HAL
open science

A quest for selfhood : deconstructing and reconstructing female identity in Doris Lessing's early fiction

Hajer Elarem

To cite this version:

Hajer Elarem. A quest for selfhood : deconstructing and reconstructing female identity in Doris Lessing's early fiction. Literature. Université de Franche-Comté, 2015. English. NNT : 2015BESA1026 . tel-01528318

HAL Id: tel-01528318

https://theses.hal.science/tel-01528318

Submitted on 29 May 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

UNIVERSITE DE FRANCHE-COMTE

ECOLE DOCTORALE « LANGAGES, ESPACES, TEMPS, SOCIETES »

EA 3224 LABORATOIRE C. R. I. T

Thèse en vue de l'obtention du titre de docteur en

LITTÉRATURE ANGLAISE

A QUEST FOR SELFHOOD: DECONCTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING FEMALE IDENTITY IN DORIS LESSING'S EARLY FICTION

Présentée et soutenue publiquement par

HAJER ELAREM

Le 28 novembre 2015

Sous la direction de Mme Michèle Bonnet, Professeur des Universités, Université de Franche-Comté

Membres du jury :

Madame Claire DAVISON-PEGON, Professeur à l'université de Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris.
Monsieur Mounir GUIRAT, Maître de conférences HDR à l'université de Sfax.
Madame Salwa KAROUI, Maître de conférences HDR à l'École Normale Supérieure de Tunis.

To my parents and the persons I love

For their endless love, support and encouragement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the assistance which was given to me by Dr. Michèle Bonnet in the completion of this work. Her valuable criticisms were given with a kindness which acted as a balm to nerves irritated by the stress of meeting the deadlines of a dissertation.

I wish to thank my supervisor in my M. A. thesis, Mr. Hedi Ben Abess, who introduced me to Doris Lessing.

I would also like to thank my family, my loving parents, my brothers and sisters, and all my friends in Besançon and in Tunisia for their unfailing support and encouragement. Their care and concern was a great motivating force.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MQ	Doris Lessing. *Martha Quest*
PM	Doris Lessing. *A Proper Marriage*
LL	Doris Lessing. *Landlocked*
ARFS	Doris Lessing. *A Ripple from the Storm*
FGC	Doris Lessing. *The Four-Gated City*
GN	Doris Lessing. *The Golden Notebook*
GIS	Doris Lessing. *The Grass is Singing*
SPV	Doris Lessing. *The Small Personal Voice*
SBD	Doris Lessing. *Summer Before the Dark*
GH	Doris Lessing. *Going Home*
UMS	Doris Lessing. *Under My Skin*
WIS	Doris Lessing. *Walking in the Shade*
PWLI	Doris Lessing. *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*
WBAW	Doris Lessing. *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*
TB	Doris Lessing. *Times Bites: Views and Reviews*.

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **2**

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS **3**

ABSTRACT **8**

INTRODUCTION **12**

I. 1. The dilemma of subject and object **32**

I. 1. A. The motif of the mirror **32**

a. The problematic of the mirror 32

b. The mirror as male gaze 50

c. The racial and colonial eye 64

I. 1. B. The culture of masks and the estranged self **98**

a. The duplicity of the masked self 98

b. The duplicity of the Sports Club community 100

c. Self-doubt 102

d. The self beyond the mask 103

I. A. 2. When gender unsettles genre: *Children of Violence* as parody of the masculine *bildungsroman* **107**

a. The androcentric *bildungsroman* 109

and Elizabeth Langland 110

b. Parody: The subversive *bildungsroman* 112

I. 2. B. When genre destabilizes female subjectivity: The study of self as narrative in *The Golden Notebook* **131**

a. Transgressing the frontiers of genre 132

b. The postmodernity of *The Golden Notebook* 134

c. Deconstructing gendered subjectivity in *The Golden Notebook* 138

I. 2. C. Doris Lessing and the female literary tradition 142

a. An appropriate definition 145

b. The "anxiety of influence" 146

c. *The Golden Notebook:* An icon 147

d. Lessing's ambivalent position towards feminism 150

e. *The Golden Notebook* and public readership 152

CHAPTER II: 155

THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF 155

II. 1. The chaotic self and the unconscious 156

II. 1. A. Carl Gustav Jung's influence on Doris Lessing 163

a. Dreams 164

b. The break with Sigmund Freud 165

c. A Jungian interpretation of dreams in *Children of Violence* 168

II. 1. B. The significance of dreams in *The Summer Before the Dark* 179

a. Background 179

b. Kate's self-knowledge 180

c. The role of dreams in *The Summer Before the Dark* 181

II. 1. C. The role of dreams in *The Grass Is Singing* 186

II. 2. Martha Quest's schizophrenic breakdown 193

II. 2. A. Ronald David Laing's influence on Doris Lessing 194

a. Laing's understanding of schizophrenia 196

b. Martha's experience of the city: Utopia or dystopia? 198

c. The existential malaise 201

e. Breakthrough through breakdown in *The Golden Notebook* 217

II. 2. B. Breakthrough through breakdown into madness in *Children of Violence* 233

a. Madness in women's literature: an overview 233

b. Breakdown into self-induced madness 235

c. Legitimizing the discourse of madness 240

d. The healing power of madness: "Breakthrough" after breakdown 244

e. Martha's development of telepathic powers 251
f. The dynamics of the female community 253

II. 3. Microcosm and macrocosm 257

II. 3. A. From the microcosm of the self to the macrocosm of the universe 257
a. Lessing's evolving aesthetic vision 258
b. From psychoanalysis to mysticism and Sufism 261
c. Distancing oneself from psychiatry 263
II. 3. B. The opening up of female consciousness to the cosmic 266
a. The mystical self and the transcendental consciousness 268
b. The comprehensive self and the universal consciousness 272
II. 3. C. The synthetic vision and the orientation towards space fiction/speculative fiction 278

CHAPTER III: THE FIGURE OF THE WOMAN-ARTIST 283

III. 1. A. Looking in the mirror of autobiography 284

III. 1. B. The postmodernity of *Under My Skin* 289

1. *Under My Skin*: Historiographic metafiction 291

a. Memory and the autobiographical process 291
b. The fictionality of *Under My Skin* 296
c. Dialectical selves 299

2. The rebellious inner self 303

a. The self against family 304
b. The self against male authorship 305
c. The self against the British Empire 309

3. The use of photography in *Under My Skin* 310

4. Looking beyond the photograph 313

III. 1. C. 1. Autobiographical fiction 318

1. The frontier between fiction and reality in *Children of Violence* 318

a. Martha Quest: Lessing's other self 318
b. The mother-daughter relationship 322

2. The frontier between fiction and reality in *The Golden Notebook* 324

a. Anna Wulf/Ella and Doris Lessing 326
b. Clancy Sigal and Saul Green 329
c. The blue notebook: a fictionalized autobiography 330

III. 1. C. 2. The paradox of self-revelation and self-knowledge 334

1-Autobiographical self-creation through performativity 335

2-The spatiality of the autobiographical self 337

3-The relational autobiographical self: Knowing the self through the (m)other 341

CONCLUSION 348

Bibliography 357

INDEX NOMINUM 382

INDEX RERUM 383

ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing's prolific writings and themes, which range from racial and social issues related to the Empire, the color bar and feminism, to her later interest in mysticism and space fiction, have divided critics along two major critical traditions: those who focused on her early novels, and discussed her allegiance to the Marxist ideology and the individual's attempt at self-definition and self-knowledge through social commitment and involvement in group politics but who failed to grasp the spiritual dimension of the quest for selfhood; and on the other hand those critics who concentrated on the mystical insights and psychological themes and who overlooked the fact that the individual's quest for knowledge is part of the social and political scenes. My point of view, however, is that self-knowledge, in Lessing's novels, is not independent from either the political or the psychological and spiritual. Her protagonists, mainly female ones, are in a constant quest for their true selves undergoing introspective and psychological experiences in different social and political contexts.

More essentially, many critics have considered her as a feminist and postcolonial writer but overlooked her deconstructive approach to the question of female identity. Self-knowledge, in her *oeuvre*, requires deconstructing the old assumptions and discourses about the self. This process of deconstructing logocentric structures of the self is made possible by experiences of breakdown, ego-loss, madness and schizophrenia. Such deconstructive experiences challenge reified perceptions of the self and self-knowledge.

The aim of this dissertation is therefore to analyze her oeuvre by approaching her fiction as an attempt to understand her female protagonists' quest for selfhood and self-knowledge. All along their journeys, the characters examine their realities and fight the outside forces impinging upon their consciousness and conception of selfhood and then turn inward in an attempt to understand and transcend their cultural limits. It also turns out that the heroines' progress towards self-knowledge and wholeness is achieved through acknowledgement and incorporation of the elements of both the conscious and the unconscious mind. Self-knowledge is ultimately related to interpersonal relationships with the others.

This thesis approaches the question of self-knowledge in Lessing's fiction through an often psychoanalytic framework, not only engaging with Lessing's own particular interests in psychoanalysis but also reframing her work through feminist and gender studies. It also develops a critical discourse that questions the categories of gender and gender identity and the fictitious nature of their supposed relationship. The thesis also draws upon psychoanalytical works by Carl Gustav Jung and the ontological psychology of Ronald David Laing as well as Sufi mysticism. These ideological and philosophical sources will serve as a theoretical framework within which I shall explore the theme of self-knowledge.

The first chapter is based on Lacanian and Merleau-Pontian theories of specularity and visual perception in order to account for the psycho-dynamics informing the gendering process of the self. It also resorts to the Foucauldian theories on the disciplinary and discursive practices shaping a gendered self. In their quest for self-knowledge, the female characters strive to transcend the phallocentric paradigm of the sex-gender system.
Part 2 of chapter I considers Lessing as a deconstructionist writer who attempts to deconstruct, through linguistic experimentation, the categories of gender that may hinder the process of self-knowledge. The transgeneric nature of Lessing's fiction creates a metadiscursive narrative where the discourse of realism, fiction, feminism, Marxism and colonialism interact dialogically.

Chapter II discusses Lessing's fiction from the psychoanalytical Jungian and Laingian perspectives focusing on the interpretation of dreams which may explain the heroines' construction of their selfhood. In mapping out the inner worlds of her characters, Lessing demonstrates how such experiences as madness and schizophrenia can turn out to be more valuable than the sane impressions of normality. The novelist reveals the paradoxical illumination which may come from the shadowy side of consciousness and uses it as a means to reinforce her radical attacks on the received values of modern Western society. During deconstructive moments of descent or breakdown into the unconscious, the dialogic experience with the other allows the self's ascent and reconstruction ultimately leading to breakthrough and psychic growth.

The thesis also deals with the evolution of the female consciousness in Lessing's fiction. It reflects the novelist's evolving aesthetic vision from orthodox communism to feminism, irrationalism, anti-psychiatry, Sufism and cosmic mysticism. Her female protagonists engage in explorations of time and space, journeying into "a totally uncharted interior" (*FGC* 507). Lessing's later fiction is informed by Sufi philosophy, which transpires

in her attempt at convincing her readers to move beyond a one-dimensional mode of thought and achieve an equilibrium between rational and non-rational modes of consciousness. She not only produces a fascinating complementarity between the rational Western versus the transcendental Eastern modes of thought, but she also leads her reader to engage in an effort to achieve a conceptual synthesis of the two.

The thesis will draw on phenomenology to examine Lessing's depiction of a transcendental mode of experience achieved through an evolutionary consciousness. Her dialectical positioning of the subject reveals a restless struggle towards the reconciliation between self and others. Her protagonists expand or examine their female experience within the terms of collective life. Lessing's organic sensibility lies in fusing the microcosmic and the macrocosmic realms.

Chapter three concentrates on the study of Lessing's autobiographies *Under My Skin* and *Walking in The Shade* as attempts at self-definition and self-knowledge. Rather than a simple process of self-reflection, autobiography turns out to be a potential source of self-invention and deconstruction of the conventional ideas around authorial identity. It is a performative and discursive act which constitutes identity in the interplay of memory, experience and agency, complicating the nature of the self and self-knowledge. Autobiography also prompts authorial introspection and reconstruction through language. Ultimately, self-knowledge is made possible by acknowledging the relational and fragmentary nature of the self.

“You need chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

[O]ne speaks as a woman, although the subject ‘woman’ is not a monolithic essence defined once and for all but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, defined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference, and others. One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate socio-symbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically anti-essentialist position.

Rosi Braidotti

INTRODUCTION

A ground-breaking and intellectually uncompromising essayist and novelist, Doris Lessing, who died on November 17th, 2013 at age 94, is one of the most influential women writers of the second half of the twentieth-century. A prolific writer of more than fifty novels, a pioneering individualist and a non-conformist thinker and intellectual, she always refused allegiance to formal ideologies and vehemently objected to being a prisoner of dogmas and rigid institutions. Even though she was a devout Communist for years, a Marxist, a socialist, a feminist, a Sufi seeker and a self-appointed cosmic anthropologist, she later expressed her distaste for categories and labels. She ultimately came to distrust group affiliations because she believed "it is the hardest thing in the world to maintain an individual dissent opinion, as a member of a group."[1] Perhaps because she received almost no formal schooling, as she left school at age fourteen, she remained immune to indoctrination and refused to be pigeonholed by academic analysis.

Lessing's alternative to categorization is her adoption of a holistic vision that embraces fragmentation, breakdown and oppositions, stemming from her belief in a humanist philosophy. Her dedication to the "ancient dream" of the free human being (*SPV* 9) and her exploration of themes relating to the human condition such as anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-nuclear war, social justice and gender equality definitely place her as a humanist writer, who believes that the major aim of the artist is to redeem society. Her writings, in Katherine Fishburn's words, involve

> a commitment that allows her to function as the artistic representative [of people], taking their side and speaking when they cannot. […]. She has written about the disaffections of the lower class, the stifled rebellions of middle class women, the disenfranchisement of African blacks and abuses of the mentally ill.[2]

Equally central to this humanist philosophy is the belief in individual growth through the quest for self-knowledge—a quest that was the driving force of Doris Lessing who confessed in a letter to the famous British historian and commentator Edward P. Thompson, written in 1957 and published in the second volume of her autobiography *Walking in the Shade*, that she wanted through her writings "to simmer into some sort of knowledge" (102). I

[1] Doris Lessing. "Group Minds." *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. 7th edition. Ed Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen. New York: Longman, 1999. p. 334.

[2] Katherine Fishburn. "Doris Lessing: Life, Work, and Criticism." *A Literature of Their Own*, Virago Press, London, 1978.

think that the knowledge Lessing wanted to acquire is related to the knowledge of (true) selfhood. I reached this conclusion as I came upon a question raised in her essay "The Small Personal Voice," "I, who am I, what different levels are inside of us?" (*SPV* 60), which points to a unifying theme in her novelistic literature and autobiographical writings: the search for self and self-knowledge and the attending discovery of one's role in society.

All along her journey from Southern Rhodesia, where she grew up till her thirties, to post-war London and the mother country where she arrived in 1949, Doris Lessing reconfigured her world vision: she was first inspired by the Marxist realist philosophy, then by psychological, particularly Jungian criticism and Laingian psycho-politics, and finally in her later novels by Sufi mysticism. These apparently incongruent philosophies of life reflect the incredible journey of a woman bent on finding meaning in existence. But they have also shaped her fictional writings to a great extent, leading to one theme related to the journey for true selfhood.

Her main concern, however, is more specifically women's quest for self-knowledge. Celebrated as the Nobel Prize for Literature winning author in 2007 with her watershed text for the Women's Movement, *The Golden Notebook*, she marked a whole generation of women in the 1960s and was described by the Swedish Academy as "an epicist of the female experience." Her acute sensibility in tackling the female territory and her portrayal of women charting painful courses of self-discovery are the main focus of this thesis.

Whereas critical studies and earlier assessments of Doris Lessing's works focus on such issues as colonial Africa, the British Empire, group politics, race, the color bar, feminism and the connection between them, they have overlooked the centrality of the quest for selfhood in her writings. We find examples in Louise Yelin's *From The Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* or in Cardona's "A Study of Racial Segregation and Political Life in *The Children of Violence* by Doris Lessing" and in Yvonnes Munick's doctoral dissertation "Ecriture Romanesque et engagement politique dans les oeuvres de Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer et André Brink" which mainly discuss left-wing politics, social and political issues of colonialism and communism. Other critics extol Lessing's prophetic and spiritual themes in her later novels but have not linked them to the quest for selfhood. I found, however, Lois A. Marchino's article "The Search for Self in the Novels of Doris Lessing"[3] exemplary, in this context, in analyzing the psychological and

[3] Lois A. Marchino. "The Search for Self in the Novels of Doris Lessing." *Studies in The Novel*. Vol. 4. N° 2. Commonwealth Novel (Summer 1972). pp. 252-261.

mystical dimension of identity. It nevertheless fails to grasp Lessing's deconstructive approach to the question of women's identity and self-knowledge. Viewed by most critics as a feminist before the flourishing of feminism (as in Gayle Greene's "Feminist Fiction, Feminist Form, Frontiers"), a post-communist before the fall of the iron curtain (as in Sophia Barnes's essay "And, And, And"), she is, in my opinion, a deconstructionist before deconstruction officially came into evidence.

My claim may appear to be self-contradictory. Not surprisingly, humanism and deconstruction are seemingly antagonistic systems of thought, as the one rejects the other. While humanism implies ostensibly a philosophic approach to holism, unity and totality, deconstruction emphasizes fragmentation and dismantling. The logic of deconstruction interrogates the humanist construction of the sovereign subject—its genealogy and its authorial functions. It dissolves or radically decenters the idea of the unitary, coherent and fixed subject that has long been cherished by humanists.[4] Completely exploded is the notion of the rational subject intent on reaching happiness through the supremacy of reason. On the whole, a deconstructive approach places the subject and how he/she is perceived and located in and between particular categorical identities at the center of enquiry.

Deconstruction is Derrida's subversive approach to Western logocentrism, through which he inverts and dismantles conceptual hierarchies.[5] It serves to dislodge the dominance of privileged forms of knowledge and opens up new ways of thinking that break with the epistemology of certainty. It has come to refer to a broad intellectual process in the second half of the twentieth-century.

Many questions then arise: is it not paradoxical that a great advocate of humanism should be a deconstructionist? Does Doris Lessing aim "to liquidate"[6] the subject of humanism in general and the female self in particular? And if her main interest is self-knowledge, how can a deconstructive approach to subjectivity and identity lead to a better understanding of the self? Is she in this case a deconstructionist in the Derridean radical sense?

I will argue that Doris Lessing does not deconstruct the subject but the old essentialist assumptions and discourses underlying in this regard Western thought. Indeed, in order to recast a discourse on selfhood, one has to go through the experience of

---

[4] Tony Davies. *Humanism. The New Critical Idiom*. Routledge: USA and Canada, 1997.

[5] Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology.* Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

[6] This word is borrowed from Jacques Derrida. "The Calculation of the Subject. Who Comes After the Subject?" *Cahiers Confrontation* 20, Winter 1989. pp. 91-114.

deconstruction—a necessary step towards reintegration at more complex levels of being. In other words, the pursuit of self-knowledge in Lessing's fiction is inherently destructive of conventional and essentialist forms of understanding of the self. Her novels question qualities of essence, which underlie such problematic criteria as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and class. The traditional view of self as an ontologically unitary and rational entity is contested both in her novelistic literature and autobiographical writings in favor of ontological complexity and multiplicity.

Yet, the dismantling in her fiction of the female self through experiences of ego loss, psychic breakdown, madness, schizophrenia, fragmentation, doubling and refraction in the mirror leads to the reconstruction of a new authentic self. This pattern of reconstruction after deconstruction and disintegration of the self is essential for her heroines in the course of their evolving journeys. Martha Quest, the heroine of the *Children of Violenc*e series and Anna Wulf, the protagonist of *The Golden Notebook*, are like the legendary phoenix, reborn out of its own ashes. If this mythical creature soared to the sun, burnt up and rose from its ashes to soar up again, Lessing's female characters sink and descend to "hell" but then ascend and rise from their own "ashes." This allegory points to a pattern of deconstruction intertwined with reconstruction which is essential to self-knowledge. In Lessing's case, then, deconstruction must be understood in a positive light as an attempt to emancipate the female subject from ossified categories and representational clichés. Indeed, after realizing that their selves are not whole and unique but rather fragmented and complex, the female characters willingly surrender to breakdown and then forge new identities for themselves.

I have focused on those of Lessing's novels which are woman-centric and have explored the female experience and quest for selfhood. I will therefore analyze Lessing's work from *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), her earliest African novel, and her *Children of Violence* novel-sequence (1952-1969), (which include *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, *A Ripple from the Storm*, *Landlocked*, *The Four-Gated City*) to her world-famous masterwork *The Golden Notebook* (1962). I will also study her non-fictional work "A Small Personal Voice" (1974) and her more recent autobiographies *Under My Skin* (1997) and *Walking in the Shade*: *Volume Two of My Autobiography*, 1949-1962 (1998). Martha Quest in the *Children of Violence* series, Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook*, Kate Brown in *The Sumer Before the Dark*, Mary Turner in *The Grass Is Singing* and Lessing herself in her autobiographies are women whose lives are devoted to self-understanding.

My method to approach and discuss the female quest for selfhood and self-knowledge in Lessing's fiction has been a comprehensive one ranging from psychoanalysis and phenomenology—I drew in particular from Lacan's and Merleau-Ponty's considerations on specularity and visual perception—to the feminist and gender theories of Judith Butler, Marianne Hirsh, Julia Kristeva, Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Luce Irigaray, Nancy Chodorow and Elaine Showalter. They illuminated my analysis of the female characters' process of identity formation in relation to their specular images and the phallogocentric discourse of patriarchy. I also used Foucault's concepts of power and knowledge and their impact upon creating gendered identities and "docile" bodies when I analyzed the heroines' positions in societal superstructures of power, gender, history and politics when the characters' quest for self-knowledge seems to be hampered by the indoctrinating social world. A question then arises: If the self is somehow limited by power and discursive positions, is self-knowledge then impossible?

Lessing's protagonists fight the outside forces bearing upon their consciousness by turning inward in an attempt to understand their true selves. The novelist traces a journey of breakthrough through breakdown—a pattern of reconstruction after deconstruction. This is when the psychological analyses carried out by Carl Gustav Jung and Ronald David Laing are helpful in understanding the process of self-knowledge in her novels. Their theories shed light on Lessing's belief that the journey for selfhood cannot be fully apprehended and fulfilled without delving into the uncharted territory of the inner psyche, and on all of Lessing's *oeuvre* and the epistemic basis on which it rests. The Jungian psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams as rife with symbols and archetypes insists on the centrality of dreams as spiritual insights into the discovery of selfhood. "In dreams, we put on the likeness of that more universal, truer, more eternal man dwelling in the darkness of primordial night. There it is still the whole, and the whole is in him, indistinguishable from nature and bare from all egohood."[7] Lessing's female characters are alert to remember and are skilled at interpreting their dreams, whose symbols and archetypes enable them to develop a dynamic equilibrium between the unconscious and the conscious parts of the psyche. These dreams releass what Jung called the dark, unknown or "shadow" side of personality. Only by confronting this aspect can the female protagonists develop wholeness and achieve true knowledge.

[7] Carl G. Jung. "Psychology and Religion: West and East." *The Collected Works*. Vol. 11. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959. p. 10.

But why is Lessing so particularly interested in Jung rather than Freud? Reading her autobiography, we learn that she was in direct contact with a Jungian analyst. She found Jung's paradigm of the psyche more appealing than Freud's. In the perspective of Freud, dreams are essentially spurred by unconscious sexual desires. For Jung, however, every psychic phenomenon must be considered from a two-fold perspective: causality and finality (*causa efficiens* and *causa finalis*). Dreams can then be seen as psychic phenomena. This is why Lessing deconstructs "logocentric repression"[8] of dreams by reason in order to highlight the role of the unconscious (including dreams) in the process of individuation and self-knowledge.

The female characters' deconstructive journeys are further examined through their "descent" into experiences of breakdown, madness and schizophrenia, whose positive effect is to dissolve the boundaries of subjectivity and ego-centricity and then open the self to the intersubjective realm. This phenomenon is best expressed in the preface to *The Golden Notebook* when Lessing explains that "sometimes when people 'crack-up,' it is a way of self-healing" (8). Many of her protagonists find their way to an "existential rebirth" through a controlled and sometimes guided descent into breakdown. My analysis will essentially rely upon Ronald David Laing's revolutionary interpretation of schizophrenia, madness and psychic breakdown as cathartic and therapeutic experiences productive of extraordinary insight and psychic growth. In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing explains how schizophrenia is not meant to describe a pathology but is caused by an existential crisis including an inward voyage of introspection. "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 appalling state of existence called normality?"[9] In referring to Laing, I focused on Lessing's interest in the psychodynamics of altered states of consciousness and the intricacies of transcendental capacities of the mind such as telepathy. I also related Lessing's admiration of Laing to the anti-psychiatrist movement of the late 1960s and the intellectual climate of the time:

> My view of Laing is that at an appropriate time in Britain he challenged certain extreme rigidities in psychiatry with alternative view points, and made other attitudes than the official ones possible… Laing was only part of a much wider

[8] Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. pp. 196-7.

[9] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 136.

movement.[10]

What united Lessing and Laing in the 1960s, then, was that they both attempted to reassess questions which they found inadequately resolved by Marxism, psychoanalysis and other intellectual doctrines. Laing's radical dissent from the official discourse of psychiatry and belief that the Western man's alienation from society can only be avoided thanks to an inner journey complement concepts of Jungian psychology and sheds light on the pattern of deconstruction. The aim of such a deconstructive journey is to confront and acknowledge the inner schism in the individual as an initial step towards a balanced relationship with the self and the community. Indeed, "when people open up a new area in themselves, start doing something new, then it must be clumsy and raw […]; the new opening up ha[s] to be through a region of chaos, of conflict. There [is] no other way of doing it" (*GN* 155-156). I have tried to analyze how *The Golden Notebook* is exemplary in showing how Anna Wulf emerges with a more balanced psyche as she combats, with her counterpart Saul Green, her inner chaos and ultimately overcomes the contradictions of her own consciousness and perception of reality.

In her fiction, Lessing contests the traditional dichotomies of sanity and insanity, and the assumptions regarding normality and abnormality. She encountered a major theoretical challenge while writing about madness in her fictional works: How can madness be conceived of outside its dichotomous opposition to sanity? Can madness be a strategy of dissent and subversion? How can it be a major way to "breakthrough" and awakening? Here again, Lessing found in Laingian psychology and Foucauldian views answers to her questions.

In Lessing's novels, the quest for selfhood culminates in spiritual elevation after the female protagonists attain a state of superior consciousness—a blissful state of nirvana, of no-self. This is where the pattern of reconstruction and ascent comes in. The female characters' breakdown and their experiences of ego loss are often followed by mystical revelations and the recovery of an authentic self free from cultural dictates. In this context, Sufi meditative writings, especially those of the Sufi teacher Idris Shah, are central to understanding the motif of reconstruction of the heroines' selves in their quest for knowledge. This theoretical choice stems from the influence of the esoteric traditions and intuitive modes of consciousness on Lessing and her belief that individuals can transcend the limits of their normal perceptions. Even though critics have referred to Lessing's later mysticism as evidence of her loss of interest in social and rational concerns, I contend that it is on the contrary indicative of her

[10] Doris Lessing. *Times Bites: Views and Reviews*. USA: Fourth Estate, LTD, 2004. p. 55.

serious commitment to a deep understanding of the nature of human psychology and the world in which we live. It was indeed the Sufist philosophy that changed her view of the world and transformed her writings. She was won over by Idries Shah's writings, tales, jokes, and world views, which she considered were "full of unique insights into our psychology, our society, and the human condition" ("Time Bites" 229). She thought they were rife with deep truths and wisdom. For her, the Sufi evolutionary methods provided the means that could help people transcend their limited cognitive capacities and be a key to a fuller understanding of reality. She explained the reasons for her inclination to Sufi thought in the following statement: "For people like myself, […], this philosophy shows where to look for answers to questions put by society and by experience—questions not answered by the official surveyors of knowledge, secular or sacred."[11] Lessing then acquired a much more mature and objective vision of the world and portrayed people who were liberated from the narrow sphere of self-love, which led them to a deeper exploration of the spiritual dimensions of existence.

During their quests for self-knowledge, heroines gradually recognize the value of building their identities in a dialogic manner rather than as unitary and isolated ego-selves. While in the *Children of Violence* sequence, *The Golden Notebook* or *The Summer before the Dark*, Martha, Anna and Kate strive to define themselves as unique, different and separate, they realize that the self is necessarily a dialogic, permeable and ever-changing space. What is remarkable in Lessing's fiction is then that she eschews an exclusionist ontology of identity, refusing all oppositionality, dualism and conflict. Identity is rather relational; the self is dialectically related to the cosmic whole and her heroines develop a sense of unity and an oceanic experience in which they become one with everything. As a matter of fact, the protagonist of the quintet, Martha Quest, gains ultimate knowledge by merging her individual consciousness into the collective or universal consciousness in the last volume of the series, *The Four-Gated City.*

Lessing shows the necessity to transcend the limitations of an exclusively individualistic world and acquire a collective consciousness. She underlines this idea in her essay "The Small Personal Voice" in which she claims that the responsibility of the writer is to fill the gap "between the public and the private conscience" (11). Here she confirms her humanistic thrust when she insists on the interconnectedness of the individual and the collective, and the link between the metaphysical or the transcendental and the immanent.

[11] Doris Lessing. "An Ancient Way to New Freedom." *The Elephant in the Dark*. Ed. Leonard Lewin. New York: Dutton, 1976. p. 22.

Indeed, the dialectics of the individual and the collective, the "private" and the "public" is inscribed within the dynamics of the evolution of human consciousness. This is clear in her introduction to *The Golden Notebook*, where she writes,

> The way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity," that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvelous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience […] into something much larger: growing up is after all, the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares. (7)

The tiny individual's link to the "terrible and marvelous possibilities" of the global world is indicative of the uniqueness of the individual as a shared consciousness. Lessing sees the female heroines as members of a world of which they are intrinsic parts; they are not to be viewed as separate entities located in space. Her vision is ultimately holistic and humanistic even though her approach to the question of identity is deconstructionist.

In Lessing's fiction, self-knowledge is therefore intelligible through experience as an esoteric process in which "the way out" is to retrace the "way in." It results from the interaction with the other and the outer world. This means that in a Heideggerian sense, the quest for self starts from a "being-in-the world" (*Dasein*), since the self is not cut off from the world in some sort of "mind" or what Heidegger calls "the cabinet of consciousness."[12] It is rather a world-immersed self. Lessing articulates this notion in her essay "The Small Personal Voice" when she says that the quest is of a being "in the world, not of it" (2). This "being-in-the-world," however, is intertwined with "a being-with-others" (*Mitsein*). The experiential interaction with the world and others is a fundamental principle of self-knowledge, the growth of consciousness and spiritual transformation. This experience is gained through undertaking outer and inner journeys.

In the light of such a theoretical framework, I divided my analysis into three main chapters. In the first one, I attempted to demonstrate that the female protagonists' search for selfhood is motivated by the need to escape a patriarchally-defined type of identity. At the outset of their quest for selfhood, the female characters experience a dilemma: on the one hand, they strive to conform to normative ideals of beauty and perfection in order to become

[12] Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time. A Translation of* 'Sein und Zeit.' Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson**.** Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962. p. 58.

accepted and socialized female persons; on the other hand, they strive to transcend the markers and attributes of these gendered identities. Oscillating between women's traditional socially accepted positions and the new identities they imagine for themselves, free from the normative prescriptions of gender, the protagonists go through an identity crisis with the dilemmas they experience instigating a process of reflective self-inquiry, self-criticism and self-evaluation necessary to self-knowledge.

I first examined the way aspects of the heroines' gendered identities are produced, repudiated and deconstructed in Lessing's fiction. I used Butler's theory of gender performativity to shed light on how identity and gender are socially and linguistically constructed and discussed in Lessing's novels. The narrator shows how gendered identity needs to be interrogated from a perspective informed by feminist critiques.

Drawing upon the post-structuralist theory, I demonstrated how the woman's body, in Lessing's novels, is shown to be "normalized", in Michel Foucault's words, and inscribed within ideological and discursive constructions engendered by patriarchy. Self-identity cannot be detached from the amorphous signifier within a Lacanian Symbolic order, according to which the prescribed vantage point is gendered as male. This process in which the signified (or the individual subject) complies with the socio-cultural norm is reinforced by what Foucault calls the practices of surveillance and discipline. At this initial point in the female characters' quest for selfhood, the perception of the female body as object of the male gaze shapes their beings as bodily selves. Their self-knowledge is limited to the material world.

In the same line of thought, I examined the psychodynamics informing the gendering process by scrutinizing the motif of the mirror. I analyzed its significance and psychoanalytical dimension in light of Lacanian and Merleau Pontinan theories of specularity and visual perception. I studied how, in Lessing's novels, the female identity is conceived of in the reciprocity of seeing and being seen. I focused on the refractive and (de)formative power of the specular image over the heroines' psyche, which creates a doubling of the self and opens up a psychic territory which is simultaneously self and other.

Lessing shows how femininity is constructed through masquerade, through the process of dressing or applying make-up, which are an artifice, a cultural construction, a mode of enacting and reenacting gender norms. The female protagonists of *The Children of Violence* and *The Summer before the Dark* perform femininity as a carefully wrought social mask as opposed to the ontological solidity of the masculine position. Their identities are to a

great extent shaped by gender-bound discursive situations. It is therefore for the female protagonists a phase which is necessary to transcend the sex-gender system, which is both a socio-cultural construct and a semiotic apparatus. In this part of analysis, they feel that their quest for self-knowledge is bound by their social conditioning. The fictional female characters therefore develop a sense of identity through opposition, the consequence of which is that they constantly express insuperable differences between themselves and the other characters (male or female) they consider as obstacles to their quest.

It becomes clear that the deconstruction of the old discourses and assumptions about the female subject and its gender is essential in order to free the female protagonists from their partial conditioning by discursive and cultural dictates. This task requires the deconstruction of the linguistic forms and discourses in which identity is produced. In order to accomplish this project, Lessing plays with the laws of genre and gender. She proves to be a great experimental writer of forms and possibilities in her novels, as we shall see in this thesis. She attempts "to break a form; to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them" (*GN* ii). As a matter of fact, the narrator makes Martha Quest the heroine of a subversive female *bildungsroman* in order to dismantle aesthetic representation and deconstruct gendered subjectivity. The five-volume sequence is transformed into an experimental narrative that culminates in the repudiation of the assumptions about personality and history characteristic of the masculine bildungsroman. Commenting on formal experimentation, Roberta Rubenstein (1979) says that Lessing's "efforts to break through not only the intellectual blinders to perception and knowledge, and conventional assumptions concerning the nature of reality itself, but also the limitations of verbal expression, should assure her stature as one of the major, unique and visionary writers of our time" (256).

Chapter II explores inner space, detailing the female protagonists' journeys into the unfathomable regions of the self. Jung's paradigm of the psyche and the concept of "the collective unconscious" find resonance in Lessing's novels. Through dreams and imagination, the subconscious plays an important part in the quest, since a person's identity is built up by both conscious factors and subconscious ones. Wholeness is gained during the journey through the unconscious.

The limits of sanity also intrigued Doris Lessing. She radically departed from the Marxist ideology and the rational world of twentieth century Western culture and turns to the anti-psychiatrist movement, Eastern philosophy and spiritual mysticism.

By giving schizophrenia and madness an ontological status that is at once transcendent, mystical and superior to an alienated existence, Lessing, drawing on Laing, points to their importance to self-knowledge. After their schizophrenic journeys, the female characters emerge with the insight that the ostensibly sane are not able to achieve. At a meta-level, she debunks the traditional discourse of psychiatry, as schizophrenia is conceptualized in non-clinical concepts. The analysis of episodes of madness, psychosis or schizophrenia in her narrative brings out a transformational experience, potentially deeper and truer than normality. Doris Lessing's characters thus often achieve self-awareness and renewal by protecting, healing and guarding mad and schizophrenic others. It is by caring for the mad themselves that Anna Wulf and Martha Quest reach an inner vision. *The Golden Notebook*, and in particular *Landlocked*, *The Four-Gated City* and *The Summer Before the Dark*, testify towards the evolution of the female consciousness to a transcendental realm after the heroines' mystical experiences.

An "architect of the soul" (*SPV* 11), Lessing leads her reader through an evolutionary progress of the soul. The basic premise underlying her interest in Sufism rests in its role in widening the perception of reality by working on different levels of cognition. In this context, the protagonist of the *Children of Violence* series learns that freedom requires a long, arduous process, not only of working it through but of seeing others through. In *The Four-Gated City*, she becomes involved in a mystical experience with Lynda Coldridge—a "legally insane" woman who is yet in touch with a deeper, more poetic and human reality than that of the apparently healthy. The quest for selfhood and self-knowledge is ultimately acquired through this in and out of the self movement, through the encounter with the other.

I shall conclude with Chapter III, which analyses Lessing's life writings. I opted for this choice because I think that autobiographies shed further light on the pattern of self-knowledge, as Lessing herself confessed in *Walking in the Shade*: "this business of 'finding out who I am' has always left me wondering" (15). In 1994 and 1997 respectively, she published *Under My Skin, Volume I of My Autobiography, to 19*49, the first volume of her autobiography centered on the three decades she spent in Africa, and *Walking in the Shade, Volume II of My Autobiography, 1949-1962*, which starts with her arrival in London. In her autobiographies, she intertwines self-analysis with political, philosophical and historical issues. Key questions are raised: Can the process of autobiographical writing work experientially towards self-knowledge? How does the autobiographer's identity as a woman,

within the symbolic order of patriarchy, affect her relationship with genre/writing, to the structuring of the text, to the self, and to the problematic nature of representation itself?

We discover that the quest for self-knowledge is problematized by Lessing's experimental exploration of experience, memory, language, sexuality, social and political commitments… She deconstructs the teleological conception of selfhood and the attempt to render a plain version of the self in autobiographies.

I have first demonstrated that Lessing's autobiography subverts the "autobiographical pact" by blurring generic lines between autobiography and fiction. In her works, the fictional can become the space for more general identifications or for the trying-out of potentialities and possibilities; it can also be a way to suggest how much fiction is involved in all self-representations. The woman autobiographer questions the fixed reality of the self and the referential power of language which underlies the distinction between fiction and autobiography. Lessing brought the domains of life and literature, experience and textuality, into a much more complex and mutually creative relationship. It illuminates Lessing's claim that sometimes "fiction makes a better job than autobiography." In fiction, self-revelation and self-knowledge challenges our conventional assumptions about life-writing.

Lessing's fictional characters are reflections/representations of her own search for selfhood and self-understanding through her autobiographical writing. She delved into the complicated process of re-examining her life's experiences by sublimating her voice through Anna Wulf and Martha Quest, dispersing her authorship in various narrators. The emergence of several "selves" or meta-mirrors through autobiography or autobiographical fiction can be interpreted as not only question self-knowledge, self-presence and truth but also allows the recognition of the alterity, multiplicity and fictionality of the self. This is best expressed by Rimbaud's famous quotation "*je est un autre.*" The "autobiographical I" fractures under Lessing's textual negotiations, making any notion of a wholly contained self impossible. Simultaneously, the autobiographical texts of *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade* prove to be non-transparent, self-reflexive and postmodern.

The act of writing one's autobiography is often spurred by a desire for self-knowledge. Yet, this attempt embroils the author in a variety of problems and contradictions. This is why I endeavored to trace the paradox of self-disclosure and self-knowledge. Lessing's volumes of autobiography are anything but simple and transparent. They are not only processes of self-recording, self-exploration and self-expression but they are mainly

channels of a dynamic process of ongoing self-creation and self-invention: The autobiographer creates herself at every moment afresh within the text. What emerges in Lessing's autobiographical texts is a subject in an evolutionary process, whose self-knowledge is always negotiated, discursively and dialogically, in and through the other. Ultimately, the autobiographical self relinquishes in turn the lure of "egoic mastery"[13] and opens itself to the other.

[13] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives.* USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. p 217.

On the one hand, consciousness alienates itself and in this alienation sets itself as an object […]. On the other hand, there is in this very process the other moment in which [self-consciousness] has equally transcended this alienation and objectification and taken it back into itself, and so is at home with itself in its otherness as such. This is the movement of consciousness […].

Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807)

Being cannot be thought without its ontic transformability and we must now start to pay attention to this plastic structure if we hope to bring down the wall that Heidegger's critical posterity built up between Being and being.

Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference*

"The Marthas of this world read and search with the craving thought" (*PM* 73). They rely on "the strength of mind" (*PM* 128) against the tide of femininity.

CHAPTER I:

THE FEMALE SUBJECT AND THE GENDERING PROCESS

Introduction

The question raised by Doris Lessing in her essay "The Small Personal Voice: "I, who am I, what different levels are inside of us" (*SPV* 60) points to a unifying theme in her novelistic literature: the search for self and self-knowledge and the attending discovery of one's role in society. Lessing devotes much of her literary production to exploring women's attempt at self-definition in a patriarchal society where gender is one of the strongest determinants of social and linguistic behavior. How can a woman define herself if she has already been predetermined in a masculine paradigm of representation? What can be the inward reality of a woman caught in the web of ideological and discursive constructions engendered by patriarchy? Martha Quest, the female protagonist of Lessing's five-volume epic, *Children of Violence*, encapsulates, as her last name suggests, this problematic quest for self and concern for self-knowledge in a male-dominated social system. The narrative of the series spans her life from 1952 to 1969, recounting her erratic progress from the British colony of Southern Rhodesia to a fantasized paradisiacal city of London in search for a sense of being.

The first volume of the series, *Martha Quest*, opens with young Martha, the daughter of snobbish and conservative British settlers, trying to resist the normative and patriarchal society in which she lives. In the wake of World War One, the Quests have immigrated to Africa after seeing an exhibition in London which promised new settlers that they might become rich on maize-growing in the vast uncultivated lands of Zambezia. But they are disappointed by their drab, unattractive existence in the shabby mud house of the colony, where everything "decay[s], decline[s], and lean[s] inwards" (*MQ* 31) in a "sickness of dissolution" (*MQ* 56). The Quests seek as a consequence to "season[…] the dull staple of their lives—servants, children, cooking—with a confinement or scandal of some kind" (*MQ* 7). The fifteen-year old Martha grows in this stifling, stale and conventional atmosphere characterized by an authoritarian parental rule and racial prejudice against blacks, kaffirs and servants. More importantly, she is immured in a gendered space in which it is "a tradition that the men should talk to men, women with women" (*MQ* 19). She observes with a critical eye her father Mr. Quest and her Afrikaaner neighbor Mr. Van Rensberg talking about crops and the native problems "with their backs turned on the women with firmness" (*MQ* 8). In this context, the adolescent protagonist is presented as a critical and rebellious girl, locked up in her solipsistic world of literature and books. She displays "a swelling dislike to her

surroundings" (*MQ* 11) and constantly "repeat[s] to herself that her mother [is] hateful", that "all these old women" who accept their lot at the cost of "lies, evasions, compromises", are "wholly disgusting" (*MQ* 13). Her spirited individualism and her romantic idealism fuel her constant longing for a better world materialized in a fantasized England, supposedly untroubled by the contradictory demands and oppressive rewards of gender. The driving force of her quest for selfhood lies in her dream of "a noble city" in England, "set foursquare and colonnaded along its flower-bordered terraces," where "splashing fountains, and sounds of flutes" and "citizens move[…] grave and beautiful, black and white and brown together". In this idyllic country, "groups of elders pause […], and smile […] with pleasure at the sight of children—the blue-eyed, fair-skinned children of the North playing hand in hand with the bronze-skinned, dark-eyed children of the South" (*MQ* 17). This utopia is the antithesis of her own flawed world.

In response to the conformity and sterility of her society, Martha endeavors to build up a sense of "I-ness," seeking to achieve both an autonomous self—a self-reliant and self-generating one, with clearly defined ego boundaries—as well as a unified one. This idealized conception of subjectivity and selfhood is clearly humanistic, insofar as the humanist subject is supposed to be whole, authentic, un-gendered, and unmarked by social and discursive differences.[14] It is "pre-discursive, fully autonomous and unconstrained "beyond power ad knowledge."[15] This model of humanism which emerged in the Renaissance period focused on the individual's potentiality, freedom and dignity as well as the sovereignty of the humanist subject standing alone and experiencing itself as "continuous, unified, rational and coherent."[16] Yet, gender constantly presses against Lessing's narrative, destabilizing this conception of subjectivity. The autonomous and singular self that Martha seeks throughout her journey for self-knowledge is endangered by the gendering forces that conspire against her goal, as exemplified by the mirror, in its symbolic and metaphorical dimension, the male gaze and the mother. She must, therefore, undertake the task of freeing herself from the cultural codes which have structured her self-representation and concept of selfhood.

In the first three volumes of the series, Martha Quest's identity is, to a large extent, conceived of in the reciprocity of seeing and being seen. The mirrors to which she appeals for self-reflection play a crucial part in her conception of self, as they position her in a gendered

[14] Tony Davies. *Humanism. The New Critical Idiom*. Routledge: USA and Canada, 1997.

[15] Eric Paras. *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge.* Other Press: New York, 2006.

[16] *Ibid.* p. 43.

paradigm. Symbolically, mirrors, windowpanes, books, water, and what they stand for, the other's gaze, are reflective facets that introduce the female protagonist into the socio-symbolic order of cultural coding. At the outset of her quest for selfhood, she oscillates between assimilation and rejection of the effect of the mirror/and or the gaze of the other on her sense of self. The specular images fragment her self and initiate a process of doubling and otherness, shaking the unity and transparency cherished by Martha.

Mirrors become metaphors of the split and fragmented subject, providing a refracted image of the self, obscuring Martha's desire for unity and wholeness, and inhibiting any singular and coherent identity. Indeed, rather than reflecting a stable and unified picture of the self, the looking glasses, in Lessing's *Children of Violence*, refracts the m(other) back. Having realized this, Martha Quest tries to situate herself outside the specular field and beyond the phallocentric paradigm which positions her as a passive object rather than a subject-agent. These steps, she believes, are essential to her quest for self-knowledge.

In *Martha Quest* (1965), *A Proper Marriage* (1966) and *Landlocked* (1973), mirrors, windowpanes, water and the Other's gaze are reflective facets that provide the first central discourses about self-knowledge. We shall therefore explore the symbolism of the mirror and some of its psychoanalytical dimensions with regard to the female protagonist's identity formation. This why I will take a Lacanian and Merleau-Pontian approach to specularity and visual perception in order to decipher and understand the mechanisms by which subjectivity is constructed; particularly, how the female protagonist becomes attached to her own subjection, and then resists it and revolts against it. Beside exploring the agencies behind identity construction, this chapter will highlight their reliance on processes of subjection to the socio-symbolic order. Lessing's heroines strive to situate themselves in the impossible position of unrepresentable femininity outside the specular field and beyond the phallus. The analysis of the mirror scenes will provide valuable insights into the psychodynamics informing the gendering process of the self.

I. 1. The dilemma of subject and object

I. 1. A. The motif of the mirror

a. The problematic of the mirror

Introduction

This chapter traces out the female characters' attempt at self-definition and self-knowledge within a specular paradigm by studying the series of mirroring refractions that permeate the *Children of Violence* series. The intricate depths of the mirror reveal some of the most interesting aspects of the human psyche. Greek mythology was always aware of the ways in which a human subject confronts his/her reflected image. In this context, the fate of Narcissus[17], who gave his name to a human preoccupation with the self, offers an early appreciation of the mirror and the negative consequence of an individual's immurement within the narrow limits of a specular world. Yet, the mirror is also the means by which the developing human ego recognizes itself, detaches itself from the external world and internalizes a concept of itself as a unique human being. As in Alice's voyages of exploration in *Through the Looking Glass*[18], the metaphor of the mirror is interlocked in Lessing's *Children of Violence* with the motif of the journey and quest for selfhood to disclose the process of identity construction. Most famously, Jacques Lacan's 1949 essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"[19] offers an insight into the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of the mirror and illuminates the process of identity formation at what he calls "the mirror stage," which I shall develop later in my analysis. In the Lacanian paradigm, the specular moment is imbued with symbolic meaning as it sets the self in a reflexive/reflective paradigm that triggers off the gendering

[17] Narcissus or Narkissos (Greek: Νάρκισσος), a name possibly derived from ναρκη (*narke*) meaning "sleep, numbness," was in Greek mythology a hero from Thespiae, Boeotia renowned for his beauty. In the various stories he is exceptionally cruel in that he disdains those who love him. As a divine punishment he is made to fall in love with his reflection in a pool, not realizing it is his own, and perishes there, unable to move away from the beauty of his own reflection.

[18] Lewis Caroll. *Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1999.

[19] The essay is originally a lecture delivered by Jacques Lacan at the 16th International Congress of Psychoanalysis, Zurich, July 17, 1949.

process. It also accounts for the psychodynamic process that may lead the female protagonist to her identification with a gendered being.

Confronting the mirror represents in women's fiction a way to come face to face with the self or rather of initiating the search for self-knowledge since the mirror is the metaphorical starting point from which an individual, but more particularly a woman, as we shall see, seeks to define her identity. "Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of them all?" the Queen from the German fairy-tale *Snow White* asks. The mirror's continuous affirmation—"You are, Your Majesty"—might best illustrate the fantastic relationship that a woman is often said to have with her own reflection. However, rather than being a means of simple reflection, the role of the mirror turns out to be completely reversed in Lessing's narrative, for it is used to deconstruct the notion of the whole female self. We shall see in this part that the mirror destabilizes the notion of an integral coherent self craved for by the female protagonists and strengthens in the process the notion of a fragmented and altered female self.

Jenijoy La Belle explains in her study of mirror scenes in 19th and 20th centuries' literature, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass*, that the mirror is "not only a crucial tool for self-exploration" but also "a social instrument that assists in the formation of the self according to cultural norms" (22). Although the looking glass initially confirms a person's sense of existing as a whole and unified being, it can also function as a deforming and alienating tool that creates a sharp sense of alterity, confirming that the self is a double or complex self, one that is both subject and object. La Belle calls the paradox characterizing the mirror experience "oxymoronic."[20]

In the light of La Belle's analysis, the mirror, as we shall see in *Children of Violence*, proves to have a twofold function: it both attracts and deceives. On the one hand, it gives Martha an illusory sense of unity, but it also fragments and alters her, on the other, showing the paradoxical nature pointed out by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty. The latter suggests that the specular image gives what he calls "the lived body"[21] the joyful possibility of experiencing itself as whole

[20] Jenijoy La Belle. *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. p. 42.

[21] In Merleau-Pontian thought, the lived body is a body that simultaneously experiences, acts in, and is aware of a world that, normally, responds with immediate pattern, meaning, and contextual presence. Merleau-Ponty understands the "lived body as a latent, lived relationship between an intelligent but pre-reflective body and the world it encounters and perceives through continuous immersion, awareness, and actions." (Martin C. Dillon. *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. p. 69.)

and unified, as reflected in the narcissistic scenes of the first volume of the series, *Martha Quest*, when, standing in front of the mirror, Martha is lured by her specular image (we shall develop this point later in the chapter). But they both stress the alienating and refracting[22]/distorting effect of the specular image over the child's psyche. Indeed, the mirror induces a confrontation of the self with "the Other." We shall first analyze the psychological dimension of the mirror in order to understand its significance to self-knowledge. In this context, considering identity in terms of reflection and refraction in the mirror, Lacan suggests that the self is refracted into an "other" during the mirror stage. In *Écrits*, he observes that

> the jubilant assumption [*assomption*] of [one's] specular image seems to […] manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.[23]

The mirror stage establishes a structural psychic dialectic between the self and the other. The identification with the other occurs within the "imaginary order" which precedes the subject's entry into the "symbolic order." For Lacan, the imaginary is the realm of the ego, the pre-linguistic realm of sense perception, identification with the other. It produces an illusory sense of unity with the (m)other. In this phase of alienation and fascination, the ego emerges with its own image. It is formed by the organizing and constituting properties of the image. The ego is the product of images; it is, in short, an imaginary function. Lacan insists that the ego is based on an illusory image of wholeness, coherence and mastery which it is the function of the ego to maintain.

The subject acquires his/her subjectivity when he/she enters the "symbolic order." It is the system of signification which positions the individual within a given structure of meaning. Lacan conceived of the symbolic order as a totalizing concept in the sense that it marks the limit of the human universe. In his Seminar IV, "La relation d'objet" ("Object relations"), he suggests that the symbolic order refers to the order of language associated with the "Name of the Father" ("Nom-du-Père")—the symbolic function that intrudes into the child's illusory world and breaks the imaginary dyad of the mother and child characteristic of the imaginary

[22] The term "refraction" is borrowed from physics: When a ray of light enters a material such as glass, its path bends. This change in direction as the ray passes from one material to another is called "refraction." Refraction is also the change in direction of propagation of a wave when the wave passes from one medium into another, and changes its speed. Light waves are refracted when crossing the boundary from one transparent medium into another because the speed of light is different in different media. Thus, refraction marks the change or the alteration of an image in the mirror. (Spero Daniel J. and Gary Shipman. *Light Reflection and Refraction*. USA: Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, 1994).

[23] Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the "I" as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Ecrits, A Selection*. Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977. p. 76.

order. The child assumes that the father satisfies the mother's desire and possesses the phallus. As the signifier of the wider cultural system and the social taboo on incest, the "Name of the Father" is endowed with the symbolic capacity. In this sense, Lacan argues that the Oedipus complex involves an element of substitution, that is to say, the substitution of one signifier, the desire for the mother, for another, the Name-of-the-Father. It is through this initial act of substitution that the process of signification begins and the child enters the symbolic order as a subject of lack. Broadly speaking, the symbolic order is the domain of culture and societal norms as opposed to the imaginary order, which is the domain of nature and unity with the mother. Lacan also refers to the symbolic order as the big "Other." The subject is caught up in the chain of signification governed by the big "Other."

We shall show that the paradox of the mirror—as both an alienating and on the other hand a jubilatory experience of illusory wholeness—reveals that Martha's quest is oxymoronic at the outset: the protagonist hesitates between creating a social identity or a gendered self born out of her self-absorption in the mirrors and on the other hand shaping a subject-agent with a singular voice by educating herself through reading.

Examining the first book of the series, we discover that Martha's quest for selfhood and wholeness starts with developing a hard shell to protect herself from the hostile world around her. This is why the adolescent girl perceives her identity as necessarily dependent upon her rejection of those who impede her search for true selfhood. She emerges as a dissenter, or what Roxane Fand has called a "naysayer."[24] By excluding others in her community of the veld, Martha creates self-contained alternative worlds which shape her identity to a great extent. As an adolescent, she is narcissistically imprisoned by her own gaze in the mirrors in which she constantly sees herself. We shall then interpret her absorption in the specular paradigm.

- Martha Quest's narcissistic imprisonment in the specular image

Narcissism allows Martha to create a solipsistic dreamy world where she can find solace from the dystopia around her and fashion herself without any external interference. As Jenijoy La Belle suggests, the mirror allows her to forge an identity in accordance with her

[24] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*. London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 106.

own desires.[25] That is why we repeatedly find her narcissistically absorbed in her mirrors, which validate her as a feminine beautiful girl:

> 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.' This happened when Mrs. Quest had made one of her joking remarks about Martha's clumsiness, or Mr. Quest complained that girls in this country matured so early. (*MQ* 22)

The phrase "beautiful, you are so beautiful!" echoes the fascinating formulation of the "Snow White" fairy tale, "you are the fairest of all lands," a reminder of the conceited queen, Snow White's stepmother, asking the magic mirror to reaffirm her. Ensnared by her mirror reflection, Martha Quest re-enacts the queen's relationship with the anthropomorphized and authoritative glass that orchestrates the latter's life. Furthermore, the narrator clearly refers tp the mythological figure of Narcissus in one of the scenes in the first book of the series when Martha "[falls] into a rite of self-love" (*MQ* 161) while inspecting her own body in the water. Sigmund Freud argues that the development of the psyche originates in a position of primary narcissism in which the child is completely self-sufficient and is the object and satisfaction of its own desire: "This narcissism is the universal and original state of things, from which the object-love is only later developed, without the narcissism necessarily disappearing on that account."[26] In the light of Freudian psychoanalysis, this primary narcissistic drive gives the child or the adolescent the opportunity of self-assurance and gratification with his/her image in its totality, as a *gestalt* in the looking glass:

> Sometimes she would take the mirror to her parents' bedroom, and hold it at an angle to the one at the window, and examine herself, at this double remove, in profile; for this view of herself had a delicacy her full face lacked. With her chin tilted up, her loose blonde hair falling back, her lips carefully parted in an eager and expectant look, she possessed certain beauty […]. (*MQ* 73)

The mirror thus offers Martha narcissistic moments when she becomes the object of her own reflection. It conveys her need for a sense of a coherent and unified self as it reflects "a delicacy her full face lacked." In his *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger explains that this need to "see" one's self in the mirror has always been a central part of the female experience: "[A

[25] *Ibid*. p. 73.

[26] Sigmund Freud. "Libido Theory and Narcissism." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1951-73, XVI. p. 416.

woman] is continually accompanied by her own image […]; from earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually."[27]

Yet, rather than simply reproducing one's beauty in a visual image, the representation of the mirror is complicated and the reflection revealed serves as a significant psychological experience in the female protagonist's life. The mirror, Simone de Beauvoir notes, is a woman's privileged instrument of narcissistic doubling or splitting, the place where she alienates herself in her imaginary specular double. She recognizes herself in the fantasy self of the mirror which is, like her childhood doll, "petrified," "immanent," "passive and given," "inert," "a thing," an "immobile trap."[28] This narcissistic self-alienation between subject and object points to the refracting and othering effect of the mirror as analyzed by Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

- The refracting effect of the mirror

The mirror is a Lacanian metaphorical site for the construction of identity and a Pontian phenomenological tool for the exploration of the body-subject/object. In *Children of Violence*, the mirror images materialize the relation between the body and the specular image as well as between the body and signification. It makes the character aware of her being-object. The Lacanian concept of the "mirror stage" points to the human desire for self-sufficiency and agency, which is always dialectically bound up with feelings of powerlessness and fragmentation. In his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan suggests that "the deflection of the specular I into the social I is the source of the 'paranoic' alienation"[29] experienced by the child in front of the mirror. The mirror stage is a drama whose

> internal pressures push precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and from the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turn out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure.

[27] John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 2008. p. 47.

[28] Simone De Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953. p. 335.

[29] Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the "I" as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Ecrits, A Selection*. Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977. p. 4.

This alienation characterizes the protagonist's initial attempts at self-knowledge. While she seeks reflection and unity in the mirror, Martha Quest only feels fragmentation, alterity and refraction. All along the *Children of Violence* novels, her identity is constantly refracted by the mirrors in which she seeks to seize her own reflection. The refraction materializes in a doubling of the female protagonist into a subject-self and an object-self. In front of the looking glass, she constitutes herself simultaneously as subject and object. The heroine is doubled into a being-subject examining her being-object: As she "[is] alone […], she move[s] carefully to the small square mirror that [is] nailed to the centre of the window" and "examine[s] herself in the mirror leaning up on her toes, for it [is] too high" (*MQ* 22). But she "see[s] herself only in sections, because of the smallness of the mirror" (*MQ* 23). The perceived picture of her self appears primarily fractured, fragmented and incomplete. This initial failure to recognize her specular image as an image of the self points to the difficulty of the passage from what Merleau-Ponty calls the "introceptive I" to the "specular I"[30] in the process of self-development. The specular "I" that Martha sees in the mirror is closely related to the mother, as evidenced by the remark that "she [is] by no means resigned to the appearance her mother th[inks] suitable" (*MQ* 22). By contrast, the "introspective I" is associated with an "underground rebellion" (*MQ* 19) and an impulse for resistance to the maternal force. It turns out that her specular "I" is distant and yet close; it is felt as an Other, and yet as her own self. This unsettling encounter with one's specular image amounts to an alienating experience caused by the split between the specular image and the introceptive body image. Merleau-Ponty best expressed this idea in *The Primacy of Perception:*

> At the same time that the image makes possible the knowledge of oneself, it makes possible a sort of alienation. I am no longer what I felt myself, immediately, to be; I am that image of myself that is offered by the mirror. To use Dr. Lacan's terms, I am "captured, caught up" by my spatial image.[31]

The differences between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty's interpretations of the relation between the body and its specular image are ramified in their parallel readings of the role of the specular image in sociability. In Lacanian theory, imaginary oscillation evolves into the

[30] Ted Toadvine, and Leonard Lawlor. *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*. USA: Northwestern University Press, 2007. p. 164.

[31] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. "The Child's Relations with Others." Trans. William Cobb. *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964. p. 136.

transitivism of the "see-saw of desire" (*la bascule du désir*),[32] a distressing and disorienting stage of "absolute rivalry with the other" and of "primitive alienation."[33] During this stage, the child's relation with the other is that of struggle for mastery of and identification with the other's body. This mastery results paradoxically in a destruction of the child's desire and therefore its subjecthood.

The alienating effect of the mirror reveals the (de)formative and refractive power of the specular image over the heroine's psyche. It highlights the tension between the bodily dimension and the reflective one, the inner and the outer world, or in Lacan's terms, between the *umwelt* and the *innenwelt*.[34] This alienation crystallizes when Martha tries to grasp her own image in a windowpane at the evening dance in her neighbors' house but fails to recognize her reflection. Indeed, in an attempt to bypass the stage of infancy, she has sewn and designed a dress for the evening dance with her friend Billy Van Rensberg. She has fashioned herself on the image of romantic queens and waits excitedly for her meeting with her Charming Prince Billy. Throughout the whole week before the event, she has been dreaming of herself "wearing her white frock in a vast ballroom hung with glittering chandeliers" (*MQ* 79). But the adolescent girl unexpectedly realizes that she is "the only person in evening dress" (*MQ* 82), an outfit which appears "too elaborate for the occasion" (*MQ* 83). During the whole dance, she feels "she [is] not herself" (*MQ* 86) and she "wishe[s] bitterly she had not come" (*MQ* 85). The dance is awkward and clumsy and Martha dances in Billy's arms "stiffly and unwillingly" (*MQ* 88). This realization sharpens her feeling of alienation. As she catches sight of herself in a windowpane, she does not recognize

> this aloof, dream-logged girl who turned a brooding face under the curse of loose blonde hair; so strange did it seem that she even glanced behind her to see if some other girl stood there in just another white dress. (*MQ* 83)

---

[32] Lacan posits desire as that which defines a subject. Imaginary identification threatens the subject in that it represents both a loss of the self which is subsumed by the image of the other as it is defined by the very contours of this image—and a loss of desire which is alienated or projected in the image of the other.

[33] Since mastery coincides with an absolute identification with the other, "où le sujet littéralement se perd, et à quoi il s'identifie" (Lacan séminaire I, 268), it effectively negates the child's subjecthood by alienating its desire in the other, even as the affirmation of the child's desire implies a destruction of the other as subject.

[34] Lacan contrasts the German term *innenwelt*—the inner world—with the word *umwelt*, which means environment or surroundings, to emphasize the interaction between the imaginary interior space that the "I" occupies and the physical world in which the living human subject is situated. The connection between the *innenwelt* and the *umwelt* is for Lacan always dialectical in the mirror stage; the "I" only comes into being through an association with an image that is outside of and other than the infant. (Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the "I" as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Ecrits, A Selection*. Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977. p. 9.)

Her reflected image in the windowpane confronts Martha with her otherness and self-estrangement. The specular image does not provide her with the sense of unity and coherence that might assuage her feelings of alienation. It rather exacerbates them: "So strange [does] it seem that she even glance[s] to see if some other girl st[ands] there in another white dress." Her specular image is not a simple reflection, but rather a doubling of her self—a doubling that opens up a psychic territory that is simultaneously self and other. The specular subject constitutes itself at once as subject and object, as woman and the other woman. Her sense of self and identity dissolves. If the formation of the ego is "above all based on the perception of the body as a *gestalt* in an external reflective surface,"[35] the imaginary otherness shatters this impression of unity. Martha's embarrassment springs from the disparity between the ideal body, the real body and the looking glass body. While she seeks to be the embodiment of the princess of her dreams, the mirror reflects a stranger to the self.

At this stage in her life, she gains a sense of identity from others' approval: Only her friend Marnie's "exclamations of delight and admiration [have] kept her mood from collapsing entirely" (*MQ* 83). All through the dance with Billy, she has been lulled into a spurious sense of security by some of her partners' appraising eyes. This scene incarnates Lacan's "*bascule du désir*" or "swing" of desire, for Martha's desire becomes the desire for recognition from the Other.

Another encounter with the looking glass occurs by the end of the night party and confirms its altering and refracting effect, and the Lacanian "swerve" of desire. After receiving Billy's "hard and intrusive kiss" (*MQ* 88), which has marred the fairy tale of romance into which she had been projecting herself for the last week, Martha escapes from the dancing floor, heavily dragging red mud in her skirt like a fleeing Cinderella. The mud that has spoilt her dress permanently shatters any hope for improvement. It is also a metaphor for the ugly, defiling experience she has just gone through. When she finally enters a room in the Afrikaaners' house, she returns to the mirror to look for her self-reflection but she only finds a refracted self:

> 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* [my italics], 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 did not know

[35] *Ibid*. p. 19. *Gestalt* means the child's early perception of the human form.

> herself. She left the mirror, and stood at the window for a moment, bitterly criticizing herself for allowing Billy, that imposter, to take possession of her at all. (*MQ* 89)

In front of the looking glass, Martha is unable to achieve the ideal 'ipseity' she seeks—the transparency of the self she most cherishes. She becomes confused at the opacity of her being as she sees "someone not herself" and aware of the fictional nature of her specular image ("she is like a girl from a legend"). She realizes that Billy is but "the power of that outside force which had first claimed her for days before" (*MQ* 86) and blames herself for being submissive to that "force which [wears] Billy's form and features" (*MQ* 86). This reading conveys "the see-saw" of desire as Martha's desired reflection becomes the Other's. We can then see that the mirror enacts the heroine's self-awareness as an object of the specular gaze.

The mirror thus reveals psychic depth in *Children of Violence*. It ensnares and deceives. The fantasy of wholeness and the mirage of self-sufficiency are all but disguises of an ego staging its quest through imaginary adventures. Interestingly enough, the dual dimensions of the specular moment ensure what Merleau-Ponty calls a chiasmic[36] ontology in the sense that the other is always intertwined within the subject. Self and non-self are but the reverse of each other. This is the double process of introjection—incorporating an Other into the self, and projection—bringing the self into an Other.

Moreover, the mirror, in which Martha is refracted and fragmented, bears upon her consciousness. Indeed, the heroine experiences specularity in the double sense of a reflexive image of herself and a speculative and self-reflective split in consciousness. "Looking at herself in the mirror, she becomes conscious of the image she represents" (*MQ* 85). The reflected image offers a non-egological Sarterian conception of consciousness[37]: reflected consciousness is an object for reflexive consciousness. In other words, reflection turns consciousness on itself. The mirror allows Martha the opportunity to ponder and reflect upon her own visibility and vision. Her self-consciousness becomes as split as her own self. In this sense, the specular moment is ontologically significant; it further "reforms itself in the

[36] "The chiasm is not only a me and other exchange but it is also an exchange between me and the world, between the phenomenological body and the "objective" body, between the perceiving and the perceived: what begins as a thing ends as consciousness of the thing; what begins as a "state of consciousness" ends as a thing." Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, III: Northwestern University Press, 1968. p 215.

[37] Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: The Citadel Press, 1966. p. 11.

emotional make-up of the adult."[38] Its quasi-reality never entirely disappears from Martha Quest's adult life, as evidenced by the recurrent mirror scenes in the later books of the series, especially in book IV of the quintet, *Landlocked* (1973):

> Martha made up her face, smoothed down pink cotton over hips and thighs, combed her hair. She could not prevent this time, as she leaned forward into the mirror, a pang of real pain. She was twenty-four years old […]. Yet she remained locked in herself, […] as she turned to examine her back view. (19)

The mirror thus proves its function as a tool that questions the entire nature of selfhood, reinforcing the fragmentation and alterity of self and consciousness. It does not satisfy the heroine's need for a coherent self. That is why she will endeavor to transcend her fragmentation in the looking glass by seeking a true and whole reflection of who she is in the literary books she reads. These books, conventionally believed to be means of self-knowledge, function as metaphorical mirrors in which the female character craves for a sense of herself.

The same dual effect is produced, however, by the texts of literary books and magazines read by Martha. The following section will then be dedicated to the interpretation of these textual mirrors as bearing a two-fold function: They can serve as an instructive tool allowing a detached and objective vision of reality. But they also entrench the protagonist into the gendering and illusive trap of discourse. These ideas will be discussed within the framework of Michel Foucault's, Luce Irigaray's and Sandra Bartkey's theories regarding the interplay of discourse and social practices in shaping the female identity.

- The textual mirror as an enlightening tool

If in the Lacanian and Merleau-Pontian paradigms, mirrors may be instruments of psychological knowledge, literature or textual mirrors are also modes of self-apprehension and the locus of discursive power. This is plain in the *Children of Violence* series, where Martha appears as a voracious reader. She hopes literature will help her achieve a true identity and free her from the bondage of social ties and cultural clichés. She therefore attempts to find her reflection in books dealing with the "emancipation of women" (*MQ* 66). These subversive

[38] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. "The Child's Relations with Others." Trans. William Cobb, in M. Merleau-Ponty. *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964. p. 138.

writings appeal to the girl. They mirror her hostility to her social environment and provide her with a space where she can be free from external cultural laws. Such an attitude is in keeping with Doris Lessing's description of literature as one of the liberating agencies fostering human development. Reading is "one of the most useful ways we have of achieving this "other eye," this detached manner of seeing ourselves."[39] Indeed, the adolescent girl "[is] seeing herself, and in the only way she [is] equipped to do this, through literature" (*MQ* 13). Thanks to the bulk of novels she has read, she has gained a "clear-lit space" (*MQ* 18), a space which enables her to see through things around her and to have a detached and critical eye upon her surroundings:

> […] she was seeing herself through literature…and from these books Martha had gained a clear picture of herself from the outside. She was adolescent, and therefore bound to be unhappy; British, and therefore uneasy and defensive; in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, and therefore inescapably beset with problems of race and class; female, and obliged to repudiate the shackled women of the past. She was tormented with guilt and responsibility and self-consciousness. (*MQ* 14-15)

Martha has also sought instruction through books about psychology and sociology: She most often turns to that "section of the bookcase which was full of books called *The Psychology of*…, *The Behavior of, A Guide to*…, […]" (*PM* 85). These books often guide her in her journey to self-discovery:

> Then she returned to resume that other journey of discovery which alternated with the discoveries of a young woman loose in town: she returned to her books. She was reading her way slowly and vaguely from book to book, on no better system than that one author might mention another, or that a name appeared in a publisher's spring list. […] She read as if this were a process discovered by herself; as if there had never been a guide to it […]. (*MQ* 209)

Books become part and parcel of her life. She thus evaluates a letter from her mother in terms of the letters "found in Victorian novels" (*MQ* 223). She gets her schooling about what war truly is through *All Quiet on the Western Front*, given to her by her father (*APM* 328-29). Her judgments are anchored in her reading. As a matter of fact, she assesses an older woman's house from the pictures of England seen in novels, especially Edwardian novels (*APM* 332-33); she sees her town as being like a Victorian novel (*APM* 447); and she sees herself leaving her husband, Douglas, as Nora would have in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (*APM*

[39] Doris Lessing. *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*. USA: Harper and Row, 1987. p. 8.

534). She even sees her sexual capacities as a novelist might have seen them (*APM* 539-40). She sometimes compares herself to Madame Bovary (*LL* 330-31) and is obsessed by the heroines in Victorian melodramas (*LL* 498). But this absorption in literature is not without its negative impact on the heroine's concept of self as we try to show in the following part.

- The textual mirror as a refractive tool

The texts that Martha reads work reflexively and disruptively. While they afford her the opportunity to assert her individuality and see her self-reflection, they also question her concept of self. The refracting prism of language and "the beguiling lens of literature" (*MQ* 2) trap her subjectivity within the discursive and signifying systems that identify her as "British," "adolescent," "bound to be unhappy," "early twentieth century," "female" and "doomed" (as in the example above). Martha is thus predetermined linguistically and ideologically. "The picture" that she "gain[s]" from her readings is not of the free, unified and autonomous subject but rather of an object of the text's production. As a reader, Martha's subjectivity is addressed or, as Althusser puts it, "interpellated" by texts. The Althusserian argument[40] suggesting that ideology interpellates individuals into subjecthood through social rituals, books, schools or political meetings sheds light on Martha's construction of subjectivity. According to Althusser, the ideological state apparatuses, *i.e.* "social institutions such as the media, family, the educational system, language and the political system produce the tendency in people to behave and think in socially acceptable ways."[41] Acting as a social mirror, ideology does not only provide the image with which the individual identifies, but also the world into which the subject fits, the "*vraisemblance*," in Althusser's terms, resulting in the ideological hegemony that "comes into play when all the members of a collectivity see themselves within the same reflecting surface."[42] The power of ideology operates through the

[40] The individual is interpellated into (free) subjecthood in order that he/she might submit freely to the Subject's orders, and thus he/she may freely accept her/his subjection. The Althusserain theory illuminates Butler's argument of performativity: Judith Butler further stresses the enunciative dimension of Althusser's interpellation to suggest that femininity and masculinity are not only ideological productions but performative ones. Sophie Marret, et Claude Le Fustec. *La fabrique du genre* : (*dé)constructions du féminin et du masculin dans les arts et la littérature anglophones*. Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, DL 2008. p. 35

[41] By "*vraisemblance*," Althusser designates the "privileged mode of representation by which the image of the social consensus is offered to the members of a social formation within which they are asked to identify themselves." (Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971. pp. 695-696)

[42] *Ibid*. p. 162.

reflecting surfaces of novels, newspapers and literature. They reflect an ideologically bound individual identity within the limits of class, gender or race. In the same way, the traditional stories with which we structure and make sense of our lives "doom" us, in Lessing's view, to

> the nightmare repetition which we must escape if we are to survive—a narrative and conceptual feedback loop, or hall of mirrors in which our grotesque images reflect and refract infinitely through a series of epistemological, ontological prisms called race, class, male and female.[43]

Martha is accordingly somehow conditioned by her books. She is always thirsty for an authoritative explanation of her experience, which amounts to a normative construction of that experience: "She read like a bird collecting twigs for a nest. She picked up each new book, using the author's name as a sanction" (*MQ* 220). The realistic literature she reads—more specifically "the classics, Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray, inherited from prosperous Victorian households" (*MQ* 35)—most often inscribes and promotes the cultural codes of the society it describes. Indeed, this literature transmits the bourgeois ideology and culture which imprison her within the system she seeks to escape. To Karen Schneider, Martha remains "locked into the meaning-making narratives that emplot and constrain not only her life's stories but the whole history of mankind.[44]"

Absorbed in her literary books, Martha lives in a conceptual reality. She is trapped in the prison house of language. The "power of the words" (*MQ* 33) on her inner self and on her own conception of things testifies to the way the ideological discourse they convey weighs upon the adolescent girl's perceptual consciousness. The narrative voice comments that "since she ha[s] been formed by literature she could think in no other way—that all this had been described in Dickens, Tolstoy, Hugo, Dostoevsky, and a dozen others" (*MQ* 184). Martha's judgments are thus shaped by her reading:

> She was watching fearfully the effect on herself of the poetry of suffering, the words of 'no man's land,' 'star shells,' 'Boche,' touched off in her images like those of poetry; no man's land was the black and wasted desert between the living forces; star shells exploded in colored light, like fireworks, across her brain, drenched in reminiscence; Boche was fearful and gigantic, nothing human, a night figure; tripping word 'Gallipoli' was like a heroic dance. She was afraid because of the power of these words, which affected her so strongly, who had nothing to do with

[43] Karen Schneider. "A Different War Story: Doris Lessing's Great Escape." *Journal of Modern Literature*. Vol. 19. No. 2, Autumn 1995. p. 260.

[44] *Ibid*. p. 261.

what they stand for. (*MQ* 33)

The textual mirror is thus as refractive as the real looking glass to which Martha turns. It further defines the female character as a gendered being. If within a Lacanian paradigm, Martha's identity is constituted by a pre-existing signifying chain preordained by the Law-of-the-Father, it is also constrained by the gendering power of texts.

- The gendering effect of the textual mirror

Apart from literature, Martha searches for images of a lovable and successful self in romantic relationships with men and in the plots of fairy-tales in which she projects herself, unconsciously absorbing their gendering forces and their normalizing effect upon the self. Gender roles are internalized through fairy-tales, in which the heroine is unequivocally beautiful, docile, virtuous and compassionate. She is also vulnerable and saved by a noble and handsome prince. In classical romantic fairy-tales, the heroine does not develop or show autonomy and initiation. She is either helpless or wicked. Commenting on the presence of gender in the romantic literature of the eighteenth century, Terry Eagleton thus describes the cultural construction of the romantic novel as an "ideological arena in which the social contract is translated into a sexual exchange and the desirable characteristics of the good woman are both defined and appropriated by the hegemonic masculine culture."[45]
Like Mary Turner in Lessing's first novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), a young woman who has modeled herself on the "more childish-looking film stars" (36), Martha's concept of self is much influenced by the general gender attitudes of her society, as reflected in the beauty magazines she reads:

> Just before the war, women were supposed to be tall, broad-shouldered, slim-lipped, long-legged. Martha's room may have been littered with books, but it was also plentifully supplied with magazines, where all the women conformed to that shape as when she saw her reflection, when she imagined herself in this dress or that, she continually strained her mental image of herself upwards, thinning it, posing it; when she saw herself ideally, crossing a room, under fire from admiring eyes, it was in the guise of this other, imposed woman. (*MQ* 156)

[45] Anne K. Mellor. *Romanticism and Gender.* London: Routledge, 2013. p. 5.

In order to achieve an ideal body-image, Martha styles herself on the "tall, broad-shouldered, slim-hipped, long-legged" mannequin models that she has seen in the beauty magazines. The representation of gender is partly constructed by these magazines but also by how they become absorbed subjectively by the woman to whom they are addressed. Teresa De Lauretis suggests that the construction of gender is achieved through "the various technologies of gender and institutional discourses with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and 'implant' representations of gender."[46] In this sense, the beauty magazines that Martha reads are among the "technologies" of gender regulating gender relations, making the woman a constructed other.

In *A Proper Marriage*, Lessing's second book in the *Children of Violence* series, Martha concludes that "women in literature were still what men, or the men-women, wished they were" (*PM* 62). Accordingly, the presentation of women in literature is closely related to men's conception of them and consequently to the construction of a gendered self. In *Landlocked* (1973), Martha Quest starves herself and goes through a "thin phase" in order to become a slim blonde woman, fashioning herself on the images of the heroines of her romantic novels. Standing before the mirror, she

> remained locked in herself, and […] what a damned waste, she ended these bitter thoughts, as she turned to examine her back view. To the waist only, the mirror was set too high because of all the "running around"—Anton's phrase for it; because her life at this time was nothing but seeing people, coping with things, dealing with situations and people, one after another, she was thin, she was in a "thin phase," she was again a slim blonde" almost: being blonde is more a quality of texture than of color. Martha was not sleek enough *to earn the word blonde* [my italics]. (*LL* 19)

Martha's craving to "earn the word blonde" discloses the influence exerted by the normative and institutional discourse about a standard of female beauty related to blondness. John Angshaw Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*[47] (1955) elucidated the power of language as a signifying system of meaning. Within this system, signs circulate between and through a multiplicity of socio-cultural links. Austin has also demonstrated the performative power of language, suggesting that "the uttering of a sentence is the doing or the performing

---

[46] Teresa De Lauretis. *Technologies of Gender*: *Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction.* Houndmills*:* Macmillan Press, 1989, p 18.

[47] Jean Angshaw Austin. *How To Do Things with Words*. Eds. J. O. Urmson, M. Sbisa. Oxford: Clarendon Harvard, 1955.

of an action."[48] The individual's identity is thus performed by discourse. Within this modern conception of discourse, Martha's identity is constructed through the interplay of language and social expectations. In a similar way, Butler has argued that language mediates between the individual and wider cultural hegemonies:

> Language is not an exterior medium or instrument into which I pour a self and from which I glean a reflection of that self […]. Indeed to understand identity as practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse […].[49]

Butler suggests here that selfhood is manufactured through language. Identity is not a category at all for her; instead, it is a semiotic activity through which individuals are made to make cultural sense. In 1995, she defined language performativity in these terms:

> If a word [...] might be said to "do" a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing. It seems here that the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting.[50]

In a similar way, the feminist critic Teresa de Lauretis stresses that gender has to do with "the history, practice, and imbrication of meaning and experience, that is with the mutually constitutive effects in semiosis of the outer world of social reality with the inner world of subjectivity."[51] In such a position, the subject has no control over his/her linguistic self, since the semiotic system is governed by the dominant subject, who determines the linguistic structures as well. In the patriarchal social world of the *Children of Violence* novels, the woman is spoken about but does not speak for herself. She has no voice or does not act as a speaking subject. Drawing upon Foucault's account of disciplinary power in order to critically analyze normative femininity, Luce Irigaray calls this imposed discursive pattern the woman's subjection to phallocratic discourse. The French feminist is essentially influenced by

---

[48] *Ibid*. p. 5.

[49] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge, 1999. p. 143-145.

[50] Judith Butler. "Burning Acts−Injurious Speech." Performativity and Performance. Eds. A. Parker, E. K. Sedgwick. London: Routledge, 1995. p. 198. Butler states that "performative acts constitute […] identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief that is aligned with social sanction and taboo." "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader. Eds. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, London: Routledge, 1996. p. 120.

[51] Teresa De Lauretis. *Technologies of Gender*: *Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction.* Houndmills*:* Macmillan Press, 1989. p. 32.

Foucault's theory of the body[52] as a surface where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves—a nodal point on which major rules, hierarchies and cultural commitments are projected. Like Sandra Bartkey, she highlights the disciplinary practices that engender specifically feminine docile bodies such as dieting practices, limitations on gestures and mobility, and bodily ornamentation. According to her, in the realm of discourse, the speaking subject is posited as either masculine or feminine. Since language has become constitutive of social practices, epistemologies and ontologies, it also constructs reality. In this sense, femininity and what it signifies is contingent upon discursive practices.

Rather than helping her construct a whole and authentic self, the real mirror and the mirror of the text give Martha a refracted sense of self. They alienate her and categorize her as a gendered female subject. This alienating and gendering process is further enhanced by the powerful masculine gaze bearing upon her.

[52] Throughout his later "genealogical" works (*Discipline and Punish*, *History of Sexuality*), Michel Foucault constantly reminds us of the primacy of practice over belief. Our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity, not chiefly through ideology but through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives.

b. The mirror as male gaze

The specular image reveals a dialectical tension between the self and the Other's gaze, which has an important impact on Martha's concept of self and subjectivity as it sets her in a different specular paradigm. In particular, Donovan's objectifying male gaze upon Martha, in Book I of the *Children of Violence* series, clearly highlights the dialectic of subject and the masculine other as well as the construction of femininity within the symbolic phallic[53] model of desire and signification. The Other's look or the mirror, the Lacanian metaphorical site of the construction of self, propels the heroine into the "Order of the Symbolic," in which the individual is subjected to social meanings, language and sexual differentiation. In *Écrits*, Jacques Lacan characterizes the symbolic determination of the individual's subjectivity in the following manner: "Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him by 'flesh and blood'."[54] In *Children of Violence*, the gendering effect of the symbolic order on the female protagonist's subjectivity is fostered by the male gaze which relegates her to the status of a passive object, forcing her to assume a gendered sense of self, mainly when she moves from the narrow social community of the veld to the bigger unknown world of the town.

- Context: Martha's move from the farm to the town

In moving from the farm to the town to work as a secretary, Martha hopes to become independent and achieve a new self by escaping the inertia and torpor weighing upon the mud house: a "door had closed, finally and behind it was the farm and the girl who had been created by it. […] She was a *new* [original italics] person" (*MQ* 92). But the town turns out to

[53] In 1958, Lacan used the term "phallus" to refer to two orders: the imaginary phallus and the symbolic one. The imaginary phallus refers to an imaginary object (the image of the penis) as perceived by the child in the pre-oedipal phase as the object of the mother's desire. By contrast, the symbolic phallus is a signifier which eventually designates all binary differences. According to Lacan, the symbolic phallus signifies the opposite of completion: lack. It is not the real organ referring to the penis but rather the symbolic meaning, designating the "Name-of-the-Father:" "The phallus is not a fantasy […] nor is it as such an object […]. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris that it symbolizes […]. The phallus is a signifier. It is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified." Jacques Lacan. *Ecrits. A Selection*. Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977. pp. 689-690.

[54] Jacques Lacan. *Ecrits. A Selection*. Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977. p. 68.

offer an inimical environment. The Club where she meets the town's young men epitomizes the lustful celebration of life and wallowing in sensual pleasures. It is a place of unhampered gratification: "anything [is] permissible, the romances, the flirtations, the quarrels, provided they [are] shared" (*MQ* 152). But it thwarts her longing for self-fashioning, unity and wholeness, especially after her encounter with Donovan Anderson, who acquaints her with the members of the Sports Club. She there becomes an image, an object, or a body to be desired and possessed. It is significant in this respect that she should be given a new name, that is to say a new identity, "Matty" (*MQ* 111), by her male friends and Donovan. She is called "beautiful Matty" (*MQ* 139), or simply "Beautiful" (*MQ* 152), by the men of the Club, and is thus objectified. She is expected to be a shining star "under dozen pairs of sympathetic eyes" (*MQ* 152). While she longs to be a subject-agent, "an extraordinary and magnificent" being, (*MQ* 29) who intends to become "an efficient secretary" (107) and be among "the skilled" (108), the sculptor of her self-creation, she gradually becomes a lifeless statue erected in the name of beauty, and grows even more distorted, alienated and objectified.

- Martha Quest and the Club

Martha's first arranged meeting with Donovan awakens her to the gendering effect of the masculine gaze upon her psyche. She prepares herself for this encounter with the aid of "mirrors large and small […] as if Donovan's dark and languid eyes were dictating what she must do, even to the way her hair should lie on her shoulders" (*MQ* 111). Savoring for the first time "the delight of dressing for a man" (*MQ* 111), she behaves under "the power of that compulsion that seem[s] to come from outside" (*MQ* 111). She thus constructs herself as an image that will please Donovan. Yet, despite her efforts at matching his desires, she is struck by his critical and "disturbing" (111) gaze when she first meets him. He "look[s] at her, critically narrow[s] his eyes," then "studie[s] her anew" (111). This meeting is a decisive moment for Martha, who realizes that she is fragmented and altered by the scrutinizing male gaze: "It [is] like being possessed by another personality" (111), she observes. In town, she becomes aware that she is divided into two selves, the image seen by the male gaze and the other deeper self that feels and sees inside: She feels she is "under the outside pressure" of Donovan's gaze, a gaze which, as she is "inform[ed] in a small voice but a clear one," "had nothing to do with her" (*MQ* 112).

- Gender: "a style of the flesh"

Donovan's gaze prompts Martha to internalize normalized femininity into her self-perception. From the moment she arrives to town, she learns to choose her dresses "from the point of view of Donovan" (*MQ* 110). By imposing upon her a dress he has designed and sewn for the New Year's dance at the Sports Club, he makes her comply with the cultural norms regarding womanhood and assimilate a socially approved image of herself. He promises to "make [her] the belle of the ball" (*MQ* 157) and attempts to make her perform a gendered fictitious identity she does not truly endorse, as we shall see further:

> Donovan wiped off her make-up, and made her shut her eyes while he painted her face again. He arranged and rearranged her hair. She was compliant, but impatient. At the end, he led her triumphantly to the long mirror, and said, "Now, then, Matty…"
>
> Martha looked, and, in spite of her pleasure, was uneasy. It was *not herself* [my italics] she felt. The simplicity of that white dress had been given a touch of the bizarre—no, that was not it; as she regarded herself, she was instinctively forming herself to match that young woman in the mirror, who was cold, unapproachable, and challenging. But from the cool, remote face peered a pair of troubled and uneasy eyes [...].
>
> Donovan came forward quickly, and said, 'Now, listen, Matty, you really must see that you must change yourself for a dress like this. Don't you see?' He bent towards her, his hand hovering, ready to seize on what was wrong. 'Look,' he said finally, 'your eyes too. Lift your head.' (*MQ* 163)

Donovan's gaze aims to structure Martha's consciousness as a bodily being, making the female body into a cultural sign and an object of male dominance. In painting her face, the young man paints a new identity for the young woman. More importantly, he seeks to produce a "docile and subjected"[55] body by controlling and refashioning Martha's body: her "eyes," "cheekbones," "shoulders," "head," "breast," "feet" and "voice" (*MQ* 163). "A body," Michel

[55] In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault analyzes the disciplinary practices that were developed in prisons, schools, and factories in the 18th century, including minute regulations of bodily movements, obsessively detailed time schedules, and surveillance techniques, and how these practices shaped the bodies of prisoners, students and workers into docile bodies. He shows the emergence of a new form of power: disciplinary power as constitutive of the subject. It creates rather than imposes its hold upon types of individuals. It is a system of management that operates on people and their bodies, through techniques of control and regulation. Through disciplinary power, social life is brought within the purview of discipline and normalizing judgment. Women's actions, behavior and thought, which confer upon them a social identity, testify to this reality. Such disciplinary power creates docile and practiced bodies, molded by cultural and historical forces. (Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977. p. 135-169.)

Foucault states, "is docile [as it] may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."[56] Segmented and scattered into objects of fetish worship, the female body is remolded and reshaped under Donovan's "working hands" (*MQ* 160), like a shattered mirror broken into brightly polished fragments.

Donovan's injunctions and reiterated commands ("must see," "must change," "lift your head") to make Martha into "a mannequin" (*MQ* 164) are meant to align her with a feminine ideal of beauty. He instructs her to "let [her] shoulders forward a little," "stand with [her] bottom tucked in, and [her] hips forward, and [her] shoulders curved […] so that [her] breasts stand out" (*MQ* 161). This repetitive process produces a feminine body coded for sexual attractiveness. In *Martha Quest*, Donovan's gaze posits Martha as at once the object and the foundation of representation, the *telos* and origin of man's desire, as well as an object and sign of culture. Like a mirror, the masculine gaze frames the girl's femininity as a body which demands training and suffering in order to be perfected, for in Donovan's own terms, "we must suffer in the cause of beauty" (*MQ* 160).

Femininity, in this sense, becomes what Butler calls an "artifice, an achievement, a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms, which surface as so many styles of the flesh."[57] Gender is in this sense the cultural meaning that comes to be contingently attached to the sexual body. It is a daily construction that the male gaze, or in more general terms, the social gaze, imposes upon the female individual. Defining gender and how it is constructed, Judith Butler writes:

> Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effort of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered life.[58]

According to Butler, gender is then a corporeal style, or a "style of the flesh," produced through the "repetition of acts" and giving the "illusion of an abiding gendered life." Such performance of gender is to be found in Donovan's attempt at adjusting Martha's demeanor to the "feminine" style when he prepares her for the dance at the Club. He therefore mimics the way she should appear: "'Look, your eyes should be like this.' With something

[56] *Ibid*. p. 136.

[57] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge, 1990.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 191.

like horror, Martha saw him slide his own eyes slantingly sideways, into a languid, distant gleam. 'You see?' he demanded triumphantly" (*MQ* 163). Ironically enough, however, while he endeavors to instruct Martha how to assume gender (femininity) as one of the natural and essential features of her identity, he divulges its fictional and phantasmagoric nature. His simulation turns into a grotesque parody of 'perfect' femininity as he becomes "terrifyingly herself [Martha]" (*MQ* 163). This gender performance is marked by a deictic shift: the personal pronoun "he" (referring to Donovan) is unexpectedly associated with the reflexive pronoun "herself" (referring to Martha). Symbolically, the conflation of "he" with "herself" is suggestive not only of the cultural constructedness that lies at the heart of gendered femininity, but also of its malleability. The deictic shift discloses "the going-in drag of essence ("*le devenir-travesti de l'essence*")"[59] inscribed in the conceptual structure of gender. In other terms, the essence of gender is thought of in terms of its transformability. The feminine, in this sense, becomes one of the metabolic[60] traits of identity. Lessing thus suggests an unprecedented idea about gender in the literature of the time: hers is a modern conception of gender, a non-essentializing[61] one, traversing both sides of the sex/gender dyad.

By the time Doris Lessing had written her novel *Martha Quest*, the feminist movement in England was still a budding one. Even though she later expresses controversial views on feminism, which I shall discuss later in the chapter, she thus anticipated the revolutionary concept about gender performativity that was developed in the 1970s. It is clear in her novel that in the act of performing the conventions of society, as instructed by her male creator, Martha reenacts gender in her actions, and makes artificial conventions appear as natural and necessary.

In her 1973 novel *The Summer before the Dark*, Doris Lessing further develops the idea of gender performativity. Preparing herself for the Foodstuff committee, the female protagonist, Kate Brown, a forty-five year old woman, enlists the aid of dress, cosmetics and

---

[59] Thinking gender through ontological lenses, the contemporary French philosopher Catherine Malabou, a Derridean scholar, suggests that the human being cannot be thought of outside its ontic transformability. Such ontic transformability presupposes a plasticity of gender itself. A plastic subject would be able to transform its way of being. Drawing on the twentieth century feminist theories of gender, she deconstructs essential concepts of femininity and masculinity, by deconstructing the concept of "essence" itself. This implies that the feminine is not to be reduced to the category of "woman." (Catherine Malabou. *Changer de différence* : *le féminin et la question philosophique.* Paris : Galilée, 2009. p. 48.)

[60] *Ibid*. p. 39.

[61] The essentialist view of gender is the theory that assumes that "sex and gender are conceived as natural extensions of a biological body, whereas the non-essentialist or anti-essentialist gender theorists have taken up the position that gender does not express an inner essence about the subject." (Lorraine Cod. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. New York: Routledge, 2000. p. 47.)

hair color to pass for a younger version of herself, thus showing that she is caught in what Simone de Beauvoir termed "the elegance of bondage."[62] She has to be in that "state of eternal youth, to which such a large part of the time and effort of womanhood is directed" (*SBD* 44). She behaves like an actress on a stage, "adjusting the picture of herself: lips, a set of facial muscles, eye movements, angle of back and shoulders" (*SBD* 45), so that men can see her. As she has withdrawn for a while from the group of the committee members, she realizes that "this is what it must feel to be an actor, an actress—how very taxing that must be, a sense of self kept burning behind so many different phantasms" (*SBD* 45). The narrative voice earlier commented on the Foodstuff committee saying that it was "as good as the theatre—better since she was one of the players" (*SBD* 43), thus stressing that play-acting is emblematic of gender performativity. Luce Irigaray[63] expresses a similar idea elsewhere, suggesting that femininity is a mask donned for social performances and that the subject of mimetic performances of femininity remains partially elsewhere, beyond the performance of the self. The two female protagonists Kate Brown and Martha Quest perform femininity to cater to male fantasies.

- Shaping Martha's intellect

Like Donovan or the men at the Sports Club, the Cohen brothers, Martha's neighbors on the farm seek to model her personality and thus hamper her autonomy and quest for self-fulfillment. The two brothers Joss and Solly Cohen first appear as the intellectual mentors who provide her with books on sociology, psychology and history in order to instruct her but they actually treat her as an object. When Martha visits them to borrow novels and books, they alienate her with their sarcastic and objectifying gaze, as shown in the following citation, for during her conversation with Joss, Martha understands that the "note in his voice" (*MQ* 50) is a sexual allusion to her "careful make-up" and her "new green linen:"

> Martha looked quickly at him [Joss], and at once interpreted his agreement as a reference to her own appearance; […]. He had been watching her, and, at the

[62] Elisabeth Wilson. *Adorned in Dreams, Fashion and Modernity*. New York: IB. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2005. p. 125.

[63] Luce Irigaray. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. G. Gill Cornell. New York: University Press, Ithaca, 1985.

> glance, he lifted from a table beside him a large pile of books and handed them to her. […].
>
> He remarked 'take these, good for your soul.' He frowned again; and at once she felt indignant that he might be surprised because she had made the same intellectual journey he had. […].
>
> She raised her eye to his and waited. Because of the look on his face, she at once became conscious of the picture she presented, standing there in front of him, a young girl in a green linen frock that emphasized every line in her body. […]. (*MQ* 50-52)

A closer scrutiny of the semantic field related to eyesight in the dialogue between Joss Cohen and Martha reveals that it is fraught with expressions referring to the gaze ("to watch," "a glance," "her eye," "the look"). As mentioned earlier, the look of the Other annihilates the being-subject, for-itself (*pour-soi*), in favor of the being-object, or what Sartre calls the "being-for-others" (*être-objet-pour-autrui*). The structure of the self as being-for-the-Other discloses the existence of the Other as a subject who can only manifest his/her subjectivity by reducing the self to the status of an object. Joss's look at Martha relegates her to an object-position: "because of the look on his face, she at once bec[o]me[s] conscious of the picture she present[s]: […] a young girl in a green linen frock that emphasize[s] every line in her body" (*MQ* 52).

Assuming that Martha cannot exceed him in intellect, Joss offers the latter books he assumes to be "good for her soul." He acts as if he were the only purveyor of knowledge. This is why the girl feels at once "indignant that he might be surprised because she had made the same intellectual journey he had" (*MQ* 53).

So far, the movement to town and the involvement in the community of the Sports Club has brought no consolation to Martha's quest for selfhood and need for wholeness. On the contrary, it reinforces her objectification and alienation by the male gaze. As shall be demonstrated, she is, at this stage of her quest, torn between the desire of transcendence and the temptation of submission.

- Martha's ambivalent reaction to the masculine gaze

No matter how much she tries to escape the effect of gender and cultural coding, the adolescent Martha acts both inside and outside its ideology. She is conscious of that twofold pull and of her being at once within and without male representation. Her psychological state

while being molded by her masculine creator Donovan best exemplifies this ambivalence. The heroine is "compliant, but impatient" (*MQ* 163). She is torn between her mimetic tendency to "look" like the others and to conform to a generalized perception of womanhood and her subversive impulse to be different and authentic. While at the beginning of the party, she seems to be gratified when she meets the socially accepted feminine ideal and wins over onlookers, she later becomes alienated by the partygoers' objectifying gaze, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis. By the end of the party, Martha feels "hurt and confused, her own idea of herself [is] destroyed" (*MQ* 174).

The Martha of the Sports Club thus embodies an uncomfortable duality between the private self and the public one. This ambivalence, which shall be analyzed in detail, displays the heroine's inner conflict between the desire to respond to individual aspirations and the temptation to give in to cultural and masculine scripts of womanhood.

–Martha's submission to the masculine gaze

At first, Lessing alludes to the way the female subject is bound to its male representation as a gendered feminine object: As she "turn[s] passively between [Donovan's] hands like a dummy" (160), Martha is obediently submissive to her dress-maker. "Congealing into perfection" (162), she remains "motionless" and "unmoved" (163). "Chattering and amenable, ready to be sewn into her dress" (163), she responds to her instructor in a robotic manner. She thus enacts herself as a representation, fashioned to entice the scopophilic male gaze—its active pleasure of looking. Thus, the construction of gender proves to be the product of its representation.

In the Sports Club, Martha Quest, to take up the words of Joan Riviere, the Kleinian psychoanalyst, "masquerades" as Miss Ideal: her make-up masks her natural face and projects a normalized image of beauty. In the dress designed by Donovan, she has forged a chimeric identity for herself, "forming herself to match that young woman in the mirror" (*MQ* 163). Rivière coined the term "masquerade" in relation to a woman's gendered identity in her famous essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade"[64] published in 1929. This seminal essay argued that "womanliness could be assumed and worn as a mask."[65] Masquerade is the

[64] Jean Riviere. "Womanliness as a Masquerade." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Vol. 10, 1929. pp. 303-313.

[65] *Ibid*. p. 305.

inevitable female disguise, perceived by Riviere as a submission to dominant social codes. Femininity is a mask that women wear in order to be better accepted in a social world codified by men. The Oxford English Dictionary connects the word "masquerade" with "deception," "disguise" or "masking," which refer to protecting or hiding from view, or to deceiving for a purpose. Masquerading thus means assuming a counterfeit appearance. Pleading to be the beautiful object of contemplation, Martha thus participates in the masquerade of femininity and renounces the status of a subject to become the image of femininity. Her diet which starts during her stay on the farm and which continues once she has moved to town, bears testimony to her compliance with the cultural norms subduing and fashioning her body: "She had slimmed herself during the past two years so that the bones of her pelvis were prominent, and this gave her great pleasure; and she went to bed vowing she must not put on weight" (*MQ* 134). As Sarah Sceats writes in Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction, "notwithstanding Martha's reading, rebellious tendencies and views of herself as different, she accepts the socially approved female model at this early stage in her life without question […]."[66]

It is clear that in the patriarchal culture of the Sports Club, Martha Quest subconsciously internalizes the voyeuristic power of the masculine gaze over her concept of self. As Sandra Lee Bartkey points out,

> in contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. A woman sees her body as seen by an Other, by an anonymous patriarchal Other.[67]

Martha seeks to capture Donovan and the partygoers' gaze: She "imagined herself thus suddenly exposed, and laughed on a thrill of excitement" (*MQ* 165). She desires to be desired. In a Lacanian sense, she seeks to see herself looked at by that other gaze, imagining the way she will fascinate it. This third gaze, from which she sees herself, is the Lacanian "ego-ideal"—the point of symbolic identification which "governs the interplay of relations on which all relations with others depend. And on this relation to others depends the more or less

[66] Sarah Sceats. *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000. p. 75.

[67] Sandra Lee Bartkey. "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." *Feminism and Foucault, Reflections on Resistance*. Ed. I. Diamond and L. Quinby, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999. p. 46.

satisfying character of the imaginary structuration."[68] In Simone De Beauvoir's terms, "it is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect, as the hero of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her; she [the woman] strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendor."[69]

In the Sports Club, Martha seems to be unable to transcend the boundaries of objecthood and construct herself as a subject:

> Three times Martha found herself drawn onto the veranda by one or other of the wolves (afterwards she had to remind herself who they had been) and kissed; and always in the same way. Abruptly, without any sort of preface, she was held rigid against a hard body, whose lower half pushed against hers in an aggressive […] way, and her head was bent back under a thrusting, teeth-bared kiss. (*MQ* 173)

The male characters or what the narrative voice calls "the wolves" are positioned as the active subjects who gaze at and control the heroine as a passive object, as emphasized by the passive forms "she is drawn," "was kissed," "held rigid," "was bent back" (*MQ* 173). The aggressiveness of the kiss testifies to the mechanical way in which Martha is treated. She is helpless and reduced to the status of a sex object. 'Snapped' by one of the wolves of the Club, Martha is submitted to an obtrusive act of love, devoid of the slightest touch of sensuality and tenderness.

Martha Quest's paradoxical state is also discerned after her engagement in a marriage that the narrator ironically calls "proper." Her marriage with Douglas Knowell confines her even more to social convention. Rather than being a liberating and escapist route from parental authority, marriage and ultimate motherhood turn out to hamper the heroine's quest for selfhood.[70] Married at nineteen with Douglas Knowell in *A Proper Marriage*, she remains torn between the social eye and the personal eye. The narrative voice comments that there is

> nothing more paradoxical about her situation than that, while she insist[s] on being unique, individual and altogether apart from any other person, she could be comforted in such matters only by remarks like "everybody feels this," or "it is

[68] Lacan developed his double-mirror device to clarify the relationship between the drive, the ego, the ideal ego, the ego-ideal, the other, and the Other. This model helped him describe the dynamics of identification and explain how psychoanalytic treatment works. The ego-ideal illustrates the projection of the ego's ideal image onto the external image (human beings, things, animals), whereas the ideal-ego refers to the subject's introjection of another external image that has a new (de)formative effect on his/her psyche. It also makes the subject enter the symbolic plan of law. (Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique* [1953–1954]. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988. p. 141.)

[69] Simone De Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953. p. 533.

[70] These ideas will be further developed in the thesis.

natural to feel that." (*PM* 31)

Even after her marriage, the heroine realizes once again that her body has become "newly licensed for use by society" (*PM* 55). After giving birth to her daughter Caroline, she "proceed[s] to starve herself. By dint of literally not eating anything, she had lost twenty pounds at the end of six weeks. Better, she had regained that slimness which had been before she had married" (*PM* 178). We can thus notice that Martha's desire to be a subject clashes with her (self) objectification. Will she then resist at least partially this (self) objectification or will she remain trapped in limited self-positioning? Do the power of gender and the masculine gaze foreclose the possibility of partial liberation from the patriarchal forces that are imposed upon her?

–Martha's resistance to the masculine gaze

Martha's propensity to succumb to normative constructions of gender and the power of the masculine gaze does not axiomatically exclude possibilities of resistance to these social forces. Indeed, the narrative voice conveys, at several times, the heroine's disgust at the cultural representation thrust upon her by the phallocentric gaze. The oxymoronic phrases "fascinated disgust" (*MQ* 163), "with a nervous laugh" (163), and "laughing with genuine bitterness" (164) reflect this ambivalence, which makes her at once relish and resent that representation. Upon entering the Club, Martha attended by Donovan, feels strong "resentment" (*MQ* 165) at her "childish compliance, as if she were under a spell" (165). She is frightened that she "must rouse herself to meet [Donovan's] wishes" (*MQ* 159) and that she should be obliged to wear a dress under his "personal supervision" (*MQ* 157) for her first dance at the Sports Club. The fairy tale of romance promised by Donovan becomes a nightmare of self-alienation in which she has to adapt to roles in order to please men and conform to their projected images and desires. After the meeting with Donovan, Martha feels fragmented into multiple subjectivities. It is "as if half a dozen entirely different people inhabited her body, and they violently disliked each other, bound together by one thing, a strong impulse of longing; anonymous, impersonal, formless, like water" (*MQ* 159). These multiple and contradictory selves pose a threat to the humanist ideal of singular and unified identity to which Martha aspires in her quest for self.

Martha's resistance to the voyeuristic power of the masculine gaze is also revealed in her dance with Perry when she seeks a subject-to-subject gaze rather than a subject-object

gaze dictated by group pressure: she "watche[s] his eyes and become[s] obsessed by the need to look at the eyes of these people and not their bodies" (*MQ* 172). She longs for a genuine engagement with Perry but the latter "pushe[s her] conventionally around the room, in a rectangular progress, and the straight blue eyes assess[…] her" (*MQ* 172). While Martha wishes to "establish contact with him, simply and warmly" and "want[s] him to recognize her as a reasonable being" (*MQ* 173), he fails to "accept her as *herself* [original italics]" (*MQ* 172). When she is denied the validation of the Sports Club as a "reasonable" person, being "one of the different selves which insisted on claiming possession of her" (*MQ* 172-173), Martha becomes disillusioned with her involvement in the Club and her move to town. Her aversion for the Sports Club crowd increases: "She hated Donovan, with pure, cool contempt; she looked at the young men, and despised them passionately" (*MQ* 174).

Despite her attempts at resisting the masculine gaze, Martha realizes that they are only partial and limited. A few weeks after her arrival in town, her search for selfhood seems to be doomed to failure: "She was thinking that she had not been in town more than a few weeks and already she was bored and longing for something different; […] it was all so banal" (*MQ* 182). Her thirst for an ideal liberty fails to be quenched by her move from the veld to town. As Elizabeth Masleen puts it:

> Martha is more aggressively manipulated by men she meets: the wolves of the Sports Club with their endlessly sterile sexual teasing; Donovan with his dressing and shaping of her so as to make her literally conform to his ideas of what her image should be.[71]

Martha agonizes over the existential shame of being made into an object by the Other's look. The gaze, Lacan says, is "presented to us only in the form of strange contingency, symbolic of the lack that constitutes the castration anxiety […]. It surprises [the viewer], disturbs him and reduces him to a feeling of shame."[72] The experience of being scrutinized contributes to fuelling the anxiety she feels about her identity. This uneasiness stems from her "being-for-others" and r and her sense that she is a mere object to the look of the Other. In a Sartrean sense, all attempts to achieve the ideal in-itself-for-itself are thwarted by the latter's negating effect. Martha is engulfed in her shame, a notion that Jean-Paul Sartre has expanded in his *Being and Nothingness*:

---

[71] Elizabeth Masleen. *Doris Lessing*. United Kingdom: North Cole House, 1994. p. 10.

[72] Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques Alain Miller. Trans. Alain Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981. pp. 72, 73, 84.

> Shame motivates the reaction which surpasses and overcomes the shame inasmuch as the reaction encloses within it an implicit and non-thematized comprehension of being able to be-an-object on the part of the subject for whom I am an object. This implicit comprehension is nothing other than the consciousness of my "being-myself," that is, of my selfness reinforced. In fact, in the structure which expresses the experience "I am ashamed of myself," shame supposes a me-as-object for the Other but also a selfness which is ashamed and which is imperfectly expressed by the "I" of the formula.[73]

By the end of the first volume of *Children of Violence*, the female protagonist feels ashamed when she realizes that she has been treated like an object by the "wolves" of the Sports Club. She becomes "hot and restless and writhing with shame" when she finds out that Perry and all the rest of them [are] a bunch of kids, messing about for years with every girl in the club" (*MQ* 193). Such a revelation occurs when she discovers that she is no longer "something special, she [is] being treated like the other girls, who [have] been currency in the club for years" (*MQ* 224). The arrival of her friend Marnie Van Rensberg at the club for the first time is an illuminating moment for her. Watching the reaction of the men upon her entry, she telescopically sees herself, like Marnie, being reduced into an object of male desire:

> She realized this fully when Marnie Van Rensberg came into the veranda wearing a bright floral evening dress, into which the projecting shelf of her breasts and her jutting hips were fitted like the slack bulging shapes of loosely filled grain sacks. Marnie smiled her good-natured, half-abashed smile to a chorus of moans and whistles. She was the new girl, she was the fresh arrival, she had taken Martha's place, and this had nothing to do with her looks or her personality. Martha saw this, with a mixture of shame that she had ever been affected by the adulation, even slightly, and resentment that she could be disposed by Marnie Van Rensberg. (*MQ* 224-225)

Shame, however, coincides with a moment of self-consciousness. It activates the internal self-evaluative eye of the self. Martha realizes that her idyllic concept of self as a free, autonomous and unified entity is undermined by the authoritative male gaze which negates her subjectivity and relegates her to the status of an object. She becomes conscious of the power of the gaze which gives the male voyeur authority over the female object. At the moment of self-consciousness sparked upon seeing Marnie, Martha becomes the gazing subject rather than the passive object of the gaze. She acts as an active subject, appropriates

[73] Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, New York: The Citadel Press, 1966. p. 365.

the gaze and turns it towards her inner self. But this brief moment of self-consciousness is not enough to destabilize the opposite poles of the specular logic, and the standard gender associations of subject/object, voyeur/object of the gaze, masculine/feminine, especially as Martha is still conditioned by the social eye.

Martha Quest's sense of self in the first two books of the *Children of Violence* is much influenced by the masculine gaze and the patriarchal ideologies of hersociety. But how can we account for her ambivalence and fluctuating, in-between state of submissiveness and rebellion?

Some critics attempted to answer this question, highlighting that if at times Martha seems to be helpless to control the forces of society that entrap her, she is nonetheless determined to reject the norm. At this stage in her life, refusing the social norms is itself an achievement for an adolescent girl, as suggested by Catharine R. Stimpson in her essay "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth:"[74] "saying no, saying I will not is half way between submission to the life [Martha] despises and the one she might actively build for herself, halfway between conformity and authenticity" (245).

Roxane J. Fand's argument offers another explanation to Martha Quest's ambivalence regarding the contrast between the normative social eye and her personal aspirations. To her, "the problem is that being a naysayer alone is a commitment to the principle of non-commitment, to lack, to no positive vision. Martha only has an abstract commitment to the vague ideal of the four-gated city."[75] Her lack of vision accounts for her waverings between the social and the personal, the conventional and the authentic, her idealistic aspirations and the demands of socialization.

But if Martha's quest is overtaken by obstacles and complications related to gender and patriarchy, it is also hampered by the issue of race as the heroine lives in a colonial society in which the range of opportunities for a white woman like herself is severely circumscribed. We will demonstrate that in *Martha Quest* and *The Grass Is Singing*, the female protagonists are inescapably beset by the issue of race or the racial eye.

---

[74] Catharine R. Stimpson. "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth." *Doris Lessing*. Ed. Harold Bloom. USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.

[75] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood.* London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 119.

c. The racial and colonial eye

Written respectively in 1950 and 1952 when Southern Rhodesia was a British colony, *The Grass Is Singing* and *Martha Quest* center upon the social positioning and conditioning of white women in racial and colonized Africa. Not only are the protagonists subjects to the Law of the Father but they are also entrenched within official discourses of race in colonial societies. As well as foregrounding the pervasiveness of a gender-biased power system, *The Grass Is Singing* sketches out the colonial woman whose identity is constrained by racial prejudice against blacks. In *Martha Quest*, the narrative voice constantly refers to the issue of race and the strong social conditioning preventing her from establishing authentic relationships with Africans based on racial presumptions. The novel also surveys the colonial eye that conditions Martha's behavior—the eye that limits the human potential and autonomy by imposing predetermined desires and rules on women. Likewise, in *The Grass Is Singing*, the protagonist Mary Turner appears as an object of the colonial society's gaze. Her identity is, to a large extent, shaped by the coercive social system endorsed by the conservative English settlers in South Africa.

- The colonial eye and the racial issue in *Martha Quest*

The first novel of the series outlines Martha's quest for selfhood within an African colonial context where prejudice against blacks predominated. Lessing who, like Martha, was brought up within an English family in colonial Southern Rhodesia commented on such colonial reality:

> The Africans told stories, but we weren't allowed to mix with them. It was the worst part about being there. I mean, I could have had the most marvelous rich experience as a child. But it would be inconceivable for a white child. […] There was a total color bar. […] The only contact I had with blacks was what I had with servants.[76]

[76] T. Frick. "Caged by The Experts." *Doris Lessing: Conversations*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. pp. 156-157.

Living in this segregated colonial society, Lessing's fictional character Martha Quest is doomed to observe the rigid boundaries that are maintained between blacks and whites, men and women, colonizer and colonized. That is why it is difficult for her to distance herself from the cultural construction of racial superiority cherished by most white colonists in Southern Rhodesia. As a matter of fact, the adolescent girl is forbidden by her mother Mrs. Quest to wander outside her home: "What would happen if a native attacked you?" (*MQ* 47), her mother says. As a consequence, the girl has internalized the deep fear of being scrutinized or raped by black men and dreads to walk from the station to her home in the veld because she "imagine[s] that [natives'] eyes [will] follow her, as she set[s] off, on foot, along a road where a dozen cars might be expected to pass that afternoon. White girls *do not* [original italics] …" (*MQ* 57). At one time, when she endeavors to make this journey on foot, she once "savor[s] freedom" but is "convinced that everyone remark[s] her, comment[s] on her" (*MQ* 59) behind in the station. She feels under scrutiny. Here, both gender and race coalesce to engender social rules that bear upon Martha: The narrative voice stresses the double bind exerted by the colonial/racial gaze upon "white girls" who are thus constituted as objects for social and male voyeurism. It is important in this regard to understand how race operates in colonial contexts and make visible its instrumentality as a means of subjecting white women.

In the history of Southern Rhodesia, during the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, the white race was believed to be superior to the black one. The settlers regarded themselves as morally superior to the African civilization they confronted. This can be demonstrated by some quotations from white leaders at important stages of Rhodesian history: "Rhodes admired Anglo-Saxon culture and believed that we are the finest race in the world […] and […] the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race."[77] This racial supremacy was just an argument in order to maintain hierarchical boundaries between races and to ensure the political and economic subservience of the African population.

The potency of race lies also in its identification with nation and national feelings, and was therefore instrumentalized in colonial contexts to legitimize the hegemony and power of the "superior white race"/nation over the black African continent. The African population was consequently cut off from the economic power and "its ability to compete and achieve power by other means has been further lessened by a deliberate policy of restricting opportunities for

[77] This is Sir Godfrey Huggins's quotation. He is the man who led white Rhodesians from 1933 to 1953. (Reginald Austin. *Racism and Aparteid in Southern Africa, Rhodesia*. Paris: The Unesco Press, 1975. p. 28.)

education, training, enterprise and collective bargaining."[78] It was not until the British Race Relations Act of 1976 that discrimination on racial grounds was penalized.

But it is also necessary to unveil the complicity of race with the gender system in order to discern its effect on women. The dynamics of the intersection of gender and race is best understood in psychoanalytical terms by Gwen Burger who attempted to decipher racialization using psychoanalysis. In a parallel process to the Lacanian account of the differentiation of male and female identity within the symbolic order, race has recently been understood through what Bergner terms, in *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex and Psychoanalysis*[79], the "racially symbolic"—"a pattern of organizing human difference through comparisons against the privileged signifier of whiteness" (xxvi). Race determines who is vested with power and who is powerless. Bergner argues that whiteness is made to be the master position by racial division and the white woman is compelled to assume raced-subject position. We find echoes in *Children of Violence* where the racially symbolic requires Martha Quest to identify with the same-race (homo-racial) lines. That is why she is expected to abide by white normality.

However, at some points in the novel, Martha seems to have realized that she is formed by her community's belief in racial superiority. As she meets her Jewish neighbors the Van Rensbergs in the little village, she remembers

> with shame the brash and easy way she had said to Joss that she repudiated race prejudice; for the fact was, she could not remember a time when she had not thought of people in terms of groups, nations or color of skin first, and as people afterwards. (*MQ* 61)

Martha's disillusionment with her subconscious tendency to emulate her community's attitude towards blacks is a first step towards her transcendence of racial prejudice. Despite her mother's warnings, she carries on her friendship with the Van Ransbergs who are of a different race. However, her counterpart Mary Turner in *The Grass Is Singing* was unable to resist the white community's disapproval of any conduct with blacks. I shall therefore discuss how the cross-hatched intersection of gender and race engenders Mary's failure of individuation and her ultimate tragedy in *The Grass Is Singing*.

---

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] Gwen Bergner. *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex, and Psychoanalysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

- The colonial eye and the racial issue in *The Grass Is Singing*

In *The Grass Is Singing*, Lessing also portrays Mary Turner's subjectivity as shaped by and entangled within the ideological duality of gender and race, and shows how these factors are rooted in the colonial ideology of racial superiority. The female protagonist is a victim of the colonial English settlers' ideology in Southern Africa. She is "white," "English" and a "settler" and therefore belongs to the hegemonic racial group. But she is also "female" and must consequently observe the barrier between white women and black men. But the racial problem is not simply that of exploiter and the exploited or of rich whites and poor blacks; it is also of the prohibited sexual relationship between blacks and whites because any sexual relationship between a white woman and a black man was seen as a taboo in the South Africa of the 1950s. In this context, Mary Turner's transgressive sexual relationship with Moses, her black servant, is the dramatic climactic point in the novel, bringing about her psychological breakdown and her ultimate death. This is why the novel has been described as "a psychological exploration of the colonial settler class and the frustrations caused by imposed racial and sexual boundaries."[80]

Like the adolescent Martha, Mary Turner's sense of self is, to a large extent, shaped by what Lessing calls "the gaze of the cruelly critical world" (190). It is the colonial gaze that forbids her to walk out alone in the veld, which is supposed to be a dangerous place where white women might be raped by the natives. Confused and bewildered, Mary recalls how rare her contacts with the Africans have been since her childhood:

> She had never come into contact with natives before […]. Her mother's servants she had been forbidden to talk to, in the club she had been kind to the waiters, but the native problem meant for her other women's complaints of their servants at tea parties. She was afraid of them, of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be. (*GIS* 58-59)

White women like Mary are kept within domestic boundaries as a consequence of the ideology of white racial supremacy and the attending fear of the racial other. The colonial woman, in Lessing's African fiction, is doubly bound on the one hand by her gender and by

[80] Simon Gikundi. "Lessing, Doris." *Encyclopedia of African Literature*. Ed. Simon Gikundi. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.

her color or race on the other: "Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be." This implies that gender cannot be separated from the political, racial and cultural spheres in which it is produced and maintained. White women are objectified as the exclusive property of white men. The native men are stereotyped as violent, savage and sexually threatening. The phenomenon of the "Black Peril," for example—the fear of sexual crimes against white women by black men—was one of white South Africa's most compelling mythologies and one of the stereotype of the "bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof."[81] The myth of the Black Peril had two effects: first, it proclaimed the bodies of white women as the protected possessions of white men; second, it constructed the black man as a primal, sexual "animal," incapable of controlling his physical impulses. It was also a necessary political strategy to solidify racial and gender differences and construct a white and male superior social order. In *The Grass Is Singing*, the generic colonial gaze is represented by the successful British farmer Charlie Slatter who upholds "the dictate of the first law of white South Africa:" "Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are" (178). This is why the "*esprit de corps"* (11) is the first rule of South African society. Tony Marston, an Englishman who embodies the racist class ideology, realizes that

> White civilization […] 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. (*GIS* 26)

As a consequence, miscegenation and mixed-race relationships had long been considered as taboos and pollutants. Anthropologist Mary Douglas attempted to reveal the reasons underlying such an ideology and developed her theory of pollution and taboo in her book, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*.[82] Studying the link between the social and the physical body, she argues that the boundaries of the physical body within culture are necessarily representative of social limits:

> Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below,

[81] Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993. p. 66.

[82] Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1966.

> male and female, with and against, [black and white,] that a semblance of order is created. (4)

According to Douglas, the boundaries of the body become the boundaries of the social order and vice versa. She emphasizes that the notion of pollution as related to the body develops remarkably and solely in the paranoid structures of a racist system. Pollution involves the transgression of such rigid lines of structure. Anyone who might want to defy the limits of society via the limits of the body is thus condemned: "A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone."[83]

Within this social and colonial context, Mary Turner is expected to play her role in the construction of the racial, gendered hierarchies of the empire. But after a traumatic childhood ending up with the death of her parents, she becomes unable to fit into her social environment. Indeed, Mary is the daughter of unhappy parents. Her mother is her first gender role model, "a passive and helpless woman, dominated by the overwhelming masculine patterns, nonetheless the complying victim of poverty" (*GIS* 33). Her father is a violent drunkard who causes the breakdown of the family and its descent into poverty and alienation. After their death, she marries, at age thirty-five, Dick Turner, a failed farmer. She has hasted into this ill-matched marriage which she was forced to accept in order to meet the expectations of colonialism, marrying a man she does not love: "All women become conscious, sooner or later, of that impalpable but steel-strong pressure to get married, and Mary, […] [is] brought face to face with it suddenly, and most unpleasantly" (*GIS* 40).

At the beginning of the novel, Mary endorses her culture's racist colonial ideology and responds with horror to the "reeking bodies of the working natives" (*GIS* 69), considering black women as "strange, […] alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about" (*GIS* 95). Yet, her accidental sight of her black houseboy Moses as he is washing arouses her sexual desire: "She was arrested by the sight of the native under the trees a few yards off. He was rubbing his thick neck with soap, and the white leather was startlingly white against the black skin" (*GIS* 143). This moment of voyeurism which radically splits her personality is the first instance of her transgressing the rigid line between blacks and whites. It is also when she becomes aware of his humanity:

> What had happened was that the formal pattern of black-and-white, mistress-and-

[83] *Ibid.*

> servant, had been broken by the personal relation; and when a white man in Africa by accident looks into the eyes of a native and sees the human being (which it is his chief occupation to avoid), his sense of guilt, which he denies, fumes up in resentment, and he brings down the whip. (*GIS* 144)

Mary then becomes torn between, on the one hand, her racist ideology and her desire to identify with her social group and her attraction to a black man on the other. Day after day (and especially when her husband falls ill with malaria), as her fascination with Moses grows, her attitude towards him grows more and more ambivalent: it is "one of a strong and irrational fear, a deep uneasiness, and even—though she did not know, would have died rather than acknowledge—of some dark attraction" (*GIS* 154). While at some point in the novel, she responds to his physical touch "with loathing […] as though she had been touched by excrement" (*GIS* 152), she gradually comes to realize the black man's humanity. Mary is "forced into contact" with Moses, and compelled to treat him "as a human being" because "it [is] impossible for her to thrust him out of her mind like something unclean" (*GIS* 156). She gradually loses dominance over him: "There was a new relation between them, for she felt helplessly in his power. […] She realized daily that there was something in it that was dangerous, but what it was she was unable to define" (*GIS* 179). The danger she feels is the danger of pent-up sexual urges she has denied all her life. She is now no longer able to keep them under control since she is obsessed by the black man. The ensuing inner dilemma and the guilt it breeds drive her to the brink of madness and to her tragic end.

After her moment of intimacy with her black houseboy, Moses, Mary is found dead. The houseboy is suspected of her murder and hanged. But the novelist has intentionally kept the details of the crime enigmatic: Standing in the midst of the bush, Mary knows that somewhere among the trees, Moses is waiting for her. She sees herself as "an angular, ugly, pitiful woman, with nothing left of […] life," desperately heading to the "the fatal night" (*GIS* 194). She walks straight into the bush "thinking: 'I will come across him and it will all be over'" (*GIS* 197). Mary's death seems to be her unique way out of her dilemma. She is unable to overcome the feelings of guilt that have arisen from her attempt to find her true sexual self. She ultimately finds ease in self-annihilation and death rather than self-affirmation: "She is unable to protect herself against pain and punishment because she has been taught that resistance is useless—to be a woman is to be powerless, at least in relation to a man."[84]

[84] Eva Hunter. "Marriage as Death. A Reading of Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*." *Women and Writing in South Africa*. Ed. Cherry Clayton. Marshaltown: Heineman Southern Africa, 1989. p. 148.

We can conclude that Mary's transgression is lethal because she ultimately fails to transcend her mental conditioning and overcome the overpowering racial ideology of Apartheid. She remains a prisoner of the colonial ruling power dictating that she, as a woman, must behave according to the terms imposed by her imperial identity. She inevitably pursues her path to death.

The colonial and racial gaze conditions Martha's and Mary's lives to a great extent. But while the latter is in the end defeated and thwarted by the racist colonial ideology of the white settlers and meets a tragic death, the former shows more signs of revolt, although she still oscillates between a normative representation of the self and a subversive desire for a self-created identity. Lessing thus reveals the protagonists' psychic dilemmas in the whirlwind of gender and race. In her portrayal of Southern Rhodesia's colonial society, she conveys the image of a society which perpetuates itself through its capacity to shape individuals' identities according to norms which constrict the development of their full human potential. Her female subjects seem to be ideologically conditioned and closer to determinism than free will. But how can we account for Lessing's deterministic vision in her first novels *Martha Quest*, *The Grass Is Singing* and *A Proper Marriage*?

- Doris Lessing: Marxism and communism

This deterministic vision of the dialectical relationship between the individual and society stems from Lessing's early Marxist sympathies, when she was involved in a Marxist group in Africa in 1949 (*SPV* 74). Marx's famous formula "*ce n'est pas la conscience des hommes qui détermine leur être, c'est inversement leur être social qui détermine leur conscience*"[85] reflects the power of the social gaze and social structures upon the individual's subjectivity and consciousness. This political conviction explains the deterministic outlook that characterizes Lessing's first works, *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, and *The Grass Is Singing*. In the latter novel, the novelist best portrays the dialectical relationship emphasized by Marxism between the individual circumstances of one's life and the material nature of one's social and economic system. In her essay "*The Grass Is Singing:* A Little Novel about the Emotions," Michele Wender Zak contends that *The Grass Is Singing* is one of the rare works of fiction which acknowledges the Marxist analysis of "life as not [being] determined

[85] Karl Marx. "Préface." *Contribution à la critique de l'économie politique*. Trans. M. Husson, and G. Badia. Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977. p. 3.

by consciousness, but consciousness by life."[86] The critic refers here to the rigid and hierarchical social structures which condition human consciousness and especially female subjectivity in colonial societies.

The novelist was greatly interested in left-wing intellectual debates. Between 1942 and 1949, she became active in a Marxist group close to the Communist party because "it was the only people [she]'d ever met who fought the color bar." She later said, "we really believed in ten years' time the world could be communist, which made us certifiable" (*GH* 231).
In *Going Home* (1957), Lessing explains that her involvement in communist groups in Africa was motivated by her aspiration for racial equality. She therefore became an active member of the National Executive of the Southern Rhodesian Labor Party. She was against white supremacy in both the labor movement and the social and political life of the country. Her adherence to communism also confirmed her humanistic approach: "It is a fight for basic human rights," (*GH* 103) she insisted. In *Going Home*, she added,

> Communism was a great marvelous vision which was much bigger than merely eliminating poverty and redistributing wealth and that sort of thing. It was a vision of a society where every individual was immensely important, where there was no emphasis on color, class or creed, there was no hurting each other. Every person had a chance and the right to develop himself. This was the dream, and it's why people are socialists, why I was. (110)

She would later realize however that the progressive "idealism" of the communist party was no more than a pragmatic white tactic to assuage the uprising anger of black activists. The communist group in which Lessing was involved unconsciously assumed that whites would maintain their standards of living and that blacks would gradually be integrated into the larger white society and politics. Disillusioned with the rift between the idealistic claims of communism and its practical realities, Lessing left the Labor Party and communism in 1956. This disengagement was later reflected in her writings, mainly *Landlocked* and *The Four-Gated City*. In *Going Home*, she writes

> I said as late as 1967 that I believed the communist countries were getting more democratic. […] How could I have conceivably believed such nonsense? How does it come about that people who are quite insightful and sensible about some aspects of politics are so silly about others? For it remains true that on the whole socialists and communists were more far-sighted about the nature of white rule than other

[86] Michele Wender Zak. "*The Grass Is Singing:* A Little Novel about the Emotions." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14, N. 4 (Autumn 1973). pp. 481-490.

> people, no matter how wrong they were about communism. […] Looking back, I say to myself that ideally I would like to have been a communist for let's say two years, because of what I learned about the nature of power, power lovers, fanatics, the dynamics of groups and how they form and split, about one's capacity for self-delusion. (253-254)

The determinism that colors Lessing's first novels is also reflected by matrilineal plots where the daughter repeats her mother's life. The figure of the mother is therefore another frightening mirror that accounts for Martha Quest's ambivalent positioning between conformity and subversion.

d. Matrophobia[87] or the frightening mirror

The mother is a looming figure in most of Lessing's fiction, a Woolfian[88] phantom haunting the daughter, who feels caged and imprisoned in her mother's traditional roles as parent and wife. The maternal figure is perceived by the daughter as an impediment in her quest for selfhood. In *Children of Violence*, the dynamics of the specular double that shapes the relationship between mother and daughter conveys the sense of entrapment and self-alienation that overwhelms the female protagonist, who ultimately believes that severance from the maternal dominance is the condition of her search for autonomy, freedom and full subjectivity. She will therefore enact various strategies of escape to evade becoming her mother's specular double. In Doris Lessing's first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, the main protagonist Mary Turner displays such a matrophobic attitude to her mother. For the two female protagonists Martha and Mary, the mother is an object of fear because she embodies simultaneously devourment and powerlessness. The daughters dread being metaphorically devoured or absorbed by the ruthless maternal figure. At the same time, they dread repeating a pattern of self-sacrifice and defeat related to the powerless mother.

The two female protagonists are determined not to become their mothers' double, but inevitably replicate their mothers' lives. The model of matrilineal repetition that characterizes the *Children of Violence* narrative signifies that the wholeness, unity and authenticity that Martha seeks in her quest for selfhood are hampered by the maternal mirror. In *The Golden Notebook*, written in 1962, the conflictual relationship between mothers and daughters is still not resolved. In her autobiographical essays and, most importantly, in the first part of her autobiography, *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949 (1994)*, Lessing confesses that she lived her life in a state of accusation against her mother, as well as in a prolonged and ambivalent desire for separation from and identification with maternal power. In *Under My Skin*, she recalls her fourteenth as "a break year, […] a swim year. She "was fighting for [her] life against [her] mother" (155). Her depiction of the mother-daughter relationship in her fiction dramatizes this conflictual relationship.

[87] The American critic Lynn Sukenick conceptualized "matrophobia" as the fear of becoming one's mother in her 1973's essay on Doris Lessing. "Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973, pp. 515-535.

[88] The reference here is to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Women's literature in the twentieth century often dramatizes matrophobia as the daughter's endeavor to forge a sense of self in opposition to her mother's negative image, that of a wife submissive to the institution of motherhood—an institution shaped and controlled by the larger patriarchal society. The daughters will try to resist the repressions and restrictions suffered by their mothers. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich defines matrophobia as "the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of becoming one's mother."[89] She adds that matrophobia

> can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mother's; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.[90]

Matrophobic plots convey the daughter's rage at her mother for offering her a stunted reflection of herself as a woman: "A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches for clues as to what it means to be a woman."[91] As in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle,* which follows the pattern of the hostile relationship between mother and daughter, Martha's matrophobic attitude towards Mrs. Quest in *Children of Violence* is reflected by her rejection of her mother's paradoxical conflictual image of omnipotence and submissiveness. In Lacanian terms,[92] this ambivalent aspect of the mother as both omnipotent and "lacking" is called the "phallic" mother, who coexists with the "castrated" mother.

---

[89] Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1986. p. 235.

[90] *Ibid,* p. 236.

[91] *Ibid*. p. 243.

[92] In studying the Oedipus complex, Jacques Lacan uses the term "castration" to refer to two different operations: On the one hand, at the beginning of the Oedipus complex, the mother is considered, by both sexes, as possessing the phallus. She is the phallic mother. The child then feels the threat of being devoured by this phallic mother. On the other hand, Lacan refers to the symbolic castration of the mother at the second stage of the Oedipus complex (*i.e.* the symbolic lack of an imaginary object): the child perceives that the mother desires an imaginary phallus; so, it tries to be the phallus for the mother, but the father intervenes to deprive the mother of her object by promulgating the incest taboo, and thus castrates the mother. (Evans Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.* London: Routledge, 1996. pp. 23-24).

d. 1. The complex nature of the ambivalent mother

- The omnipotent and devouring mother

Mrs. Quest stands for the threatening and tyrannical maternal figure. Throughout the series, she appears as an obstacle to the construction of her daughter's self-image and a menace to her emerging subjectivity. In her essay "Martha's 'Quest' in Lessing's *Children of* Violence," Ellen I. Rosen has characterized Mrs. Quest's portrait as "the Terrible Mother, the Victorian woman, […] the bourgeois matriarch."[93] The reader is first introduced to her through the eyes of her adolescent daughter, who only feels anger and resentment towards her. Martha criticizes her domineering mother for what Jacques Lacan describes as the "cannibalistic fantasies of devouring the daughter."[94] Lacan here draws upon Sigmund Freud, who remarks that the girl usually faces "the surprising, yet regular, fear of being killed (devoured) by the mother."[95] He writes in turn the Freudian argument that "there is no other real relation with the mother than that which all present psychoanalytical theory puts in relief, that is the relation of devouring."[96] This image of the mother as what Lacan repeatedly describes as an overpowering and devouring "crocodile" has been constant in his works: "[f]or psychoanalysis, a continued allegiance [of the daughter] to the mother appears as regressive and potentially lethal."[97] In her Freudian and Lacanian study of literary fiction, *The Mother/ Daughter Plot, Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, the feminist theorist Marianne Hirsch suggests that the mother is depicted in women writers' narratives as someone who is "overly invested in her child, powerless in the world, a constraining rather than an enabling force in the girl's development, and an inadequate and disappointing object of identification" (169). That is why the daughter equates the link to her mother with loss of selfhood and autonomy. In *Martha Quest*, Mary Quest embodies the devouring mother: She repeatedly

---

[93] Ellen I. Rosen. "Martha's 'Quest' in Lessing's *Children of Violence." Frontiers: Mothers and Daughters*, Summer 1978. p. 55.

[94] Evans Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.* London: Routledge, 1996. p. 120.

[95] Sigmund Freud. "Female Sexuality." *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud XXI*. London: Hogarth, 1961. p. 227.

[96] Jacques Lacan. *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*. *Livre IX*. *La relation d'objet*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Seuil, 1994. p. 280.

[97] Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. p. 168.

attempts to condition her daughter and mold her into a docile girl by controlling her body and dress.

- Controlling Martha's body and sexuality

In the first volume of the series, Mrs. Quest is the manipulative and overpowering mother who strives to constrict her daughter's body. She refuses to accept Martha's awakening to sexuality and often seeks to confine her to the identity of a sexless, childish self: she can only see her daughter "with a ribbon in her hair–an Alice in Wonderland child" (*MQ* 73). When she once enters Martha's room and finds her almost naked, "save for a tiny pair of pink drawers" (*MQ* 24), she is alarmed at the mature appearance of her daughter's breasts and hips, which she tries to deny when she "[lays] her hands at either girl's waist, as if trying to press her back into girlhood." (*MQ* 24)

Martha's mother denies the growing body of her adolescent daughter and her sexual development. The budding girl means that she is no longer an extension of herself, and that her body grows beyond control. In analyzing the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship, Nancy Chodorow argues in her classic work *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender,* that mothers experience stronger feelings of "oneness" and "continuity" with their infant daughters.[98] Their sense of continuity lasts longer with their female children than with their infant sons (109). In some cases, this pre-oedipal symbiosis is prolonged after the girl reaches adolescence, when mothers may consider their daughters as narcissistic extensions of themselves. This is what is suggested in *Children of Violence* when Mrs. Quest tries "to press [Martha] back into girlhood." She thus seeks to maintain the symbiotic relationship with her daughter.

Control over the daughter's body is also achieved through the type of dressing Mrs. Quest imposes on Martha: She usually forces her to wear "childish" clothes and sews for her "ugly, even obscene dresses" that turn out to be too tight for her breasts, which are "well grown, and the yokes emphasized them, showing flattened bulges under the tight band of material; and the straight falling line of the skirt was spoiled by her full hips" (*MQ* 23). As a traditional matron, May Quest yearns to model her daughter on the girls of England whom she thinks do not "come out until at the earliest sixteen, but better still eighteen" (*MQ* 23). Mrs.

[98] Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Quest is undoubtedly the representative of the conventional colonial society. Dress is for her a matter of "social convention" (*MQ* 23). Anthropologists hold that the dress code highlights the relationship between the body and social habits. It articulates the body and frames gender within a cultural context. To Wilson, clothing "satisfies a number of social, aesthetic and psychological functions; indeed, it knots them together, and can express all simultaneously."[99]

- The conventional and submissive mother

In *Children of Violence*, Mrs. Quest embodies conventional femininity and passive acceptance of patriarchal expectations. Martha regards her as an "immensely down-to-earth matron" (*PM* 110) and finds her "conventionality contemptible" (*MQ* 88). . Mrs. Quest has been molded by the Victorian ideology of the "domestic angel," which embodies cherished bourgeois values of ideal, "pure" femininity and devoted motherhood. Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House"[100] best epitomizes the Victorian ideal of feminine self-sacrifice, submissiveness and motherly devotion. The narrative voice comments that Martha's mother has "absorbed sufficient of the spirit of the times" (*MQ* 10). The mother also endorses the traditional patriarchal cultural preference for sons over daughters: "Thoughts of Martha always filled her with such violent and supplicating and angry emotions that she could not sustain them; she began to pray for Martha: *please let her be like her brother* [original italics]" (*MQ* 69).

Besides, Mrs. Quest personifies domestic confinement and the paralyzing force of the family in her passivity and limited potential. That is why she is associated with the androgynous witch figure, the mythical Hypnos and Thanatos,'[101] the archetypal incarnations of eternity. In Greek mythology, they are respectively the twin Gods of Sleep and Death. Hypnos (Latin *Somnus*), who is the Greco-Roman god of Sleep, was the son of Nyx (Night) and the twin brother of Thanatos (Death). He is variously described as living in the underworld or on the island of Lemnos (according to Homer) or (according to Book XI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) in a dark, musty cave in the land of the Cimmerians, through which

---

[99] Elizabeth Wilson. *Adorned in Dreams, Fashion and Modernity*. New York: IB. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2005. p. 3.

[100] Coventry Patmore. "The Angel in the House." *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*. Ed. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle. Peterborough: Broadview, 1999. pp.743-44.

[101] http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/279818/Hypnos.

flowed the waters of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness and oblivion. This is what Martha discovers in one of her nightmares when she sees Mrs. Quest as "the eternal mother, holding sleep and death in her twin hands like a sweet and poisonous cloud of forgetfulness" (*MQ* 32). Martha's mother, May Quest, does not give life, but "sleep and death". This is taken up later when the narrative voice comments: "Sleep, sleep, the house was saturated by it; and Mrs. Quest's voice murmured like the spells of a witch, 'You must be tired darling" (*MQ* 31). Like Hypnos, Mrs. Quest embodies death, numbness and stasis, overwhelming the African mud house: "What was most frightening [to Martha] was this feeling of being dragged, being weighed. She did not understand why she was acting against her will, her intellect, everything she believed. It was as if her body and brain were numbed" (*MQ* 31). Anne Laure Brevet makes a similar remark in her essay "Figures de la discontinuité subjective dans *A Proper Marriage* de Doris Lessing" where she associates the imagery of Martha's mother with the paintings of the Austrian symbolist painter Gustav Klimt, where the maternal figure is allegorized as death.[102]

- Mrs. Quest as a mother: a negative model of self-abnegation

The model of motherhood epitomized by Mrs. Quest is equated with self-abnegation and self-effacement. To her, the mother "must sacrifice herself to her children as she has done" (*PM* 145). This negative image of motherhood, transmitted from the mother to the daughter, is a prevalent image in women's literature in the nineteenth and twentieth-century:

> But the feminine ideal in relation to motherhood has remained curiously static [...] the representation of ideal motherhood is still almost exclusively made up of self-abnegation, unstinting love, intuitive knowledge of nurturance and unalloyed pleasure in children.[103]

In the same way, the feminist American critic Elaine Showalter has studied the situation of mothers and pointed out that "children are the compensation for feminine surrender" and "childbirth is not a victory; it is an acceptance of the compensations of giving

[102] "On trouve dans l'excessive incarnation des tableaux de Gustav Klimt de ces allégories ambivalentes de la maternité et de la mort surchargées de détails visuels, enchâssant les sujets dans des ornements multicolores à la manière d'émaux, où les corps féminins et gravides s'empilent dans des attitudes d'abandon évoquant à la fois […] le sommeil et la mort (en particulier dans un tableau paradoxalement nommé *L'espoir* et *la frise Beethoven*)." Anne-Laure Brevet. « Figures de la discontinuité subjective dans *A Proper Marriage* de Doris Lessing ». *Les Cahiers du CEIMA 1*. p. 56.

[103] Rozsika Parker. *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence*. London: Routledge, 1995. pp. 21-22.

in and giving up."[104] This is exemplified by Mrs. Quest, whose life has been a "complicated system of self-denials" (*PM* 286). It is evidenced by her renunciation of sugar. This is why after her marriage, Martha assumes that "giving up sugar [is] in some way connected with her mother" (*PM* 286). This image of motherhood as self-effacement is illustrated by the Greek mythology of the Pelican mother who rips her own breast open to feed her young ones with her blood. The mother's body is offered as a sacrifice for her children's lives.

- Martha's strategies of escape from the threatening maternal figure

Terrified that she will one day be a replica of her gendered mother, Martha rebels against the maternal figure and makes "resolutions day after day that from now on she [will] be quite different." She takes "the slightest remark" from her mother, "examine[s] it, and hand[s] it back, like a challenge" (*MQ* 112). She adopts different strategies in order to escape from the maternal threat.

–The battle over dress

In *Martha Quest*, the heroine's struggle to evade her mother's specular double crystallizes in her strong determination to control her body and self-image against Mrs. Quest's intrusive effort to mold it in accordance with English values and conventions. As long as femininity is culturally constructed around the female body and its beauty, the daughter will use it as an instrument of protest and revolt against the mother over the issue of female identity. This is why the subject of clothes and outward feminine appearance becomes a battlefield between the daughter and her mother. This is demonstrated when Martha cuts up the childish dresses which conceal her burgeoning sexuality. Her "underground rebellion" bursts to the surface when she stands before the mirror, taking "a pair of scissors and sever[ing] the bodice from the skirt of her dress" (*MQ* 23). This act of protest irritates Mrs. Quest, who has the following conversation with her daughter:

> 'I'm not wearing this kind of dress anymore,' said Martha, trying to sound calm, but succeeding only in her usual sullen defiance. […].
> 'My dear, nice girls don't wear clothes like this until–'

[104] Elaine Showalter. *A Literature of their Own- British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. New Jersey: Virago, 1977. pp. 305-306.

‘I’m not a nice girl,’ broke in Martha, and suddenly burst into laughter. (*MQ* 24)

Demystifying the cultural construction of what Mrs. Quest calls “nice” and “bad” behavior in relation to clothing and dressing, Doris Lessing points to the daughter’s refusal to align herself with the gendered mother. Clothes in this sense are the cultural signs by which gendered identity is produced and maintained. They set the female protagonist’s identity in a differential paradigm as either “nice” or “bad”. But Martha Quest refuses to follow the path of the normative femininity sanctioned by the type of dress recommended by her mother. The “battle for clothes […] raged for months, until poor Mr. Quest groaned and went out of the room whenever the subject was raised, since it had become a focus for the silent struggle between the women, which had nothing to do with clothes, or […] ‘niceness’” (*MQ* 26).

In another attempt to release herself from the inhibiting maternal bond, Martha further decides to sew her own dress for the evening dance with Billy Van Rensberg, refusing the “pink-filled georgette” (*MQ* 73) her mother has chosen for her. She spends the whole night before the dance working zealously on her white dress. After finishing it, she feels “triumphant and that triumph was directed against her mother, as if she said, you cant’t do anything about it now, can you?” (*MQ* 80). Symbolically, Martha seeks to “sew” a different identity, as a strategy of liberation from her authoritarian mother. Ironically, however, she reproduces the same pattern her mother had previously fashioned for her: Just like the “pink” color, the “white” color of Martha’s dress is symbolic of purity, virginity, innocence and the early stage of girlhood she most yearns to escape. She thus shuns one stereotype to endorse another, a sign of her difficulty in getting free from her mother’s dominance.

–Reading

Besides endeavoring to discard these gender-marked clothes, Martha Quest turns to reading subversive books in an effort to emancipate herself from the cultural models in which she feels entrapped. We see her continually striving to build “intellectual bastions of defense […]” (*PM* 109) mainly through reading. She in particular chooses to read Havelock Ellison’s book on sex only to annoy Mrs. Quest, even though “this collection of interesting facts seemed to have so little to do with her own problems” (*MQ* 9). She uses the book as a weapon or “a means of asserting herself” (*MQ* 10). She thus deliberately opposes her mother, who angrily tells her that “Epstein and Havelock Ellis [are] disgusting” (*MQ* 10) and shocking.

Mrs. Quest, who has conventionally been formed to observe the rigid moral code of Victorian England, thinks these books are inadequate for a sixteen-year old girl. In the same way, Martha reads a book entitled *The Decay of the British Empire* as a gesture of defiance towards her mother's English snobbishness. Yet, although she uses books "as a means of asserting herself" against her mother, she sometimes finds that "this weapon [has] gone limp and useless in her hands" (*MQ* 10). This is why Martha finally looks for another strategy in order to defeat her controlling mother.

–The masculine alternative

While the mother's subjectivity is entangled in discourses encumbered with censorship and prohibitions, Martha "range[s] herself with the men" and with "the rights of the intellect" (*MQ* 158). She also attends meetings of intellectual socialist men, refusing to be a mere extension of her conventional and domestic mother. She thus thinks that she may find an ally with her father. After each quarrel with her mother, she turns to him, convinced that he might "support her against the forces of tyranny" (*PM* 145). To Adrienne Rich, matrophobia can be seen as "a womanly splitting of the self" between the rejected feminine culture of domesticity and male-centeredness on the one hand, and the desire for a masculine way of being in the world—"a vigorous work life—"[105]on the other. In order to avoid becoming like her mother, Martha Quest, Rich suggests, "splits herself in a double gender identification."[106] Yet, this double gendered self is not really possible either psychically or socially: Alfred Quest is present but simultaneously absent. He is a sickly man referred to as a "ghost" or "spectre" (*MQ* 69). He usually uses his illness as an excuse to avoid his daughter's needs. Lessing's narrative describes him entering his bedroom where his adolescent daughter stands, almost naked, admiring herself before the mirror. Refusing to acknowledge her sexuality, he turns to his medicine bottles. In another incident when Martha, dressed in the white dress she has sewn, seeks confirmation of her womanhood, she finds no response from her father:

> "Do I look nice, Daddy?" she asked again. He gave a queer irritable hunch to his shoulders as if he disliked a pressure or distrusted himself. "Very nice," he said slowly. And then suddenly in an exasperated shout. "Too damned nice, go away."

[105] Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1986. pp. 236-247.

[106] *Ibid*. p. 236.

(*MQ* 80)

Mr. Quest's personality is strongly shaped by his experiences in World War I. He served as a soldier in the battlefields and was injured. After this experience, he becomes more and more introverted and does not have a very active role in the family. He suffers from diabetes and is "completely absorbed in being ill, he talked of nothing else—his illness and the war, the war and illness" (*MQ* 24). Because of his war experience, he has adopted a passive attitude and developed a taste for suffering. In his role as a victim, he cannot be the savior that Martha seeks. He is always tired of the antagonistic home atmosphere and its two fighting women: '"I simply cannot stand this damned fight, fight, fight,'" he exclaims when both of them plead to him for help (*MQ*, 71). Martha is disappointed with her father, who fails to support her in her conflicts with her mother and therefore cannot lean upon him. After failing to find proper support from her father against the stifling mother, Martha will as a consequence seek another man.

–The alternative of marriage and its failure

Martha opts for marriage as another strategy of escape from her mother's overbearing presence. By the end of *Martha Quest*, she decides to marry Douglas Knowell. Ellen I. Rosen suggests that Martha "searches for a man who can fill the empty space left in her psyche by the Terrible Mother who has failed to love her."[107] That is why she rushes for a man with whom she might find the love and nurture denied by her mother. Douglas Knowell, whom she met one night at the Sports Club, first appears to her as a "cheerful, grinning" (*MQ* 236) civil servant. Her hasty decision to marry him is caused by her relentless desire to flee the mother. As Elizabeth Maslen puts it, "Martha's adolescence and marriage are a continual battle against her mother's […] crude invasion of her private life."[108] As a matter of fact, she

> did not want to marry Douglas, she did not want to marry at all. With a cold disparaging eye, she looked at the image of Douglas and shuddered. She told herself that she would ring him from the office to tell him they had both made a terrible mistake [but] calm descended on her. (*MQ* 246)

[107] Ellen I. Rosen. "Martha's 'Quest' in Lessing's *Children of Violence." Frontiers: Mothers and Daughters*. Summer 1978. p. 57.

[108] Elizabeth Maslen. *Doris Lessing*. United Kingdom: Northcote House, 1994. p. 10.

Having finally married with the sole expectation that marriage will be "a door […] closing on her past" (*MQ* 241), Martha finds, however, that marriage only entrenches her more firmly in the social role enacted by her mother. Rather than providing access to "something new and rare" (*MQ* 216), it locks her in "interconnected social circles" (*PM* 49) and meaningless social activities. Martha's marital status confines her to a commonplace existence: She is "now married, signed and sealed away from what she was convinced she was" (*PM* 14). She is sucked into the conventional cycle of matrimony, with her potential savior Douglas turning rapidly into a tyrant. She realizes that "until two weeks [earlier], her body had been free and her own […] and now this precious intimacy, this independence, so lately won from her mother's furtive questioning, was being threatened by an impertinent stranger" (*PM* 110). Like her mother, Douglas represents conventionality and the "voice of authority" (*PM* 107) that Martha loathes most: He relies upon "common sense" (*PM* 74) and official discourse. His nickname "Know-all" (*MQ* 245) derides a knowledge that relies on his deference to social mores and habits. Douglas agrees with Mrs. Quest on many issues such as the illegality of abortion, which Martha views as an "insult to personal liberty" (*PM* 106). Martha also abhors his "lapse back into that anonymous voice of authority whenever [his] own personal authority was threatened, saying things of a banality and a pomposity infinitely removed from [his] level of thinking" (*PM* 107). As Lorna Sage points out, Martha was self-deceived when she fancied Douglas would be the ideal soul-mate for marriage. In reality, their view of life and dreams do not coincide.[109] The heroine feels gradually that marriage has not lived up to her expectations.

Although, deep inside, she knows that she should not marry Douglas, Martha feels that "she could not help it; she was being dragged towards it, whether she liked it or not" (*MQ* 243). The heroine's convictions and actions are strikingly discordant: while she intends to avoid a conventional or "proper" marriage, she nonetheless decides to get married to Douglas. By acting the way she does, she comes closer to her mother and the general attitudes of her society. One part of herself seeks the release from the mother's world whereas the other complies:

> She immediately began chiding herself for her utter dishonesty. The instinct to comply, to please, seemed to her more and more unpleasant and false. Yet, she had to reassure Douglas and kiss him before he left if she was not to feel guilty and lacking as a woman. (*PM* 292)

[109] Lorna Sage. *Contemporary Writers, Doris Lessing*. London: Methuen, 1983. p. 33.

Marriage does not sustain Martha in her quest for selfhood. It locks her even more to her mother's conventional life. She will therefore seek another alternative.

–The attempt at abortion and its failure

After her disappointment with her marriage, Martha grows more determined to reject maternity: "The maternal force, that enemy, would not be allowed to enter the picture" (*PM* 127). Motherhood is to her such a "dark blind sea" (*PM* 145) that it obstructs light and illumination. That is why she must "keep brightly burning that lamp above the dark blind sea which [is] motherhood. She [will] not allow herself to be submerged" (*PM* 145). In *A Proper Marriage*, the appearance of the "native woman" with her three small children elicits Martha's fear of falling into the cycle of childbearing. This woman "sum[s] up her uncomfortable thoughts and present[s] the problem in its crudest form" (26). Holding a small baby by one hand and "a slightly larger one by the other and […] a new baby folded in a loop of cloth on her back" (*PM* 26), the black woman embodies the instinctual feminine self that Martha loathes. "Loyalty to progress" (*PM* 75) forbids any compliance with it. In the same way, when she first discovers that her friend Alice is pregnant, Martha feels "caged, for [her]. She could feel the bonds around herself. She consciously shook them off and exulted in the thought that she was free" (*PM* 105).

In order to ward off the possibility of pregnancy, Martha regularly visits her physician Dr. Stern for advice about birth control. As she refuses maternity, he advises contraceptive methods. But she gets pregnant and vainly attempts to get rid of the fetus: "She drank glass after glass of neat gin, until a full bottle was gone. […] She filled the bath with water so hot that she could not put her hand into it, and, setting her teeth, got in" (*PM* 115). Yet, this attempt at abortion is doomed to failure, as she is finally informed by Dr. Stern that she is four-months pregnant. Struck by this announcement, Martha "look[s] at the grave responsible face, and hate[s] him bitterly from the bottom of her heart" (*PM* 116). For Martha, Dr. Stern is but a representative of the social and medical authority which she deems binding and contravening. Like her husband or her mother, he seeks to align her with conventional married women, and is therefore part of the conspiratorial forces that bind her to the pattern of repetition and sameness personified by her mother. This is why in *A Proper Marriage*, Martha is "filled with a strong and seething rage against her mother, her husband, Dr. Stern, who

[have] all joined the conspiracy against her" (118). She nevertheless finally relinquishes the idea of abortion and finds herself "excited at the idea of having a baby" (*PM* 118).

- The circular pattern or the "nightmare repetition" associated with the mother

Martha's attempts at escape from the maternal figure are thwarted by a circular pattern of seeming fatality linked to the mother. In their respective essays "Re-reading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition,"[110] and "The Nightmare Repetition: the Mother-Daughter Conflict in Doris Lessing's *Children Of Violence,*"[111] Claire Sprague and Catherine Fishburn have argued that Lessing has entrapped her heroine in a matrilineal narrative of doubling and that after her marriage, Martha falls into the grip of "the great bourgeois monster, the nightmare repetition" (*PM* 104) related to her mother. The protagonist of the series seems to be doomed to the fate that was spun for her by her mother. This circular pattern of matrilineal repetition testifies to Martha's inability to transcend the cultural clichés of her society at this point in the series.

Indeed, right after her marriage with Douglas, Martha receives a letter from Mrs. Quest stating that she is going to sell the farm and join her in town. At that moment, she bitterly realizes that there is no escape from her intrusive mother and that sooner or later, she is bound to become her double:

> For if she remained in the colony when she had wanted to leave it, got married when she wanted to be free and adventurous, always did the contrary to what she wanted most, there followed that there was no reason why at fifty she should not be just such another woman as Mrs. Quest, narrow, conventional, intolerant, insensitive. […]. She had no words to express this sense of appalling fatality which menaced everyone, her mother as well as herself. (*PM* 42)

Besides, the inertia and numbness characteristic of the African mud house and associated with the mother still hang over Martha's household in the second book of the

[110] Claire Sprague. "Re-reading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition." *Chapel Hill*, 1987. xi, pp. 210.

[111] Catherine Fishburn. "The Nightmare Repetition: the Mother-Daughter Conflict in Doris Lessing's *Children Of Violence.*" *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. Eds. Cathy Davidson and E. M. Broner, New York: Unger, 1980. pp. 207-216.

series, *A Proper Marriage*: She "was gripped by a lethargy so profound that in fact she spent most of her time limp on that divan, thinking about nothing. She felt heavy and uncomfortable and sick" (*PM* 113). In this mortal-like state, she is overwhelmed by an "appalling feeling of flatness, staleness and futility" (*PM* 43), a consequence of the "nightmare repetition" (*PM* 90-104) that she puts down to her mother. This sense of fatality impedes her progress and paralyses her actions:

> She could take no step, perform no action, no matter how apparently new and unforeseen, without the secret fear that in fact this new and arbitrary thing would turn out to be part of the inevitable process she was doomed to. (*PM 1*04)

In his essay "Working It Out, Working It Through,"[112] Gayle Green associates the "nightmare repetition" or the "great bourgeois monster" with a nightmare that Martha has in Book III of *Children of Violence, A Ripple from the Storm*, in which she sees a monstrous reptile embedded in a bedrock, ancient and extinct but still powerful and alive—"alive after so many centuries" (*RS* 85). The nightmare seems to obliterate all possibility of change, for what appears to be new only turns out to be "part of the inevitable process she was doomed to" (*PM* 104).

In the marital flat which Martha feels is like "a suffocating prison" (*PM* 105), the married woman is haunted by a vision of "an unalterable sequence of events" extending back to the past and forward to the future. These thoughts compound her fear of becoming her mother, of sharing the same fate:

> She was looking at Mrs. Quest in a deep abstract speculation as if neither she nor her mother had any validity as persons, but were mere pawns in the hands of an old fatality. She could see a sequence of events, unalterable, behind her, and stretching unalterably into the future. She saw her mother, a prim-faced school-girl, confronting the Victorian father, the patriarchal father, with rebellion. She saw herself sitting where her mother sat, a woman horribly metamorphosed, entirely dependent on her children for any interest in life, resented by them, and resenting them. (*PM* 109)

Mrs. Quest is associated with "the web of fatality" (*PM* 109), or the oppressive weight of history, and those "individuals, carrying their doom inside them, like the seeds of fatal disease" (*PM* 109). The recurrence of the word "fated" in expressions like "old fatality," "fatal

[112] Gayle Green. "Working It Out, Working It Through." *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change.* USA: University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 45.

disease," "fated road" and "web of fatality" emphasizes the burden of determinism weighing upon the young woman. The narrative voice explains it in biological terms:

> The birth itself sat Martha on a fated road. It was during the long night of terror, the night of the difficult birth, when the womb of Mrs. Quest convulsed and fought to expel its burden through the unwilling gates of bone; it was during that birth that […] her character and therefore her life were determined for her. (*MQ* 15)

But the reason is more importantly psychological and historical since the narrative events take place during the bleak atmosphere of the second World-War, which generates a sense of general fatality and impending downfall. In this context, Martha's attempts at escape are almost ironical, as if "nothing could alter the pattern" (*PM* 109). The same process that transformed her mother from a spirited young woman into a representative of the social conventions Martha most loathes threatens to transform her into a representative of these same conventions.

The repetitive circular pattern that characterizes the mother/daughter relationship is best symbolized by the "great wheel" or the Ferris wheel spinning outside Martha's apartment. It is emblematic of the deadening monotony of "that flickering cycle" (*PM* 113) and of the vicious circularities in which Martha is caught. The wheel, "glittering with the white lights, […] like a damned wedding ring" (*PM* 37) turning slowly and forming at each passage the luminous picture of a perpetual movement, becomes an obsessive symbol of the cycle of nature encoded in the female body and in the social pressures that drove Martha to marry someone she knows was wrong for her in the first place:

> She found herself waking from sleep and crying, but what she was weeping for she had no idea at all. She drew the curtains so that she might not see the great wheel, and then lay watching the circling of light through their thin stuff. […] The persistent monotony of that flickering cycle seemed a revelation of an appalling and intimate truth; it was like being hypnotized. (*PM* 113)

In his book *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change*, Gayle Green has associated the Ferris wheel with a cluster of images relating to circles and cycles—"cycles of guilt and defiance" (*PM* 201), "the cycle of procreation" (*PM* 152), "the cycle of birth" (*PM* 251), the circles of friends and women (*PM* 36, 249, 255, 272)—which work together with the imagery of nets, webs, cages, bonds, traps (*PM* 28, 81, 91, 95, 99,137, 201, 202, 250, 266, 337) to

suggest a "sense of appalling fatality" (*PM* 34).[113] The circling of the great wheel that Martha hypnotically follows with her eyes not only reminds her of the image of "a damned wedding ring" but also of the nightmarish repetition of the cycles of life that haunt her. While she seeks renewal and change, she seems all the more entangled in circular repetition:

> Several times she had half roused, with the urgent knowledge that she ought to be attending to something; and this anxiety seemed to be of the same quality as that suggested by the great dragging circle of lights, which continued to flicker through her sleep like a warning. (*PM* 38)

This circularity metaphorizes the sense of determinism that marks the narrative.

- Matrilineal repetition: Martha as mother

Although she was, at the beginning of her marriage, determined to "cut the cycle" (*PM* 109) of matrilineal repetition by not having a baby, Martha ends up being pregnant. She thus seems to be condemned to follow the same pattern of matrilineal repetition. After this unwanted pregnancy, she loses control over her life, body and individuality. She realizes that before giving birth to her daughter Caroline, she "was as free as air" (*PM* 228), but now she "is sitting to a small room bound for twenty four hours of the day […] to a small child" (*PM* 228). After her delivery, Martha thinks that she will "certainly grow up to be like these women about her, a dull housewife with no purpose in life but to continue the cycle of procreation" (*PM* 172). She feels that the mothering role is like a prison where the child makes demands and the mother obeys: "Being a mother, or rather, the business of looking after a child, as distinct from carrying and giving birth to one, was not a fulfillment but a drag on herself" (*PM* 279).

After giving birth to Caroline, Martha's relation with her newly born daughter is a reflection of her own relation with her mother Mrs. Quest. The starvation experienced by Martha as a baby is once again experienced by her baby daughter Caroline who weighs "half an ounce of flesh, less than was proper" (*PM* 177). "Mrs. Quest looked at Caroline with an odd little smile, and then remarked with the bright guilty laugh in which was the note of triumph that always stung Martha, 'I suppose you've been starving her as I starved you' (*MQ*

[113] Gayle Green. *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change,* USA: University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 44.

178). Martha's mother recalls that she did not produce enough breast milk for her daughter as a baby and was tormented by her constant crying (*PM* 97).

The persistent starvation that Martha imposes on her baby daughter is a symptom of emotional deprivation, which is an exact replication of her own relationship with her mother. This matrilineal repetition is explained by Ellen I. Rosen in her essay "Martha's 'Quest' in Lessing's *Children of Violence"* in *Frontiers: Mothers and Daughters*, in which she writes that "Martha's unconscious need for the nurturing mother she never had propels her towards the consummation of her "doom," "the nightmare of repetition" in marriage and motherhood, a destiny from which she also longs to escape" (55).

Within the Freudian perspective, the lack of the mother as the primary caregiver of the infant's needs at the pre-oedipal stage makes Martha look for an alternative maternal love as embodied by her thirst for the motherland. In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow argues that the girl's pre-oedipal attachment to her mother, an attachment more intimate and prolonged than the boy's, is crucial in determining her sense of identity and her experience of the oedipal phase, which like the pre-oedipal one is not equivalent for girls and boys. While the boy finally represses his sexual feelings for her mother because he fears paternal anger and desires the benefits of masculine identification, the girl does not abandon her attachment to her mother, but rather adds her libidinal attachment to her father in a more complex triadic relationship. The differing relational experiences with the mother, Chodorow concludes, account for fundamental differences in masculine and feminine personality:

> Feminine personality comes to be based less on repression of inner objects and fixed splits in the ego, and more on retention and continuity of external relationships. From the retention of pre-oedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world; the basic masculine sense of self is separate.[114]

Martha's strenuous relationship with her mother during the pre-oedipal stage may explain her aversion for her during her childhood. Because Martha was denied love in the pre-oedipal phase, she cannot give it to her own daughter. This matrilineal repetition mocks the

[114] Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. p. 169.

individual longing for change, free will and evolution. That is why Martha finally opts for a radical alternative and decides to divorce Douglas and abandon her daughter Caroline in order to "set her self free." After the divorce, Caroline is mothered by a conventional woman, Elaine, whom Douglas marries after his break-up with Martha. Once again the daughter is trapped in "the grip of the great bourgeois monster" of eternal repetition or what Freud called "repetition compulsion."

Martha's failure to achieve her desire for independence reveals that her struggle with her mother is not external but rather internal, manifest in the conflict between her conscious desire to reject her mother's mode of being and her unconscious compulsion to identify with her. Rich argues that "where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely."[115] In spite of her determination not to be like her mother, the adult Martha ends up functioning as the latter's double, as evidenced by the recognition of her mother's shadow in her own specular image in the fourth book of *Children of Violence, Landlocked*:

> Martha stood in front of a mirror and lifted brown arms to her hair, then held them there, looking with a smile at the small perfect crease in her shoulder. The smile, however, was dry, she wiped it off her face. It was there too often, and too often did she have to push it away, and make harmless the attitude of mind it came from. She had to survive, she knew that, this phase of her life was sticking it out, waiting, keeping herself ready for when "life" would begin. But that smile … there was a grimness in it that reminded her of the set of her mother's face when she sat sewing, or was unaware she was being observed […]. (19)

Frozen in the mirror of resemblance, Martha sees in her own specular reflection the petrifying image of her mother while "sewing," an archetypal image of domesticity that is most threatening to her. She is astonished at the "grimness" in her smile which reminds her of "the set of her mother's face when she [sits] sewing [...]." The "sewing" metaphor points to her mother's life, reduced to the unquestioning repetitive activity of a spinning insect. This mechanical, lifeless existence into which Mrs. Quest's nature has shrunk constantly presses against her daughter's effort at escape and freedom. The protagonist's relation with her mother is summarized in the title and the central metaphor of being "landlocked." While waiting for her ultimate move to England, Martha is still locked in Mrs. Quest's spectre. That

[115] Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1986. p. 235.

is the reason why she unconsciously flees her biological mother, heading to the other mother country materialized by her utopian imaginary England.

d. 2. The issue of motherhood in *The Grass Is Singing*

In *The Grass Is Singing*, Mary Turner displays the same revulsion towards the maternal body and finds the prospect of motherhood loathsome. Her disgust at seeing African babies' breast-feeding is but an example of her aversion to motherhood. Mary Turner projects her repugnance on the native women who are

> [suckling] their babies with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. 'Their babies hanging on them like leeches,' she said to herself shuddering; for she thought with horror of suckling a child. The idea of a child's lips on her breasts made her feel quite sick; at the thought of it, she would involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them from a violation. (94)

In her essay, "Horrors of the Breast: Cultural Boundaries and the Abject in *The Grass Is Singing*,"[116] Edith Frampton has studied this scene of breastfeeding in the light of the notion of the abject developed by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*[117] in relation to the maternal. She identifies the source of abjection in the disgust felt at the sight of the glutinous film that is formed on the top of a cow's milk when heated. This revulsion typical of abjection characterizes Mary's conception of motherhood. Kristeva argues that all individuals experience abjection at the time of their earliest attempts to break away from the mother, prior to their entrance into the symbolic order. She sees the mother–child relation as one marked by conflict: the child struggles to break free but the mother is reluctant to release it. The disgust or sense of abjection experienced by Mary focuses essentially on the biological functions related to the maternal body: when she thinks of children, "she [sees] her mother's face at her children's funeral—anguished […], she shudder[s] at the thought of having any of her own" (*GIS* 39).

[116] Edith Frampton. "Horrors of the Breast: Cultural Boundaries and the Abject in *The Grass Is Singing*." *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings.* Eds. Susan Watkins and Alice Ridout. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009. pp. 15-25.

[117] Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

d. 3. Becoming her own mother: Mary Turner in *The Grass Is Singing*

The complex circular pattern of daughters fighting mothers and then becoming these mothers characterizes *Children of Violence* as well as *The Grass Is Singing*, in which Mary Turner seeks to flee her mother's life but cannot help duplicating it. Although Mary's defeated mother died when the girl was twenty-year old, her ghost keeps haunting the daughter even after her marriage with Dick Turner: "With the memory of her own mother recurring more and more frequently, like an older sardonic double of herself walking beside her, [she] followed the course her upbringing made inevitable" (*GIS* 90). In one of her quarrels with her husband Dick, Mary speaks

> in a new voice she had never used before in her life. It was taken direct from her mother, when she had had those scenes over money with her father. It was not the voice of Mary, the individual, but the voice of the suffering female, who wants to show her husband she just could not be treated like that. In a moment she would begin to cry, as her mother had cried on these occasions, in a kind of dignified, martyred rage. (*GIS* 79)

After a disillusioned marriage, Mary Turner becomes psychologically fragile, realizing that she is living the same shabby life as her "bitter" (*GIS* 34) mother. Her daily life with Dick Turner, marked by dullness and misery, recalls the figure of her mother as the submissive victim of poverty. She stands helpless at the inevitability of that pattern, sitting not with her husband, but "back with her mother, watching her endlessly contrive and patch and mend" (*GIS* 54).

Matrilineal repetition is also visible in *A Proper Marriage*, when the narrative voice observes that "from her white and feminine body, she, Martha, had emerged—that was certainly a fact! […]. Those hands had tended her, the baby" (111). But as a married woman, Martha has become less accusative of her mother and can only feel a "gulf of pity" for her (*PM* 111). She understands that, throughout her life, Mrs. Quest has been a victim of the patriarchal Victorian[118] society Martha remembers her mother's "disappointing life" (*PM* 288). She says to herself that "while she, Martha, was of a generation dedicated above all to self-knowledge, Mrs. Quest knew no such obligations. She was appalled at her own cruelty"

[118] Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

(*PM* 288). The desire to be released from the mother's bondage, to become individuated and free is seemingly difficult to satisfy.

d. 5. The mother/daughter relationship in *The Golden Notebook*

The mother/daughter relationship in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is as complex as in Lessing's *Children of Violence.* As Marianne Hirsch's seminal study *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989) demonstrates, the literary representation of mothers is complex and fraught with contradictions. Hirsch stresses that mother-daughter relations are particularly ambivalent, as daughters (and writers) negotiate their way through "the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation"[119] in their relationships with their mothers in their quest for selfhood.

The female protagonist of *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf, purports to be "a free woman"—free of marriage and conventional moral systems. She is engaged in the political and creative process: she is a communist activist and a writer who lives in her flat with her friend Molly, who has been playing the role of a surrogate mother after the death of Anna's biological mother. Because Molly is "altogether more widely wise than Anna" (*GN* 26), older and bigger, she feels an obligation to take care of Anna, who is shy and unassertive. Anna retains from her mother "the image of somebody strong and dominating, whom [she] had to fight" (*GN* 42). She has as a consequence developed a matrophobic attitude. The conflict between mothers and daughters first appears when Anna resists Molly's dominance over her. From the beginning of their friendship Molly, who is "abrupt, straightforward, tactless", has "frankly domineered Anna" (*GN* 31). In fact, Molly acts as a surrogate mother, incessantly blaming her for her slackness in her writing career, just like a mother who imposes certain rules on her daughter. The narrative voice comments that "for a moment, Molly even looked like her conventional psychiatrist Mother Sugar—the pet name for much more than a person, and indicated a whole way of looking at life—traditional, rooted, conservative" (*GN* 26). Anna feels like a daughter who must resist the overpowering mother (Molly). When the latter informs Anna that she should continue writing because she has only one talent, Anna tries to talk back but she cannot. The first thought that crosses her mind is: "I am not an extension of you" (*GN* 60), which she quickly realizes is something she would say to her mother if she

[119] Marianne Hirsch. *The Mother/Daughter Plot, Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. USA: Midland Book, 1989. p. 20.

were with her. Being the daughter of an overpowering mother, Anna has to fight back this strong motherly figure if she does not want to lose her self-image or to become an extension of her mother.

- Anna Wulf and her daughter

In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing depicts the woman artist's dilemma between her personal individualized sense of identity and her biologically conditioned role as a mother. Like Martha Quest, Anna Wulf struggles between her need for freedom and the restrictions of motherhood. For Anna, "having a child means being conscious of the clock, never being free of something that has to be done at a certain moment ahead. An Anna [was] coming to life that died when Janet was born" (*GN* 531). As a single mother, she feels compelled to play the role of a strong woman in order to protect her daughter but simultaneously "resents her existence violently" (*GN* 202). She also attempts to fend off the chaos in her life and to resist her increasing depression and impending mental breakdown so that she can be a good mother. But she gradually becomes overprotective.

As a result, her daughter Janet accuses her of "putting too much on her" (*GN* 617). Like Martha Quest, she is frightened that her identity will be devoured by her mother. But unlike the two heroines Mary and Martha, who recoil from their mothers because of the latter's conformity, Janet rejects Anna because of her non-conformist, chaotic life. The girl discards her mother's world, which she deems to be a "world of disorder, experiment, where people love […] from day to day, like balls perpetually jigging on the top of jets of prancing water; keeping themselves open for any new feeling or adventure." The result is that she "decide[s] it was not for her" (*GN* 621). Janet, described by her mother as "the most conventional child imaginable" (*GN* 526) opts for a socially accepted and constrained style of living, rather than the one on which she has been raised by Anna—the free woman who rejects social norms.

This rupture with the mother is explained by Chodorow, who contends that the girl establishes her identity by negative identification ("I am what she is not").[120] These features of negative identification are also clearly present in Martha's concept of self in relation to her mother.

[120] Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. p. 137.

Janet's denial of her mother manifests itself in her determination to attend a boarding school instead of the progressive school that Anna chose for her. Indeed, the girl "wants to go to boarding school […], trying her wings as a woman." She yearns to "be ordinary and normal" and "go out of the complicated atmosphere [of her mother's world]" (*GN* 526).

She also shows opposition to her mother by adopting the uniform dress code of her boarding school as a gesture of defiance to Anna's "free style:" "Janet went to school today. Uniform is optional, and she chose to wear it. Extraordinary that my child should want a uniform. I can't remember a time in my life when I wouldn't have felt uncomfortable in one. […] The uniform is ugly […], yet, she [Janet] is delighted." (*GN* 529) For the rebellious Anna, wearing a uniform signifies relinquishing one's personal world as individuals. In general terms, uniforms homogenize large groups of people and transform the individual into an abstract ideal. Anna realizes it when she observes her daughter metaphorically vanishing "among a herd of such young girls" (*GN* 529). In the world of uniforms, Janet loses her uniqueness. Her individuality is subsumed by the needs or claims of a larger community represented by the boarding school, which is described by Anna as an institution where little girls "[go] for walks in crocodiles, like soldiers, and [look] like everyone else, and [do] things regularly at certain times." She warns her daughter that if she is not "careful," she is "going to come out of it like a processed pea, just like everyone else" (*GN* 620).

The uniform is also symbolically associated with "the Law of the Father."[121] It materializes the social laws and norms dictated by the figure of authority and hierarchy embodied by the patriarch. As she lacks a father figure in her life, Janet turns to a surrogate father personified by the head-mistress of the boarding school, Miss Street, who significantly designs the school uniforms. As head-mistress, she embodies the institutional power which produces social norms and personifies the Law of the Father. It is significant that Miss Street should be portrayed as a masculinized character, as clearly pointed out by the remark that "the woman in her died before she was twenty" (*GN* 529). Janet opts for the patriarchal way in a sharp contrast with her mother's unconventional way of life. But she also accepts the "Law of the Father" unquestioningly because she lacks a father-figure in her life.

In conclusion, the female protagonists' matrophobic attitude towards their mothers reflects the complex relationship between mothers and daughters in Lessing's works. While daughters fear becoming their mothers, who are perceived as obstacles in their quest for selfhood, they most often end up replicating the latter's lives. Moreover, in Lessing's novels,

[121] I refer here to the Lacanian concept which I earlier analyzed in "the male gaze" part.

the mother is also inhibiting and terrifying because she is part of the community of masks that stifle them and hamper their search for subjectivity and true selfhood.

I. 1. B. The culture of masks and the estranged self

a. The duplicity of the masked self

From a sociological perspective, Martha's difficulty in achieving a whole and authentic self is reflected in the theme of confusing masks and disguises in a society where one should keep up appearances for the sake of social integration. Masks are intricately related to the motif of role-playing and counterfeits in a community that has imposed a range of expectations on men and women. The mask, as in Bertolt Brecht's dramas, is also emblematic of the duplicity and splitting of the self. It is fundamentally double in function, signification and experience, serving simultaneously as a tool for disguise and as a marker of identity. It points to a mode of being and acting that women are made to adopt in order to be accepted by their socio-cultural environment as true subjects. The mask metaphor thus materializes the suppression of the true self and the assumption of a pseudo-self—a sham one. It designates the public self of the individual, the image he/she holds up to others, as contrasted with the deeper feelings, cognition and interpretations of reality as originating in his/her private self. All along her quest for identity, Martha assumes various masks or what Carl Jung calls "*personas*."[122] The masker assumes a disguise or a "*persona*," a mask that the person wears in public, or a well-played role that aims at integrating society by deception or by satisfying it by simulating an ideal. Somebody adopts a name, a title, an occupation, and identifies with it. But if this person deviates from this role, he/she becomes perceived as a misfit. In the double play on *persona*, Martha's identity incarnates the mask and the person behind it.

With the publication of *Psychology of the Unconscious* in 1912, Carl Jung revised Freud's concept of the unconscious, bringing to light another aspect of the human psyche which he thought Freud had failed to explore. He called it "the collective unconscious." In the

[122]The *persona* is originally a mask worn by actors in ancient Greece, according to psychoanalyst Carl Jung, refers to the social archetype or the conformity archetype. *The persona* is a social face the individual presents to the world—"a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual." Carl Gustav Jung. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. London: Pantheon Books, 1953. p. 190.

process of defining the relationship between the individual and the collective unconscious, Jung employed the ancient Latin word for mask, *persona*:

> This arbitrary segment of the collective psyche—often fashioned with considerable pain—I have called the *persona*. The term *persona* is really a very appropriate expression for this, for originally it meant the mask once worn by actors to indicate the role they played […]. It is, as its name implies, only a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks.
>
> When we analyze the *persona*, we strip off the mask, and discover that what seemed to be individual is at bottom collective; in other words, the *persona* was only a mask of the collective psyche. Fundamentally, the *persona* is nothing real: it is a compromise between the individual and society as to what a man should appear to be.[123]

In the first volumes of *Children of Violence*, Martha Quest's dilemma stems from her unresolved duality, between her inner desires and her consciousness of the consequent necessity to wear masks, as the more she mingles with the people of the veld, and those of the Sports Club in town, the more she feels compelled to wear the shallow mask of manners.. On the one hand, the masker is in a dilemma: to live in a society, one must wear a mask, but to live behind a mask, one must suppress one's true nature.

This tension is visible when Martha Quest partially assumes the societal mask of falsehood, succumbing to the demands of the collective psyche. Yet, the liberation from this mask occurs at special moments of escape in the veld and town, which we shall analyze. As will be shown, Martha Quest ends up suffocated by the mask that she has been wearing in the veld and town. She feels estranged in this community of disguises and needs to free herself from the *personas* related to the collective psyche. We shall discuss in the coming analysis the self with a mask and the self stripped of the mask of falsehood.

Living "in a small [veld] anywhere means preserving one's self behind a mask" (*FGC* 12), a place in which Martha partially adheres to the "false tokens of her [narrow-minded] community" (*MQ* 53). She "play[s] the part of the 'young girl'" simulating the "familiar roles" (*MQ* 8) of the adult women of the veld. Surrounded by a community of masks

[123] Carl Gustav Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966, pp. 157-158.

best represented by Mrs. Quest and her neighbor Mrs. Van Rensberg, Martha discovers the pretentiousness and ostentatious values of bourgeois Victorian ideals as represented by Mrs. Quest, her snobbish mother and Mrs. Van Rensberg, whom she finds "loathsome, bargaining and calculating" (*MQ* 12). They incarnate social hypocrisy as they pretend to show each other love and sympathy but "each would complain to her husband—one, with the English inarticulateness over matters of class, that Mrs. Van Rensberg was really 'so trying', while the other, quite frankly said that these rooineks got her down, […], they thought they owned the earth they walked on" (*MQ* 13).

Like the veld, the town is another locus of societal masks and counterfeits, where Martha is confronted with a new collective psyche materialized by the social circle of the Sports Club. In this new community, she acquires a new made up identity, a new *persona*, marked by the girlish nickname "Matty," given her by the young men in the Sports Club. She soon realizes that the new community is another "gigantic social deception" (*PM* 46), especially when she further gets trapped in the routine of the Sports Club life along with the partygoers:

> Night after night, they were up till the sun rose, they went to work as usual, and they met again by five in the evening. For into this timeless place, where everything continued dream-like year after year, had come, like a frightened wind, a feeling of necessity, an outside pressure. (*MQ* 187)

In the world of the Sports Club, all seems to be "dream-like" and ephemeral. Martha finds herself caught in an artificial performance. It is "like a fairy story drenched in nostalgic golden light" (*MQ* 154). She becomes seduced by the excitement of the parties at the Sports Club and the enticing scenes of happy, fashionable dancers drinking alcohol in an atmosphere of general hilarity.

b. The duplicity of the Sports Club community

The mask is also a metaphor of duplicity as it is closely linked to the carnival in which party-goers are masked. The festivities of the club, in which Martha is immersed, are carnivalesque inversions of everyday life:

> This club had come into existence simply as a protest against everything Europe

> stood for. There were no divisions here, no barriers, or at least none that could be put into words; the most junior clerk from the railways, the youngest typist, were on Christian-name terms with their bosses, and mingled easily with the sons of Cabinet ministers; […] 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. […] [They] might relax in an unwilling smile, under pressure from this irresistible flood of universal goodwill. (*MQ* 154)

The world of the Sports Club conforms to the atmosphere of the carnival. The party goers celebrate indulgence and pleasure, and momentarily suspend social rules. Mikhail Bakhtin evokes the Feast of Fools, a popular European medieval festival that took place in the fifth and the sixteenth century to explain carnival or the carnivalesque. In this annually celebrated event, the clergy and laity, figures of the "official medieval ideology, embodied in sacred texts and religious rituals" would burlesque their duties and participate in a lower class festival, partaking of wine and songs "as a means of inverting the official social, moral, and political order."[124] The ritual of the carnival or carnivalesque thus opposes official culture and authority, and subverts fixed hierarchies. This ecstatic liberation is achieved through parodies and mockery of representations of officialdom with bright costumes and masks mimicking the official attire as well as a clown acting as the head of the event. Accordingly, it "build[s] a second world and a second life outside officialdom."[125]

In this world, the young women symbolically wear masks of "all-experienced compassion" (*MQ* 152) in order to seduce the men of the party. Mrs. Talbot was "a kind of face mask" (*PM* 87), a self she has "created for her public" (*PM* 86). Martha participates in this social deception. She wears a mask of happiness when the wolves of the club celebrate her marriage with Donovan while deep inside, she dislikes this "public orgy" (*MQ* 249) and ecstasy about sex. While the wolves "feted and toasted" Donovan, Martha "stood by smiling uneasily, feeling that she must be perverse to dislike what everyone else thought so amusing and natural" (249). In this social masquerade, Martha displays an outer self to conform to the collective mood. But behind her mask, the inner self is stifled and suffocated. Her personality is sharply split between the public cheerful Martha and the resentful Martha feeling an inner turmoil of discontent and grievance.

---

[124] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His W*orld. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. p. 26.

[125] *Ibid*. p. 5-6.

In the Dionysian world of the Sports Club, Martha Quest assumes her mask when she dissolves into the collective psyche of the Sports Club. She wants to maintain this newly won connection and longs to be "swallowed up in something bigger" than itself:

> Night after night, they moved from the club to the plaza and on to McGrath's; and the self-contained parties that began the evening expected to dissolve into a great whole as midnight approached. By midnight they were dancing as if they formed one soul; they danced and sang, mindless, in a half-light, they were swallowed up in the sharp, exquisite knowledge of loss and impending change that came over the continents from Europe; and underneath it all, a rising tide of excitement that was like a poison. […]. They were all longing to be swallowed up in something bigger than themselves; they were in fact already swallowed up. (*PM* 78)

The social mask allows Martha to transcend her egoistic self-enclosed world. Her identity fuses in a blissful unity with the subjectivities of others. Paradoxically, she longs for this epiphanic moment of fusion into the collective and yearns to be swallowed up in an "impersonal," "trance-like" movement (*MQ* 173):

> For the few minutes the music lasted, every person on the verandah lost self-consciousness and became part of the larger whole, the group; their faces were relaxed, mindless, their eyes met those of the men and women they must meet and greet in the dance with an easy exchange. […]. The responsibility of being one person, alone, was taken off them. (*MQ* 73-74)

c. Self-doubt

As a consequence to this gigantic social deception, Martha cannot bear the different masks or *personas* she has been putting on since her arrival in town. She feels they are like a betrayal of her initial quest for authenticity, freedom and true selfhood. Everything around her seems to be fake. She feels the circle of the Sports Club hovers between reality and fantasy. Exiled as she is in a reality breaking down into a meaningless succession of events, her drama becomes an existential condition of impalpable loss. She feels "formless, graceless, and unpredictable, a mere lump of clay" (*PM* 11). She realizes that the mask creates what Carl Jung calls the frozen *persona*, a protective and false social self. The estranged Martha feels that she is no more than an insignificant individual. The banal hedonistic activities of the white ruling class in the town do not satisfy her existential quest for authentic selfhood. They only create a mask-like personality and point to the failure of the collective psyche to fulfill

the individual's ideal of authenticity. As the narrator remarks, "there was no doubt that the root of all this dissatisfaction was that she deserved something life had not offered her. The daydream locked not only her mind, but her limbs" (*MQ* 249).

Growing aware of the triviality of the social mask, the female protagonist feels the need to take it off in order to find her true self.

d. The self beyond the mask

In the veld, young Martha's attempts to strip off her mask are materialized by her escape from her masquerading community during her childhood to her visionary moments in nature, where acquires

> the gift of her solitary childhood on the veld; that knowledge of something painful and ecstatic, something central and fixed, but flowing. It was a sense of movement, of separate things interacting and finally becoming one, but greater it was her loadstone, even her conscience. (*MQ* 220)

Without her social mask, Martha experiences a genuine and "blissful" (*MQ* 63) moment of communion with nature. It occurs in the shape of "a slow integration during which she, and the little animals, and the moving grasses, and the sun-warmed trees" (*MQ*, 62) become one, "shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms" (*MQ* 62). It is a transcendent moment—a "moment impossible to remember afterwards" (*MQ* 62). The self dissolves into "the great wheels of movement" (*MQ* 62), vanishing into an organic unity and "bathing in a magical sky-reflecting light" (*MQ* 60). Such an illuminating experience into which she sometimes mounts reveals "her smallness, the unimportance of humanity" (*MQ* 62). The only genuine unity which she can enjoy without wearing a mask is in the great forces of nature.

As she gradually matures into an adult woman, Martha learns that her experiences of matrimony and pregnancy have chained her further to her social mask. In *A Proper Marriage*, when she gets pregnant, she decides to release herself from the fake life and the mask she had been wearing to conform to her marital status. In a vivid act of self-assertion and "defiance" to her husband Douglas who becomes "so full of prohibitions and firm attitudes" (*PM* 152) after her pregnancy, she and her friend Alice decide to go out in a rainy storm. Both pregnant women bathe sensually in a mud-filled pothole; they take off their clothes and plunge "across the road into the long grass" and are "to their knees in water held by the rough wells of saturated grass" (*PM* 153). They "loosen [...] deliciously in the warm rocking of the water"

and stand “to [their] feet in heavy mud” (*PM* 153). Naked, the two women, with “large, aggressive swollen stomachs, streaked purple and red” (*PM*, 154) relish a pre-oedipal experience. This image of escape celebrates the physical and, particularly, the female body. Martha and Alice feel “free and comfortable in their minds, their bodies felt relaxed and tired” following their plunge into the mud. Lying in her bath afterwards, Martha "traced the purple stretch marks with one finger, and felt something like satisfaction mingled with half-humorous appreciation of the ironies of her position” (*PM* 154). This is reminiscent of the Kristevan imagery the pre-oedipal fusion of mother and fetus in fluid, unbounded semiotic water. Only at that moment can Martha feel a sense of oneness with her fetus, “the crouching infant, still moving tentatively around in its prison” (*PM* 153). Earlier in the novel, she was frightened by the development of the creature in her womb, a “process which she could not alter or hasten” (*PM* 144). But the ritual of bathing nowalleviates the burden of pregnancy. It is transformed into a blissful unity, a semiotic world of undifferentiated pulsations.

This sensual immersion expresses Alice’s and Martha’s need to leave the world of masks in which they have been imprisoned. If in the Western tradition, water imagery may stand for the ritual of baptism and washing away of sins, water is here a cleansing agent that symbolically allows Martha to unfetter the ties of matrimony. It is also a symbol of authenticity, renewal and rebirth as it strips the self of its social mask. In swimming, Martha is searching for the unlimited into which she can lose herself. That is why she and Alice go into “fits of [cathartic] laughter” (*PM* 154). They are both “free and comfortable in their minds, their bodies [feel] relaxed and tired; they [do] not care that their men prefer […] other company to theirs” (*PM* 155). The return to nature symbolizes a return to authenticity and life without masks.

When she finally strips off the suffocating mask of the white community of Southern Rhodesia, Martha Quest relishes in freedom, particularly when she first arrives at the big city of London in the last volume of the quintology, *The Four-Gated City*:

> For a few weeks she had been anonymous, unnoticed—free. Never before in her life had she known this freedom. […] Coming to a big city for those who had never known one, means… freedom: all the pressures are off, no one cares, no need for the mask. For weeks now without boundaries, without a definition, like a balloon drifting and bobbing, nothing had been expected of her. (*FGC* 12)

The self without a mask, stripping itself from the old *personas* it impersonated (Matty, Martha

Knowell), is like the socially untainted, preoedipal child. It is the self without "the nets tightening around" (*MQ* 59) Martha on the farm and in town, and without the counterfeit (*PM* 152) of a docile, submissive wife.

Martha ultimately learns that she has to strip off the masks or the false social selves that may hamper her quest for selfhood.

The language of parody, however defined, acts to manipulate the literature it is intended to describe.

Joseph Dane

La parodie réfracte un modèle [discursif] tel un prisme réfractant un rayon lumineux, transmis, mais dévié.

Kris Peeters

I. 2. The dialectics of genre and gender

I. A. 2. When gender unsettles genre: *Children of Violence* as parody of the masculine *bildungsroman*

Introduction

Genre, as defined by Jonathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics,* is "a set of expectations that establish the literary norms to which texts may be related and by virtue of which they become meaningful and coherent."[126] Jacques Derrida argues that whenever the notion of genre is at issue, whether it be a matter of *physis* (gender) or *technè* (as in literary genre), a norm involving a typology and interdiction is established: "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity."[127]

This notion of "the law of genre/*loi du genre*" as normative, exclusive and prescriptive has nevertheless been revised and reconsidered by poststructuralists and Derrida himself. Indeed, many factors such as gender destabilize the normative claim of genres and open up generic classifications to experimentation. We shall see in that the conflation of gender with genre is an instance of the violation of this "law," as the intrusion of gender deconstructs generic certainties and confirms the impossibility for genre to maintain absolute purity. This "intrinsic impurity" characterizing literary genres is developed by Derrida in his essay "The Law of Genre:"

> The law of the law of genre […] is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part without being part of, without having membership in a set.[128]

Exploring the interrelation of genre and gender in the *Children of Violence* series reveals that gender plays with the laws of genre and challenges the afore-mentioned definition of literary genre propounded by Culler. The *Children of Violence* sequence, written between

[126] Jonathan Culler. *Structuralist Poetics*. USA: Cornell University Press and Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1975. p. 136.

[127] Jacques Derrida. "The Law of Genres." *Critical Inquiry* 7, 1980. p. 57.

[128] *Ibid*. p. 59.

1952 and 1969, seems to be structurally inscribed in the genre of the classical *bildungsroman* which had long been viewed as a "European genre defined primarily by male theorists, in terms of works by and about men,"[129] and conveyed through a humanist discourse celebrating a male hero who progresses teleologically to perform his heroic task. Yet, Lessing's gendered narrative as a female novel of development transgresses the normative power of genre, also defying the assumptions of teleology, linearity and vertical movement on which the masculine *bildungsromane* are based, as will be shown in the following analysis.

Doris Lessing is a great experimental writer considered by some critics as a "border-crosser"[130] who transgresses borders and seems to enjoy transcending regular generic categories. Her position on genre is a half-way between respect for generic traditions and challenge to conventional limits—a position that Linda Hutcheon generally describes as "that postmodern paradox of complicity and critique."[131] Her *Children of Violence* quintet, a quest narrative modeled on the *bildungsroman* genre, is a testimony to it. Indeed, the narrator adopts the male-defined genre of the *bildungsroman* to recount Martha Quest's erratic progress from Southern Rhodesia to the supposedly paradisiacal city of London in search of selfhood but also deviates from its conventions and rules, as we shall show later in the analysis.

In trespassing the generic taxonomy of the traditional masculine bildungsroman, Lessing joins modernist and postmodernist women writers like Margaret Atwood. She uses parody as a strategy for negotiating both aesthetic representation and subjectivity. By contrast with "the narrow and traditional definition of parody in the eighteenth-century" as device for "ridicule" and satire, Hutcheon, in her work *A Theory of Parody,* chooses to define it as a flexible, manifold mode of expression of the twentieth-century, especially the postmodern (xii). In her opinion, parody is "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity" (xii). She believes that the "tension between the potentially conservative effect of repetition and the potentially revolutionary impact of difference is one common denominator shared by all the many and various art forms" (xii).

Hutcheon characterizes the function of parody as "authorized transgression, an appropriation of tradition that paradoxically incorporates and challenges that which it parodies, hence

[129] Maria Helena Lima. *Decolonizing Genre: Caribbean Women Writers and the Bildungsroman*. College Park: University of Marylan, 1993. p. 2.

[130] Alice Ridout, and Susan Watkins. *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings.* London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009.

[131] Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988. p. 146.

turning it into the perfect postmodern form."[132] We shall see that Lessing draws upon parody in the sense of Hutcheon's postmodern definition. The female protagonist's progress is the parody of a linear teleological narrative whose goal is the achievement of a unified, fixed and authentic self. It thus deconstructs the humanist project of ideal and whole selfhood, reflecting the complexity and fragmentation of subjectivity. It also unsettles the realist style of the narrative of growth by mingling the supernatural and fantastic realms as shown in the last volume of the series, *The Four-Gated City* (1969). The narrative of development alters its terms from realistic mimesis to fantastic fiction.

This chapter will therefore study Doris Lessing's use of parody to deconstruct the humanist notion of subjectivity and the androcentric genre of the *bildungsroman*. It will delineate a counter-genre to the male-oriented novels of development and focus on the subversive potential of the female *bildungsroman*. We shall first explore the masculine or androcentric *bildungsroman* in order to understand its assumptions and aesthetic conventions and later to analyze the parodic dimension that distinguishes Lessing's female novel of development.

a. The androcentric *bildungsroman*

The *bildungsroman*, in French, "roman d'initiation," "roman de formation" or "roman d'apprentissage," is an eighteenth-century genre describing "the process of development and education of a single protagonist from childhood to adolescence [who is left] at the threshold of maturity."[133] The term "*bildungsroman*" was introduced into the critical vocabulary by the German philosopher and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1941), who first employed it in 1870 in a biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher. He used the German term *Bildung* (from *das Bild*: "image" or "form") to describe a process of teleological and organic growth, in the manner of a seed that develops into a mature plant according to inherent genetic principles.[134]

The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Thought, however, suggests that the novel of formation is about "the development of a typically male protagonist who undergoes

[132] *Ibid*. p. 66.

[133] Esther Kleinbord Labovitz. *The Myth of the Heroine, The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Peter Lang, 1986.

[134] Todd Curtis Kontje. *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*. Columbia: Camden House 1993. pp. 1-2.

maturation […].”[135]In the twentieth-century, many feminist critics like Ellen Morgan, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh and Elizabeth Langland examined the phallocentric premise of traditional novels of formation, concluding that the *bildungsroman* has traditionally been an androcentric literary genre—a linear narrative describing the progress of a male hero from childhood to adulthood. In “Human Becoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel,” Ellen Morgan claims that “the *bildungsroman* is a male affair.” After noting a few exceptions such as Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, she suggests reasons for this bias: “By and large, the *bildungsroman* has been a male form because women tended to be viewed traditionally as static rather than dynamic, as instances of a femaleness considered essential rather than existential.”[136]

John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1684) and Goethe’s archetypal eighteenth-century *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795-96) are prototypical masculine *bildungsromane* in that the male hero’s journey is emblematic of the phallocentric paradigm within which the traditional male *bildungsromane* are structured. The celebration of the white bourgeois male protagonist is a prominent feature of Charles Dickens’s nineteenth-century *David Copperfield* (1850) and James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). These *bildungsromane* adhere to a conventional storyline, tracing the spiritual and psychological formation and development of “a young man who eventually comes to compromise the rebellious self with the social order and its values by passing from innocence and ignorance to a certain stage of maturity and knowledge.”[137] They incorporate the protagonist into a process of social inclusion and communal accommodation:

> The genre embodies the Goethean model of organic growth: cumulative, gradual, total. Originating in the Idealist tradition of the Enlightenment, with its belief in human perfectibility and historical progress, this understanding of human growth assumes the possibility of individual achievement and social integration.[138]

It is thus clear that the traditional *bildungsroman* emerged within a Western-European culture, which was white, bourgeois, and male-centered, aiming to educate the young male protagonist

---

[135] Gregory Claeys. *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Thought.* USA and Canada: Routledge, 2005. p. 407.

[136] Ellen Morgan. “Human Becoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel.” *Images of Women in Fiction, Feminist Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon, and Bowling Green. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972.

[137] *Ibid*. p. 12.

[138] Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. UK: University Press of New England, 1983. p. 5.

into accepting the rules of his society. Not surprisingly, therefore, the genre's most exclusively celebrated theme is the compromise with a normative and homogeneous social structure.

In addition, in calling attention to the link between aesthetics and ideology, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Fraiman and Rita Felski pointed to the ideological configurations of the *bildungsroman* that made it largely a masculine form in the literary canon., Jeffrey L. Sammons thus explains that, as a "canon-forming" generic term, the *bildungsroman* reproduces "the value of the hegemonic culture" and is "an instrument of entrenched interests."[139] Indeed, the genre "replicates hierarchical phallocentric gender oppositions and thereby reinforces patriarchal norms and power relations."[140] The gender codification of the classical *bildungsroman* as male implies specific characteristics concerning its structural and thematic paradigms, such as the linear, teleological progress towards whole selfhood, going through a process of acculturation and ultimate harmony with society, the closure of the narrative, as well as the presence of a mentor[141] guiding the hero in his journey from inexperience to experience. The teleological move is towards a reproduction of existing social structures and values in relation to class, gender and race. Thus, the plot presupposes social options available only to men and describes human development exclusively in male terms. Annis Pratt explains why male *bildungsroman* patterns do not apply to women:

> In the women's novel of development, the heroine does not choose a life to one side of society after conscious deliberation on the subject; rather, she is ontologically or radically alienated by gender-role norms from the very outset. Thus, although the authors attempt to accommodate their heroes' *bildung*, or development, to the general pattern of the genre, the disjunctions that we have noted inevitably make the woman's initiation less a self-determined progression towards maturity than a regression from full participation in adult life.[142]

To Annis Pratt and Susan Rosowski, the female protagonist in female novels of development is often incompatible with traditional models of masculine *bildungsromane.* Contending that "[e]ven the broadest definitions of the *bildungsroman* presuppose a range of social options

---

[139] Jeffrey L. Sammons. "The *Bildungsroman* for Non-specialists, an Attempt at Clarification." *Reflection and Action, Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Ed. James Hardin. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991. p. 27.

[140] Anna Kuhn. *Canon as Narrative, A Feminist Reading.* New York: Peter Lang, 1991. p. 91.

[141] Susan Fraiman. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. USA: Columbia University Press, 1993.

[142] Annis Pratt. *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction.* USA: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 1981.

available only to men" (7), Fraiman and the writers of *The Voyage In* consider that "an alternate generic model"[143] is necessary to understand fictional narratives of female development. Women were thus excluded in the traditional form of the genre.

b. Parody: The subversive *bildungsroman*

Doris Lessing reconceptualizes the genre of the male *bildungsroman*. The odyssey of female selfhood related in her fiction dismantles a genre marked by an exclusively patriarchal heritage. Lessing responds to the male tradition of writing in two ways, through imitation and subversion, two features which are the main characteristics of parody. Her questioning of the commonly accepted values of British literary tradition (closure, teleology, and subjectivity)—"a questioning which is totally dependent upon that which it interrogates"[144]—induces the contradictory duality which Linda Hutcheon has characterized as parodic: "In some sense, parody paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies."[145]
She argues here that parody requires certain conditions "in order to be understood:"

> Parody, like irony, can therefore be said to require a certain institutionalized set of values—both aesthetic (generic) and social (ideological)—in order to be understood, or eventually to exist. The interpretive or hermeneutic situation is one based upon accepted norms, even if those norms only exist to be transgressed.[146]

The "dual codedness" of parody suggests that Lessing works within the very system she attempts to subvert. In other words, she adopts the structural pattern of the male bildungsroman to the female journey and moves beyond the traditional formal boundaries of the genre.
Parody is used in *Children of Violence* as a strategy for dealing with both representation and subjectivity and is to be traced at the structural level as well as the thematic one. Within the aesthetic paradigm, Lessing displaces masculine linearity, teleological progress, and realistic

---

[143] Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. UK: University Press of New England, 1983.

[144] Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988. p. 42.

[145] *Ibid*. p. 11.

[146] Linda Hutcheon. *A Theory of Parody*. New York and London: Methuen, 1985. p. 95.

plot, which are characteristic of the classical male *bildungsroman*. Within the thematic one, she uses parody to deconstruct the humanistic project by showing that selfhood is flexible, fractured, fragmented and decentered thus debunking the masculine and humanist model of self-containment and unity.

In this regard, Lessing is seen by critics as innovative as for example for Labovitz, for whom *Children of Violence* "lends another dimension to the whole concept of *bildung* and *bildungsroman*."[147] Molly Hite considers that the series' conclusion transforms "what had appeared to be a five-volume *bildungsroman*, the ongoing saga of a woman's personal growth and development," into "an experimental narrative that culminates in the repudiation of the assumptions about personality [realist notions of a unified, discrete subject] and history that make the *bildungsroman* possible."[148]

- The anti-teleological *bildungsroman*

If the classical *bildungsroman* describes events in terms of the movement of a male subject for a telos consisting in the reconciliation of the individual with the social order and normative patriarchy, Lessing's novel of female development unfolds subversively to challenge the demands of socialization and the patriarchal order. In *Children of Violence*, the anti-telos narrative entails that process matters more than the end or finality itself. Lessing seems to convey the idea that self-knowledge is bound up with a process whose "transformational logic leads up to a notion of its own purposiveness."[149] In other words, the process of development is itself a significant result. This idea goes against the "teleological rhetoric" characteristic of the classical *bildungsroman*, which posits that "the meaning of events lies in their finality." It also contradicts "the Hegelian thought, with which [the traditional male *bildungsroman*] shares a strong normative vocation [as] events acquire meaning when they lead to one ending, and one only."[150] In *Children of Violence*, it is not the conclusion of the five-volume narrative that captures the reader's attention but the various experiences of the female heroine. Ultimately, the narrator valorizes the quest as a process under way rather than an end.

---

[147] Esther Kleinbord-Lobvitz. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. Second Edition. New York: 1988. p. 145.

[148] Molly Hite. *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 26.

[149] Franco Moretti. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. New York: Verso, 1987. p. 8

The series starts deceptively or parodically in the manner of the traditional *bildungsroman* with the all-inquisitive and daring Martha Quest leaving her parents' farm in the veld and setting on her quest to discover the world, moving towards a *telos* materialized by an edenic city of social harmony freed from oppressive racial and sexual codes. Yet, Lessing displaces the *telos* or ultimate goal of social integration in favor of rebellion against and rejection of the normative rules of her heroine's society. Martha Quest rejects the banality of a *telos* involving social conformism as in Goethe's *Meister,* as suggested by the contrast between the heroine's imaginary ideal city and the conventionality and racism of her actual society. While "each group, community, clan, color, strove and fought away from the other, in a sickness of dissolution," she "could feel the striving forces in her own substance: the effort of imagination, needed to destroy the words *black*, *white*, *nation*, *race*, exhausted her" (*MQ* 56).

The whole series is thus marked by the confrontation between individual aspirations and social demands. As Schlueter puts it, it is "a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective."[151] Right from the first volume, we can see the rebellious adolescent Martha striving to disentangle herself from her confining home and the values of the white colonial society of the South African country and acting transgressively against its social mores and conventions.

The anti-teleological narrative negates any desire for closure. It is remarkable that the first novels of the series should be marked by "loose ends" working against closure. *A Proper Marriage* ends with Martha's divorce and her involvement in the communist party, which instigates an immersion in radical politics. *A Ripple from the Storm* ends with the disintegration of the communist party in Southern Rhodesia and the complication of Martha's tense relationship with her husband. *Landlocked* ends with the heroine's second divorce but opens on her travel to England. Going thus from one stage to the other, the heroine's single-minded purpose remains to return to her homeland till she reaches it in the culminating volume of the series, *The Four-Gated City*, a narrative which in turn evades completion as it explodes apocalyptically on the vision of the fallen and "poisoned" (540) post-war city of London.

---

[150] *Ibid*. p. 7.

[151] Paul Schlueter. "Doris Lessing: The Free Woman's Commitment." *Contemporary British Novelists*. Ed. Ch. Shapiro: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965, p. 49.

The overall logic of narrative evolution becomes clear when the expectations of the heroine are frustrated on reaching the shores of England. Reflecting on a blackened war-damaged urban landscape, Martha perceives the horrific lifelessness of the soil: "It was a yellowish soil. In it was embedded a system of clay pipes, iron pipes, knotted cables" (*FGC* 16). The last image of the island, where "people like you and me are a sort of experimental model and Nature has had enough of us" (*FGC* 660) is parodic of the initial dreamt-of "noble city" with its "splashing fountains" and "many-fathered children, running and playing among the flowers and the terraces through the white pillars and tall trees" (*MQ* 17). Martha's quest does not take her to the ideal city she fantasized about in the first volume but to a radically opposite reality. The extraordinary flux erodes Martha's dream of the ordered, hierarchical city:

> It seemed as if the idea of a city or town as something slow-changing, almost permanent, belonged to the past when one had not needed so many pipes, cables, runnels, and types of machinery to keep it going. If time were slightly speeded up, then a city may now look like fountains of rubble cascading among great machines, while buildings momentarily form, change color like vegetation, dissolve, reform. (*FGC* 302)

The dream of social harmony and integration that first started the bildungsroman is displaced by an apocalyptic black vision of the London of the 1970s, in which the heroine feels only alienation and "dislocation" (*FGC* 24). This is why Mona Knapp argues that Lessing deliberately exploits a seemingly outmoded form, adding, however, that the "process of education […] seems, at the end, to have totally disoriented the heroine, rather than propelling her toward her right place in life."[152] But if Martha cannot find her place in society, what is Lessing's alternative to social reconciliation?

The *telos* of social reconciliation, which Moretti defined as the resolution of "the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization,"[153] vanishes in favor of a process of consciousness-raising and acquisition of new levels of awareness:

> She [Martha] had learned that one thing, that most important thing, which was that one simply had to go on, take one step after another: this process in itself held the

[152] Mona Knapp. *Doris Lessing*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984. Print. p. 39-47.

[153] Franco Moretti. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. New York: Verso, 1987. p. 15.

> keys. And it was this process which would as it had in the past, be bound to lead her around to that point where—asking continuously, softly, under one's breath, Where? What is it? How? What's next? (*FGC* 614)

In *Children of Violence*, social integration is no longer the heroine's goal but the whole quest is replaced by existential questions about the self and life, for Martha ultimately "finds herself back with herself" wondering "where? What is it? How? What's next?" (*FGC* 614). What is then the purpose behind such a narrative choice?

The pattern of psychological development "intentionally deviates from specifically androcentric patterns,"[154] for what matters for the narrator is experience as a process which is immeasurably greater than its end. The insights and knowledge gained during the quest are far more important than the final destination. This line of development suggests that the heroine has all along been caught up in a dimension of experience that was supposed to transcend the immediate context of her local setting. It is this type of experience described by Teresa de Lauretis, in *Alice Doesn't*, as a continuous process by which subjectivity is constructed:

> For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world.[155]

The trope of the heroine's journey thus acquires a new importance as a result to the value of experience. Martha initially displays a strong belief in the ideal of her homeland, as the land of freedom and social integrity. The last volume of the series, however, unsettles this starting point. Martha's vision is ultimately altered by long-term struggles with social institutions, political organizations…It accounts for the fact that Suzanne Howe views *Children of Violence* as made up of two novels of apprenticeship: the first includes *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, *A Ripple from the Storm* and *Landlocked*, conducted in the spirit of finding certainties, pre-defined social and personal values by which to live, and the second is constituted by *The Four-Gated City*, whose ultimate goal is "not social adjustment but rather an increased sense of living—a knowledge, simply of what one is. Herein lies the real

[154] Ellen Cronan Rose and Carey Kaplan. "Doris Lessing: The Alchemy of Survival." *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 20, No. 2, Special Issue on Popular Culture, Summer 1989. p. 302.

[155] Teresa de Lauretis. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Smiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: India University Press, 1984. p. 159.

difference between the traditional *bildungsprozess*—the formation of the heroine of *The Four-Gated City*."[156]

Lessing, in addition, does not only respond to a male tradition of writing but also departs from the equally classical female tradition of the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman*, whose teleological structure works towards the conventional ending with marriage. J. F. Allen presents her themes and issues in the following quotation:

> Through her repetition and counterpointing of motifs, Lessing exposes the destructiveness, the dead ends, of some traditional institutions, particularly marriage, which often confines women to the collective experience of motherhood at the expense of their creative selves. [157]

In *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989), the feminist critic Rita Felski observes that the nineteenth-century female protagonist's "trajectory remains limited to the journey from the parental to the marital home and […] her destiny remains permanently linked to that of her male companion" (125). More often, self-realization is typically accomplished by the means of a wedding which brings about a fairytale happiness entailing material well-being: "The classical *bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriages" because marriage, as "a metaphor for the social contract"[158] between two individuals, summarizes and stabilizes all of their social relationships. Thus, the traditional female *bildungsroman*, of which Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is the prototype, reduces the quest or *bildung* to the limit of marriage.

The *Children of Violence* series, however, which disrupts the ideal of marriage as the symbolic fulfillment of the quester, presents itself as a feminist *bildungsroman*. It also questions gender categories, an aspect which is absent in the masculine genre, because Martha's search for selfhood is also the search for a world without gender, race or class boundaries. The heroine struggles against the general underlying attitudes and social values that coerce her into gender. *Martha Quest* and the ironically named novel *A Proper Marriage* subvert the rule of the conventional endings characteristic of the genre. This is why Lorna Sage suggests that the end of *Martha Quest* "reads like a parody—as it is meant to—of a

---

[156] Cited in Susan A. Gohlman. "Martha Hesse of *The Four-Gated City*: A Bildungsroman Already Behind her." *South Atlantic Bulletin.* Vol. 43, No. 4, November 1978. p. 106.

[157] Orphia Jane Allen. "Structure and Motif in Doris Lessing's *A Man and Two Women*." *Doris Lessing*. Eds. Margaret Church and William T. Stafford. Special Issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* 26.1, 1980. p. 73.

[158] *Ibid*. p. 22.

nineteenth-century ending. Martha has already begun the quest."[159] Unlike Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennet, who view marriage as their ultimate goal, Martha has severe reservations: "She [does] not want to marry Douglas; She [does] not want to marry at all" (*MQ* 291-292). Although she ventures into a hasty marriage, she regards the life she is committed to with a final, horrified dislike. "Everything about it seem[s] false and ridiculous" (*PM* 45). Thus, after realizing that she is leading a "small life" (*PM* 370) as a married woman, she refuses to be trapped in it and decides to free herself from marital subordination by abandoning her child and her husband Douglas, at the end of *A Proper Marriage*. Despite the risks she might face, the heroine of *Children of Violence* refuses to "submit to what women always had submitted to" (*PM* 370) and decides to cast aside her dull marital life even though she knows that

> when a woman left her husband, or threatened to leave him—that is, a woman of her type, who insisted on her rights to behave as a man would—then the husband went through certain actions like an automaton, beginning with confiscating the contraceptives, threatening to make her forcibly pregnant, accusing her of multifarious infidelities, and ending in self-abasing weeping appeals that she should change her mind and stay. (*PM* 369)

But why is Martha so averse to the idea of marriage? After her marriage with Douglas Knowell and her pregnancy, Martha feels that gender has trapped her in the process of procreation. Unlike the male hero who, by nature, does not have to face the female reproductive cycle, Martha discovers that her progress is hampered by pregnancy. In her study of adolescent psychosexual evolution, Simone de Beauvoir describes the transition from girlhood to womanhood as an 'othering' process, during which "feminine solipsism is pulverized, while a chronic marginality is demarcated."[160] In *A Proper Marriage*, Martha experiences the relentless conflict between her autonomous selfhood and the othering, marginalizing drift compounded by the trap of marriage and its alien image of femininity:

> She thought confusedly that there was always a point when men seemed to press a button, as it were, and one was expected to turn into something else for their amusement. This 'turning into something else' had landed her where she was now:

[159] Lorna Sage. *Contemporary Writers, Doris Lessing*. London: Methuen, 1983. p. 34.

[160] De Beauvoir analyses this Othering process : "Jusqu'alors elle était un individu autonome : il lui faut renoncer à sa souveraineté—un conflit éclate entre sa revendication originelle qui est d'être sujet, activité, liberté, et d'autre part ses tendances érotiques et les sollicitations sociales qui l'invitent à s'assumer comme objet passif. Elle se saisit spontanément comme l'essentiel: comment se résoudra-t-elle à devenir l'inessentiel ? Mais si je ne peux m'accomplir qu'en tant qu'Autre, comment renoncerai-je à mon Moi? Tel est l'angoissant dilemme devant lequel la femme en herbe se débat" Simone De Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953. p. 100.

> married, signed and sealed away from what she was convinced she was. (*PM* 17)

As she goes through several sexual encounters, Martha is offered other choices than the marriage imperative as when we see her going through several sexual encounters. Indeed, after a brief loveless marriage with Douglas Knowall, a colonial civil servant whom she finally divorces (in *A Proper Marriage* (1954)), Martha has an affair with a Royal Air Force sergeant. She then marries Anton Hesse, the authoritarian head of a small communist group in *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958). This second marriage turns out to be a sexual fiasco and ends with a second divorce followed by a passionate love affair with a Jewish refugee from Poland in *Landlocked* (1965). This relationship breaks up as Martha's lover sinks into madness. Lessing's view in Lorelei Cederstrom's comments:

> [...] one must have the time and opportunity to explore the sense of the self behind the social façades [of marriage] even if that sense of self is not socially acceptable and requires an excursion into madness or involves hostile and anti-social attitudes. Like Virginia Woolf, Lessing believes that a woman, particularly at middle-age, must find a room of her own and spend some time discovering who she really is.[161]

We can conclude that though the projected destination of the quest functions as a vital precondition and motivation for departure, the *bildungsroman* ends subversively against social integration and the ultimate goal of marriage. What is also remarkable is that Lessing's *Children of Violence* also debunks the linearity which characterizes the classical *bildungsroman* as we shall see in what follows.

- Against linearity: The nomadic female journey

If linear progress is the prerogative of the so-called "universal subject" that is to say the mythical male hero unencumbered by gender and race, Martha's movement is nomadic, labyrinthine, fragmented and discontinuous. It is also endlessly delayed and prolonged. All through this journey, rather than being essential as in male narratives of development, Martha's subjectivity is what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have termed

[161] Lorelei Cederstrom. "Doris Lessing's Use of Satire in *The Summer Before the Dark*." *Doris Lessing*. Eds. Margaret Church and William T. Stafford. Special Issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*. Vol. 26. No. 1 (1980), p. 137.

"nomadic," referring to the "nomad, *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure."[162] This nomadic subject evokes an individual who continually reinvents him/herself through "ongoing attunement of the fluxes and flows of material life to the specific contingencies of social existence."[163] Throughout the series, we learn that Martha's quest is not the result of a linear movement or a teleologically ordained process leading to the establishment of the bourgeois liberal definition of the individual but rather results from a discontinuous path producing a nomadic and flee-floating subjectivity.

While in the first volume of *Children of Violence* Martha Quest develops a humanist view of subjectivity relying on the ideal of a singular, fixed and whole selfhood rooted in an imagined homeland, she realizes, however, throughout her development from childhood to adulthood and her struggle with institutional and social forces, that this process is nomadic in its complexity and bifurcations. The protagonist's nomadic movement from the African veld of Southern Rhodesia, with its sickening atmosphere and its imperial and patriarchal façade, to an imagined lost Eden in England reveals a "deterritorialized" cartography of the self providing an escape from the constraining nature of a root and fixed self. This nomadic process departs from the linear trajectory of the traditional masculine *bildungsroman*, engendering differences and multiplicities.

It also appears that the quest for selfhood in *Children of Violence* creates what Gilles Deleuze calls "lines of escape" or "lignes de fuite,"[164] disseminating the self and producing new becomings. Since these flight lines are lines of escape from any fixed and stable order, they participate in the logic of multiplicities rather than linearity.

The series works against the humanist, Cartesian, "rock-like" or "sedimentary rock" identity, characteristic of the original Martha who seeks to anchor her self in London. Instead, the heroine develops a "rhizomatic identity,"[165] a notion advanced by Deleuze and Guattari, based on multiplicity, interconnection and diversity. The roots of the tree, which she metaphorically

---

[162] Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. p. 36.

[163] Tamsin Lorraine. *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999. p. 14.

[164] In *Dialogues*, Gilles Deleuze defines the line of escape ou "ligne de fuite" as "une déterritorialisation. Faire fuir un système comme on crève un tuyau » (47). He further defines writing as associated with the « line of escape »: "Ecrire, c'est tracer les lignes de fuite qui ne sont pas imaginaires, et qu'on est bien force de suivre».

[165] The "rhizome" is a concept derived from the botanic field and used by Deleuze and Guattari to refer to a "multiple identity" as opposed to single or "exclusive root identity." Instead of a root, trunk, branches and leaves, a rhizome has a horizontal network with no singular root or centre. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. p. 6.

seeks in England, seem to burgeon into a rhizome of bifurcating spokes and "filaments." These filaments stand for the various becomings experienced by Martha during her quest.

The protagonist's rhizomatic movement is non-linear and non-hierarchical. Contrary to what happens in the masculine *bildungsroman*, the pattern of self-development in the female *bildungsroman* is also circular, leading to the center of the self. We discover that Martha Quest goes through an esoteric experience showing that the heroine finally learns that the way out is to retrace the way in.

As we follow Martha's odyssey to Britain, we discover that the narrative plotline veers away from the linear path. Indeed, the journey is undertaken without maps or guides, displacing the linear geography of the male *bildungsroman*. We find instead flight lines which are producers of events. Sense is direction as confirmed by Martha's remark in *The Four-Gated City*: "We decided to move. The decision was made by 'feel'" (646). The heroine's movement is thus unpremeditated: "Just as if she had not left home […] she had been carried by the current of people, that tide which always flows in and out of London" (14).

The journey in *Children of Violence* does not fulfill the function of the sedentary road marked by enclosure and fixity. Even though Martha has settled in three different enclosed houses (the mud house in the veld, the apartment in town and the Coldridge household in London city), essential to her spiritual development—she continues her movement in an open space "which included the histories and lives and loves of people, London—a section map in depth" (*FGC* 18). The whole landscape, different from the claustrophobic old farm, is marked by flux, change and mobility:

> But London heaved up and down, houses changed shape, collapsed, whole streets were vanishing into rubble, and arrow shapes in cement reached up into the clouds. Even the street surfaces were never level: they were always 'up,' being altered, dug into, pitted, while men rooted in them to find tangled pipes in wet earth. (*FGC* 302)

Such a cartography is a challenge to fixity and the heroine embodies "the drifting and floating" (*FGC* 49) status of the nomad. In *Landlocked*, she "walked, walked, down one street, up another, into the avenues, down one avenue, up another—one could hop from intersection to intersection like a child playing hopscotch, one could walk from the center of the city to its edge in a slow hour […]" (198). These "crossing streets" (*LL* 109) and multiple pathways stand in a sharp contrast to roots and fixed destinations. In the final book of the series, Martha does not find a definite root but remains wandering from "room to room, cheap hotel to hotel, a bed in the flat of a man whose name she could not remember though […]

nights spent walking with men and women as enjoyably vagrant and as footloose as she was, […]" (*FGC* 22).

The nomadic movement creates an anarchic mapping of place, for these unpredictable pathways both resist and permeate the controlling order of state-instituted structures of human movement. It almost erodes her dream of the ordered, hierarchical city:

> It seemed as if the idea of a city or town as something slow-changing, almost permanent, belonged to the past when one had not needed so many pipes, cables, runnels, and types of machinery to keep it going. If time were slightly speeded up, then a city may now look like fountains of rubble cascading among great machines, while buildings momentarily form, change colour like vegetation, dissolve, reform. (*FGC* 302)

Martha's joke "of travelling with her life in a suitcase" (*FGC* 20) epitomizes the life of the nomad as "the intermezzo."[166] She "was proposing to wander off with 'nothing but what she stood up in' to take her chances for the night, and possibly other nights" (*FGC* 20). In her *flânerie* and nomadism, she constantly makes "transitions from one world to another" (*LL* 42). Like a modernist *flâneuse*, she embodies the borderless and expansive metropolitan consciousness, for Martha "felt like an empty space without boundaries" (*FGC* 26). Braidotti sees in the nomadic state the potential for "opening up new possibility for life and thought, especially for women,"[167] which defies fixed notions of identity.

The nomadic identity, which is based as much on geographical displacements and deterritorialisation as on a relationship to any fixed place, community or culture, is parodic of the humanist bourgeois subject's identity. In the final stage of her journey, Martha is "rootless, untied, free" (*FGC* 49) unlike the masculine humanist hero who conventionally fulfills a suitable social position in a fixed and definite place. In her state of nomadism, she is plainly free from social ties. She thus grows into a transgressive subject, relinquishing her desire for fixity: "It was like bird migrating. We didn't stay together—that is, within an area" (*FGC* 646).

Parody also disavows the unity characteristic of the humanist subject's sense of identity. Martha feels she is "a mass of fragments, or facets, or bits of mirror reflecting qualities embodied in other people" (*FGC* 391). She is a self-questioning subject, full of

---

[166] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. p. 100.

[167] Rosi Braidotti. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011. p. 8.

contradictions, and always critical of her own emotions. In *A Ripple from the Storm*, the narrative voice observes:

> Martha watched in herself the growth of an extraordinary, unpleasant and upsetting emotion, a self-mockery, a self-parody, as if she both allowed herself an emotion she did not approve of, allowed it and enjoyed it, but at the same time cancelled it out by mockery. It's as if somewhere inside me there was a big sack of greasy tears and if a pin were stuck into me they'd spill out. (289-290)

This disunity is especially remarkable in the final volume of the series: As we follow Martha through London, we discover that she tries on various personae, even going so far as to create names and fictitious pasts for herself in an effort to avoid the traps of social identity. She "called strange identities into being with a switch of clothes or change of voice until one felt like an empty space without boundaries and it did not matter what name one gave to a stranger who asked: What is your name? Who are you?" (*FGC* 26). She also adopts the role of "Matty"—a clown or jester, a mimic and parodist—and "gain[s] freedom from whatever other people must conform to, not so much by ignoring it, but when the point was reached when conformity might be expected, gaining exemption in an act of deliberate clumsiness—like a parody" (*FGC* 15). The nomad is then able through the use of parody and continuous displacement to maintain a position of political resistance and agency. This position also subverts the hegemonic culture related to the bourgeois British subject.

Encountering "a subterranean London" (*FGC* 21) is another flight line which subverts the central hegemonic culture. It valorizes the marginal at the expense of the metropolis. It counters linearity and foreshadows the heroine's immersion in the underworld of madness in the Coldridge household. Martha's association with working-class friends such as Iris and the mad people is in sharp contrast with the classical ideology underlying the androcentric bias of the classical bildungsroman which cherishes the bourgeois and rational subject. Interestingly enough, it is through mad characters such as Lynda Coleridge that Martha will gain new levels of awareness and spiritual development—a theme that we shall analyze later in the following chapter.

The non-linear plot reflects a tendency (in the novel-sequence) to turn sequence into cycle; the end mirrors the beginning of the story. Reaching the ultimate goal of embracing the homeland is similar to the point of departure. At the beginning of her quest, Martha thinks that spatial mobility will lead to a fixed and rooted ground. At this final stage, however, her expectations are not satisfied. The journey epitomizes the ongoing cycle of what Deleuze

refers to as "deterritorializing" and "reterritorializing" moments. Ironically, the sense of "deterritorialization" felt by Martha along her quest as a result of her exile from Africa does not dissipate as when she reaches England. Yet, this process of deterritorialization creates lines of flight that lead to the protagonist's reterritorialization in a rootless spatiality:

> No roots. No trees in this street, not one tree: therefore, no roots. Martha had never before seen soil that was dead, that had no roots. How long had this street been built? For two hundred years this soil had held no life at all. How long did roots live under a crust of air-excluding tarmac? (*FGC* 16)

The search for roots turns out to be a fruitless enterprise. The self-centered Martha who undertakes a journey seeking identity in a rooted origin and land finds herself in a withering process both for her body and for her soul, in an England wrecked by the Second World War. Her rootlessness is also related to the desolate condition of a soil covered by asphalt and constructions. Nicole Ward Jouve explains that the whole series is marked by a radical shift from a lively and swarming nature to a hollow and dead construction: "Martha's voyage has its own sullen, uncompromising logic. She goes from the complex mineral-vegetable-animal-and-human life of the mud house on the kopje to the anonymous shell of a London flat."[168] The heroine's intellectual journey is strongly impressed by her spatial experience, for the rootless dead land of England fails to live up to her expectations.

Ultimately, the journey leads to no stable position, whether in space or in intellectual conviction. Rather than providing Martha with the favorable atmosphere that would fulfill her search for oneness and fixity, England gives her access to a bewildering universality that swallows up the particularity of her experience. The otherness that Martha felt in Africa does not end with a mere spatial displacement. Instead, she is condemned to a rootless and contingent existence shot through with bitter nostalgia for the African soil: "Walking here, it would be through unaired rootless soil, where electricity and telephone and gas tubes ran and knotted and twined" (*FGC* 16). This rootlessness and fluidity, springing from a nomadic mobility, is strongly reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the image of the rhizome, which is close to a labyrinth in that it ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, in contrast to the tree or the totalitarian root which plots a point and fixes an order. To Deleuze and Guattari, "a rhizome is a subterranean stem [that] is absolutely different

[168] Nicole Ward Jouve. "Doris Lessing: Of Mud and Other Matter: The *Children of Violence*." *White Woman Speaks With Forked Tongue*. London & New York: Routledge, 1991. p. 128.

from roots and radicle. The rhizome assumes very diverse forms, ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers."[169]

But the disruption of time is also achieved by the fantastic ending that projects the story into the paranormal, destabilizing the realist claims upon which the masculine *bildungsromane* are based.

- The fantastic

The *Children of Violence* series starts in the realistic mode, recounting the stages of Martha's life until her arrival to post-war London, torn by the Cold War, the persecutions of Communist Party members, the fear of the McCarthy era, the terror of war… Yet, it ends in a parodical fantastic mode incorporating an account of a nuclear apocalypse that destroys London and notes on the dystopian and paranormal future that follows it. Like postmodernist writers, Lessing deconstructs realist modes of representation, resorting to anti-mimetic writing techniques and methods of narratology where the writer deliberately disrupts and parodies standard realist narrative structures. Parody acts here as a strategic tool allowing Lessing to convey her dissatisfaction with the conventional realism characteristic of the classical masculine *bildungsroman* as shown by Mikhail Bakhtin in "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism"[170] where he highlights the centrality of realism to the masculine apprenticeship novel. To the Russian critic, this genre, historical and linear in structure, depicts a realist process of social adjustment and compromise.

Lessing, however, plays with its law which enhances authenticity, logic, stability and clarity. She interrogates the real and draws on a different world in the last volume of the series. *The Four-Gated City* where the fantastic upsets the real, thus deviates from the

[169] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. p. 7.

[170] M. M. Bakhtin. "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism." *Speech Genre and Other Essays.* Ed. Caryl Emerson & Michel Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1986. p. 20.

canonical pattern of the masculine *bildungsroman*'s realist plot. Its use strikes us as highly subversive because it poses a threat on the solidity of the laws that govern our understanding of relations between matter, time and space. Rosemary Jackson observes that fantasy "traces the unsaid, the unseen and the untouched of culture, that which has been muted, made invisible, covered over, made absent and almost extinct."[171] It makes an obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the real or the possible. In her essay "Doris Lessing's Fantastic Children," Roberta Rubenstein views Lessing as a writer who "enjoys traversing borders and crossing boundaries, embracing mimesis, fable, speculative fiction and the fantastic, sometimes in the same novel."[172] To her, *The Four-Gated City* (1969) is no less than "fantastic fiction" (61). Tzvetan Todorov suggests that, regardless of their imagery or thematic concerns, fantastic narratives in particular are, by their very nature, boundary-straddling texts that complicate our notions of genre. We shall see the different characteristics of the fantastic, analyze Lessing's transcending of conventional realism and how the fantastic perspective breaks up the formal structure of the traditional realistic bildungsroman.

According to Todorov, the fantastic is "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event." Fantastic texts perform three functions:

> First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus, the reader's role is […] entrusted to a character (…) and the hesitation becomes one of the themes of the work. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value. The first and the third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled.[173]

Rosemary Jackson theorizes the fantastic as a literary mode which is a continuum between the mimetic and the marvelous. In marvelous texts such as fairy tales and romances, events are typically set in remote or imaginary realms; the reader, like the protagonist, is "merely a

[171] Rosemary Jackson. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 4-5.

[172] Roberta Rubenstein. "Doris Lessing's Fantastic Children." *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings*. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009, p. 61.

[173] Tzvetan Todorov. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Press, 1973. p. 33.

receiver of events."[174] At the other end of the spectrum, mimetic texts "make an implicit claim of equivalence between the represented fictional world and the "real" world outside the text."[175] Fantastic narratives "confound or straddle these categories by assert[ing] that what they are telling is real—relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so—and then […] [breaking] that assumption of realism by introducing what—within those terms—is manifestly unreal."[176] As a result, it is the real itself that is "under constant interrogation"[177] in the fantastic. These complementary approaches are useful for considering *The Four-Gated City* as a novel on the borderline between the real and the fantastic.

The last book of the series is the only novel of the series that departs from mimetic realism. The sense of the unreal and the fantastic are reinforced by paranormal elements and telepathic states. When the female protagonist finally reaches the shores of England, her most cherished destination, she comes upon a dystopian world and a land devastated by the Second World War. There, she makes the acquaintance of Lynda Coldridge, a woman gifted with a supernatural consciousness, athough her family and the larger culture regard her paranormal abilities as evidence of lunacy. Lynda, (and later Martha), slowly develops telepathic abilities and learns how to access extra wavelengths of consciousness. As the narrator observes,

> The civilized human race knew that its primitive members (for instance, Bushmen) used all kinds of senses not used by itself, or not admitted: hunches, telepathy, visions, etc. It knew that past civilizations, some of them very highly developed, used these senses and capacities. It knew that members of its own kind claimed at certain times to experience these capacities. But it was apparently incapable of putting these facts together to suggest the possibility that they were calling people mad who merely possessed certain faculties in embryo. (*FGC* 496)

In this last volume, Lessing creates an alternate community that transcends ordinary senses. Indeed, during the late 1960s, Martha, Lynda and other highly developed friends cultivate extrasensory capacities and prophetically see a "shadow from the future" (*FGC* 565): the intimation of a large-scale catastrophe. The calamitous event that nearly destroys Britain occurs sometime during the 1970s. Since the novel was published in 1969, the events described in the appendix to *The Four-Gated City* obviously take place in what was then "the future." The appendix consists of communications sent by Martha Quest from an

[174] *Ibid*. p. 33.

[175] *Ibid*. p. 34.

[176] *Ibid*. p. 34.

[177] *Ibid*. p. 36.

uncontaminated island somewhere off the coast of Scotland to Francis Coldridge in Nairobi, where he has established a resettlement camp. Martha and other survivors of the "Epoch of Destruction" have adapted to living on the limited natural resources of the island. Years after her resettlement, Martha describes events and encounters that directly challenge the real at a level beyond that of the extrasensory capabilities described earlier in the narrative. She reports that she and others have occasionally

> met and talked to people who were not of our company, not like any people we had known—though some of us had dreamed of them. It was as if the veil between this world and another had worn so thin that earth people and people from the sun could walk together and be companions. (604)

A number of children on the island are born with various forms of what the adults recognize as supernatural psychic abilities. Some of them "hear as none of us or any of those we worked with—even Lynda—could" (606). Another group of children, "when they were tiny, used to shut their eyes tight and laugh, and did not want to open them again. They were watching the pictures on their lids. This capacity faded as they grew older, but not entirely" (606). Martha speculates that such a capacity may not be truly supernormal but simply an ability that all children once had and grew atrophied after being censored by adults. The girls and boys that the female protagonist sees on the island are remarkably gifted. Although they speak and act like normal children, they can "see" and "hear" things far beyond the ordinary. These children seem mentally superior to the adults on the island. They are "beings who include [the history of the human race in the twentieth century] in themselves and who have transcended it" (607). Joseph Batts, for example, is the son of a black man who, as a child, was left with the evacuees from London and made their way to safety. He explains to Martha that "more like [him are] being born now in hidden places in the world, and one day all the human race will be like them" (608). Martha understands that she and her generation are about to be superseded: people like herself are a "sort of experimental model and Nature has had enough of us" (608). These fantastic elements function subversively, and even transgressively, obliging the reader to ponder on their significance. Martha understands that Joseph is the seed of a new generation with a visionary consciousness and is the embodiment of a guarded hope for the future of humankind.

In addition to the narrator's subversion of the classical genre's commitment to linear plotting and realist mimesis, the female *bildungsroman* problematizes the issue of mentors, a common feature in the masculine apprenticeship novels.

- The problematic of mentors

In *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century,* Labovitz claims that "[e]very male hero of the bildungsroman is guided by a mentor; something that the female heroine rarely acquires" (24), stressing that "*Bildung* is aided by a role model and the male hero attempts to fashion his life after a model" (181). In contrast to the male hero, who models himself on his mentor, Martha Quest lacks a representative role model. She embarks on her existential journey unattended: "There was no woman she had ever met she could model herself on" (*PM* 303), for Martha rejects her mother and her friend Mrs. Van Rensberg as potential role models:

> She [Martha] would not be like Mrs. Van Rensberg, a fat and earthy housekeeping woman; she would not be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied, like her mother. But then, who was she to be like? Her mind turned towards the heroines she had been offered, and discarded them. (*MQ* 10)

Neither women, representative of normative societal rules perpetrating the patriarchal ideology, can guide her in her journey. Martha's mother and her neighbor Mrs. Van Rensberg embody women's social confinement to the domestic sphere and conformity to gender roles. She therefore discards them, preferring to carry on her quest alone, driven by a rugged individualism ("She would *not* [italics in the original] be like Mrs. Van Rensberg, a fat and earthy housekeeping woman; she would *not* be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied, like her mother" (*MQ* 16)).

Yet, some critics have found in the landlady Mrs. Gunn, whom Martha meets in the city, a potential role model (for her). This kind, caring woman instructively tells Martha how she should treat men: "[…] you must keep men in their place, so they know from the start they're not getting something for nothing" (*MQ* 118). This lesson on men is taught in a more honest manner than by her mother, who always tries to laugh off sexual issues. Mrs. Gunn thus performs the function of a substitute mother, as evidenced by her statement, "if you want anything, just come to me […] think of me like a mother" (*MQ* 18).

Labovitz also sees the Cohen boys as Martha's "earliest mentors" (155). Providing her with books on psychology, philosophy, sexuality, sociology, politics and religion, they encourage and promote her self-education. But their role is not significant and Martha

discards them when she becomes aware of their subservience to Marxism. Thus, by contrast with the masculine *bildungsroman*, the mentor is almost absent in Lessing's quintet. Martha chooses the alternative route for the heroine, which is to pursue her quest for self-knowledge in solitude. She then ends with the crucial question, "who was she to be like?" unanswered (*MQ* 14). All along her journey, she has to fashion herself unguided.

Children of Violence also detaches itself from the nineteenth-century classical female *bildungsromane* such as *Jane Eyre*, where the mentor is usually a husband and "apprenticeship is reduced to a process of marital binding."[178] According to Labovitz, Martha marries young for political reasons: "Marriage for this modern questing heroine begins in the iron grip of necessity and ends by providing bonds which prohibit growth."[179] Martha is thus forced to get married because of the war. The bonds of matrimony, however, subsequently hinder her own personal development, which is why she dismisses her husband as a role model or mentor.

We can say in conclusion that Lessing's series provides a new perspective on the genre, for it runs counter traditional novels of formation and social affirmation. It is more a narrative of rebellion and transgression, challenging the standards set by the narrative of patriarchy.

---

[178] Rita Felski. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change.* Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1989. p. 6.

[179] *Ibid*. 161.

I. 2. B. When genre destabilizes female subjectivity: The study of self as narrative in *The Golden Notebook*

In *The Golden Notebook*, the tension between the aesthetic form of the novel and the subjectivity of its creator, Anna Wulf, reflects a new way of understanding the interplay of genre and gender. Lessing fuses the generic borders and plays with the laws of genre and gender, as we shall see, challenging conventional narrative forms and an essentialist sense of self and identity in distinctly postmodern ways. The novel, which has a multi-layered and fragmented structure functioning as a mirror to a fragmented sense of self, is indeed marked by formal experimentation.

Many critics did not understand the unconventional form of the book, its strange and often contradictory messages regarding society and the nature of subjectivity, as well as its fragmented and apparently chaotic style. Lessing commented on this reaction in her 1971 introduction to the book. She wrote that her "major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped" (14), thus emphasizing the interconnectedness of form and theme, genre and gender, and the inflection of subjectivity by language and discourse, and in so doing, a new way to conceptualizing identity. The text is then clearly a great work of postmodern experimentation for, as Marguerite Alexander suggests, "consideration[s] of form in postmodernist fiction can never be separated from those of theme or subject matter […]"[180.]

This part will therefore explore the chaotic structure and aesthetics of the book as reflecting a postmodern view of subjectivity as fragmented and diffused. By looking into the interrelation of genre and gender, I also hope to show that *The Golden Notebook*, apart from its allegiance to the postmodern aesthetics, fits into what Caren Kaplen calls "the outlaw genre,"[181] which can only threaten the laws of gender. In "decolonizing" genre, Lessing attempted to "decolonize" gendered subjectivity and the discursive effect of femininity and masculinity.

---

[180] Marguerite Alexander. *Flights From Realism: Themes and Strategies in Postmodernist British and American Fiction.* Great Britain: Edward Arnold, 1990. p. 9.

[181] Karen Kaplen. "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects." *Decolonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1992.

a. Transgressing the frontiers of genre

Written in 1962, *The Golden Notebook* marks a great shift in Lessing's narrative style, for it reflects the narrator's intention "to break a form" and "break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them." The text crosses the conventional boundaries of genres, blending various generic categories such as diaries, autobiographical elements, the diary novel genre (considered by Field as "the most elastic" and "lawless" of literary genres),[182] "bundles" of newspaper cuttings from 1950-1957, and the künstlerroman—a subgenre of the *bildungsroman* covering the artist's growth to maturity. As Sprague puts it, "hybrid is the perfect word for *The Golden Notebook*, a novel which speaks satirically, nostalgically, angrily, self-pityingly, self mockingly in multiple genres […]."[183]

This generic fluidity is the outcome of the narrator's frustration with traditional storytelling and formulaic genres. Her *Golden Notebook*, where generic boundaries overlap and the form is marked by fragmentation is an exercise in aesthetic experimentation. Lessing, as a matter of fact, allotted a substantial part of the preface to the form of the book, providing insight into her writing methods and the reasons behind its splintered structure. She insisted that writing *The Golden Notebook* made her discover a new mode of representation challenging without completely exploding the narrative. It was "the pivotal crystallizing process out of which all sorts of ideas and experiences [she] didn't recognize as hers emerged." She goes on writing that she "was learning as [she] wrote. The actual writing […] was really traumatic: it changed her" (27).

The form of the book mirrors freedom from conventional generic taxonomies, for although its structure gives the illusion of a feminine consciousness, trapped in the privacy of her diaries and notebooks, the diary entries ironically interact in a constant dialogic way with a novella entitled "Free Women," which functions as a structural framework enclosing and integrating the various notebook sections. The framing novel is divided into five sections and the notebooks that intersperse them are highly self-reflexive. This post-modernist style, with its space and room for "play" engaging the characters and readers, is among the most famous features of the book.

[182] In his book *Form and Function in the Diary Novel*, Trevor Field defines the diary novel genre as "being shaped according to varying amounts of logic and aesthetics," as opposed to the diary genre which mimics reality as it is and contains the intimate details of its author's life. Trevor Field. *Form and Function in the Diary Novel*. USA: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989. p. 75.

[183] Claire Sprague. "Re-reading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition." *Chapel Hill*, 1987. p. 202.

Anna Wulf uses each of the notebooks, distinguished by color, to record a different aspect of her life. While the black notebook focuses on her experience in Africa, the red notebook retells her problematic commitment to the British Communist Party. The Yellow notebook fictionalizes Anna's own life, particularly her love affair with Michael, in a novel-within-the novel entitled *The Shadow of the Third*, whose main character Ella may stand for Anna's double or alter ego. The blue notebook is closer to a traditional diary, for it tends to focus on states of mind, with entries set off by dates, beginning with January 7, 1950. Ironically, the internal stories contained in the notebooks occasionally threaten to overwhelm the framing narrative and become the primary focus, ending up by fragmenting the frame and shattering its narrative unity. The black notebook ends as a collage of newspaper clippings. A similar fate befalls the red notebook. The yellow one fragments into pieces of stories spliced together into a pastiche.

Lessing's narrative questions the validity of generic taxonomies: To Susan Watkins, "we are unable to find a safe home in familiar genres"[184] in Lessing's late fiction and *The Golden Notebook* in particular. Not only does the book transcend the normative genre of nineteenth-century realistic novels, but it also plays havoc with the conventional genre of the diary as mimetic by definition and dependent upon chronology and the outside world. In actual fact, the notebook entries share vague references to specific dates, the most obvious mimetic devices in the diary genre. Moreover, the diaristic experiments waver between real diaries the most authentic and truest to Anna's life, as exemplified by the blue notebook—and the type of diary novels embodied by the fiction written in the black notebook (entitled *Frontiers of War)* which is about Anna's fictionalized past. The latter diary (the black one) betrays the genre's original claim to authenticity. This is reinforced by Anna acknowledging that she is always "turning everything into fiction" (*GN* 232), which undercuts our ability to trust the reality described in the text and forces us to question whether anything we read is the 'truth.' Symbolically, it blurs the frontier between established genres and fiction and fact. The boundaries between the two narrative levels are thus breached (and are repeatedly breached throughout the text), making it difficult for the reader to make out levels of reality.

This idea is echoed in Todorov's view of genre as a fluid form: "Where do genres come from? Quite simply from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or several by inversion, by displacement, by combination."[185] Seen in this perspective, genres

[184] Alice Ridout, and Susan Watkins. *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings.* London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009.

[185] Tzvetan Todorov. *Genres in Discourse*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p 15.

are not fixed stratified entities. On the contrary, the system of genres is based on a dynamic and fluid exchange born out of interactions with, or even violations of, other genres. What is also threatened by the same token is the difference between male writing and female writing understood as manifestations of ontological and/or biological identities.

b. The postmodernity of *The Golden Notebook*

The fragmentation marking *The Golden Notebook* and analyzed above is an aspect of its postmodernity. By dividing each notebook into four segments and by framing the resulting four blocks (each of the four segments) with five chapters of "Free Women," the text disrupts perspective, linear chronology, and authorial omniscience. The book, in fact, deconstructs the Hegelian aesthetics which holds that the ultimate aim of art is to order discordant elements and to explore conflict in order to resolve it. The narrative seems to "wage a war on totality."[186] Its chaotic and multilayered structure is in keeping with the postmodern aesthetics of splitting and fragmentation described by Danziger:

> Fragmentation, duplication, startling juxtapositions, alternate versions of characters and events, deviations from established norms—and ultimately, violent confrontation—can all be interpreted as the natural consequences of decreased confidence in the ability of storytelling to convey meaning.[187]

Lorna Sage also explains that the postmodernity of the book resides in the deconstruction of the narrative process and the unstable shifting position of the narrator:

> Like so many of her postwar (but not usually British) contemporaries, Lessing moved to deconstruct the narrator and the narrative process. She would have said to analyze something like the psychoanalytic sense since the realist project remained as imperative as ever. And for this reason, it is perhaps better to describe what she is doing in *The Golden Notebook* as a new stage of "unsettlement" or "decolonization."[188]

Accordingly, Lessing suggests a postmodern conception of authorial agency and authority by positioning Anna Wulf as both subject, or teller, and object or character of her story. That is

[186] Jean François Lyotard. "From Answer to Question: What is the Postmodern?" *The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts*. Ed. Michael Drolet. p. 237.

[187] Marie A. Danziger. *Text/Countertext: Postmodern Paranoia in Samuel Beckett, Doris Lessing, and Philip Roth*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

[188] Lorna Sage. "Doris Lessing." *Contemporary Literature.* Vol. 25, No. 4 (Winter, 1984). pp. 488-493.

why there is a constant process of difference and deferral[189] as Anna occupies various positions in the narrative pattern. In *The Golden Notebook,* we see the novelist writing a novel (Doris Lessing on Anna Wulf) about a novelist writing two novels (Anna on Ella and 'Free Women'). Postmodern fiction itself challenges such assumptions by establishing, differentiating, and then dispersing "stable narrative voices."[190] As a consequence, the reader cannot definitely differentiate between the novel's subject, its narrator, and its author; in other words between the real Anna, the fictional Anna/Ella and the semi-autobiographical Anna, whose life and experiences are reminiscent of Lessing's. This dispersion of authorial control echoes the Barthesian "death of the author,"[191] whereby the authority of the author no longer holds hegemonic sway.

The five notebooks written by Anna Wulf are intrusive journals which tend to freeze the narrative flow and create a timeless effect, challenging the conventions by which stories were told during the nineteenth-century. The marginal or minor position of the diaries interacts dialogically[192] with the dominant or master narrative and challenges its power and hierarchy. This aspect attests to the narrative's postmodern quality which Hal Foster defines as a

> a critique of Western representation(s) and modern 'supreme fictions;' a desire to think in terms sensitive to difference (of others without opposition, of heterogeneity without hierarchy); a skepticism regarding autonomous 'spheres' of culture or separate 'fields' of experts; an imperative to go beyond formal filiations (of text to text) to trace social affiliations (the institutional 'density' of the text in the world); in short, a will to grasp the present nexus of culture and politics and to affirm a practice resistant both to academic modernisms and political reaction.[193]

---

[189] In his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference,* 1966, p. 206, Jacques Derrida explains "deferral" as the notion that words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean, but can only be evoked through additional words, from which they differ. Thus, meaning is forever deferred or postponed through an endless chain of signifiers. Difference, sometimes referred to as *espacement* or spacing, concerns the force which differentiates elements from one another and, in so doing, engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies which underpin meaning itself.

[190] Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988. p. 118.

[191] Roland Barthes. *"*The Death of the Author.*" Image-Music-Text.* Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997. p. 147.

[192] Dialogism refers to the theory developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, who argues that in a dialogic work of literature as in the writings of Dostoevsky, there is a "polyphonic interplay of various characters' voices […] where no worldview is given superiority over others; neither is that voice which may be identified with the author's necessarily the most engaging or persuasive of all those in the text." Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. USA: University of Texas Press, 1982.

[193] Hal Foster. *Postmodern Culture.* Britain: Pluto Press, 1990. p. xiii.

Lessing challenges the superiority of master narratives over minor ones, and as a consequence undermines the privilege of high over mass culture. The postmodernist contention is that grand narratives of any variety are totalizing and lead to the oppression and marginalization of the other, or groups outside dominant hegemonies or cultural elites. Waugh notes,

> Postmodernism tends to claim an abandonment of all metanarratives which could legitimate foundations for truth. And more than this, it claims that we neither need them, nor are they any longer desirable. We have witnessed the terror produced through instrumental modes of universal reason, the generalizing violence of the concept and that we no longer want 'truth' and we do not even require the 'truth effect.'[194]

Contemporary theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty, challenge the idea that ideals such as reality, truth and objectivity can be unequivocally and universally grounded, postulating instead that these concepts are highly contingent and contextualized. As a result, religious, philosophical and ideological grand narratives, including Science and Marxism, and their respective claims on reality and truth, come under fire as being essentialist and exclusionary. The world becomes a place of multiple perspectives, where (ideally) the voice of the marginalized, the excluded, the 'Other' is allowed to speak, where one viewpoint is not privileged over another and where multiple views of reality are allowed to co-exist.

Lessing is also interested in using postmodernist writing techniques to challenge conventional understandings of language, art and the novel form, and not simply as an exercise in aesthetic experimentation, but rather to depict the fragmentation and alienation she sees all around her. *The Golden Notebook* thus dramatizes her conviction that the fragmentation of society is such that it cannot be contained by traditional novelistic forms.

Furthermore, like postmodern writers, Lessing undermines linearity and narrative progression. Her novel has no set beginning and ending. Its circularity, added to the metafictional quality of the book, defies the notions of beginnings and endings and disrupts traditional linear or chronological narratives. The result is a text that is multilayered and cyclical rather than linear and progressive.

---

[194] Patricia Waugh. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1984. p. 4.

Another writing technique that is commonly used by postmodern writers to challenge linearity is erasure. Erasure, or "*sous rature*" in Derrida's[195] words, is where a fictional world, scene, object, concept, word or person is constructed, then deconstructed or erased. In *The Golden Notebook,* the text is repeatedly written then erased by Anna. This happens in the blue notebook when Anna decides to describe a day in her life as objectively as possible. Thirty three pages and a day later, an omniscient narrator (presumably Anna) notes in the journal, "The whole of the above was scored through—cancelled out and scribbled underneath: No it didn't come off. A failure as usual" (*GN* 360). This is followed by a small paragraph that summarizes the thirty-three pages in a businesslike 'journal entry' tone. She does this again later in the Yellow Notebook. Anna describes a story that is 'inside Ella' but follows it up with the comment, "Ella does not write this story. She is afraid that writing it might make it come true" (*GN* 448).

In both of these instances, Anna invites the readers to erase from their memories what they have just read and to accept a new version of events. It is nevertheless obviously impossible to forget what we have just read so that the technique has the simultaneous effect of excluding and including the erased text. McHale describes this 'bifurcation' as "violating sequentiality by realizing two mutually exclusive lines of narrative development at the same time."[196] He suggests that the "ontological peculiarity" of a world in which events both do and do not happen displaces the "truth/falsity" dichotomy, which results in a kind of "ontological flickering" between the various realities.[197]

Despite its postmodern dimension, *The Golden Notebook* remains mostly realistic and has biographical elements from Lessing's own life, which can be observed in Anna Wulf's memories of Africa in the black notebook. This suggests that the woman writer cannot disentangle herself from the social and cultural tradition and dwell in a solipsistic mode of being, which questions the possibility of an essentially feminine writing. She has therefore to create subversive discourses out of signifying systems "inscribed within the culture she would oppose."[198]

---

[195] McHale states that Derrida uses erasure in order to, "remind us that that certain key concepts in western metaphysics such as existence and objecthood continue to be indispensable to the philosophic discourse even though that same discourse demonstrates their illegitimacy. They both cannot be admitted, yet cannot be excluded." Brian McHale. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Great Britain: Routledge, 1991. p. 100.

[196] *Ibid*. p. 108.

[197] *Ibid*. p. 106.

[198] Gayle Greene. "Doris Lessing's *Landlocked:* A New Kind of Knowledge." *Contemporary Literature*. xxviii, 1987, p. 82.

c. Deconstructing gendered subjectivity in *The Golden Notebook*

Subjectivity in *The Golden Notebook* can be analyzed through the writing process undertaken by the writer-protagonist Anna Wulf. Writing, for her, is the means by which this woman artist can produce a work of art and her subjectivity comes to be reconceptualized as she sees herself as the living embodiment of her notebooks: divided, bracketed and broken. The formal fragmentation of the text mimics the female protagonist's miscellaneous selves. This symbiotic connection conveys the idea that *The Golden Notebook* enacts the postmodern theory of subjectivity as discursively constructed and located in the text. Lessing seeks to decolonize gendered subjectivity just as she decolonizes generic categorization and formal narrative rules (as demonstrated in the previous part).

Before she starts writing her notebooks, Anna Wulf perceives subjectivity as essentially coherent, unchanging and whole. Yet, facing a world of violence, terror and chaos marked by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Stalin's purges and South Africa's apartheid, she grows more and more divided. It is to maintain order and fend off the chaos brooding inside her self that she sets out writing. She writes one night, "I know that an awful black whirling chaos is just outside me, wailing to move into me. I must go to sleep before I become that chaos" (*GN* 367). She adopts, to that end, a strategy of demarcating boundaries between the disparate facets of her subjectivity, by enclosing each into a different colored notebook. The four notebooks which depict contradictory versions of her character can be understood as different aspects of her split personality. Anna talks about her various "selves" or the different Annas and often describes herself in the third person. At one point while talking to Molly, Anna thinks, "I wonder what I'm going to say? And who the person is who will say it? How odd, to sit here waiting to hear what one will say" (*GN* 497).

Symbolically, she embodies the figure of the modernist subject haunted by a desire for wholeness and order in a world where everything around her falls apart. Her urge to write is prompted by the need to give form to a formless experience and impose order on a disordered world. She voices this desire in the black notebook:

> The quality a novel should have to make is the quality of philosophy. […] Yet, I am incapable of writing the only kind of novel which interests me: a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life. (*GN* 80)

As Anne M. Mulkeen puts it, "Who else in contemporary literature besides Doris Lessing has given us a heroine for whom this vision of world unity is the most basic of drives, the most burning of longings?"[199] In this respect, Anna's wrestle with words conveys her struggle against the randomness and her external "crack-up."

Moreover, *The Golden Notebook* challenges the notion that language has the capacity to contain reality. Anna realizes that her attempt to maintain order and mastery over the self through writing is doomed to failure because of the elusive and deceptive nature of the writing process. As her personality starts to break up, so too does her belief in the ability of language to convey meaning.[200] She says:

> I am in a mood that gets more and more familiar: words lose their meaning suddenly. I find myself listening to a sentence, a phrase, a group of words, as if they were a foreign language - the gap between what they are supposed to mean, and what in fact they say seems unbridgeable. (*GN* 299)

Anna perceives a growing gap between language and reality. Language seems to dissolve; it sub-divides into specialized discourses, losing its comprehensiveness and is as such unable to evoke the fragmentation of the world without disintegrating. She cannot master and exercise control over reality through language. For Anna, this breakdown of language is a menace upon her personal wholeness:

> It occurs to me that what is happening is a breakdown of me, Anna, and this is how I am becoming aware of it. For words are form, and if I am at a pitch where shape, form, expression are nothing, for it has become clear to me, reading the notebooks, that I remain Anna because of a certain kind of intelligence. This intelligence is dissolving and I am very frightened. (*GN* 476-477)

By the end of the book, she writes "words, words. I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want… The fact is the real experience can't be described" (*GN* 633). Anna feels "the thinning of language against the density of our experience" (259) for even though she manages to construct written facets of

---

[199] Marion Vlastos Libby. "Sex and the New Woman in *The Golden Notebook." The Iowa Review.* Vol. 5, No. 4, Fall 1974. p. 106-120.

[200] This is a recurring theme in *The Golden Notebook*. As Green notes, "When Anna can accept that there is no reality apart from the mind that perceives it and the words that shape it, she can accept that none of the versions [of herself as found in the notebooks] is true—or all are true, or truth itself is a fiction, invented rather than discovered. It is this that gives her the power of renaming. New possibilities incur ontological instability, and as Anna's role becomes more creative, we cannot always tell what is real and what is created." Gayle Green. *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change.* USA: University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 113

herself, she ultimately recognizes that none of these can ever completely represent her complex subjectivity. This is related to loss of meaning. She notes:

> I am increasingly afflicted by vertigo where words mean nothing. They have become, when I think, not the form into which experience is shaped, but a series of meaningless sounds, like nursery talk, and away to one side of experience… the words dissolve, and my mind starts spawning images which have nothing to do with the words, so that every word I see or hear seems like a small raft bobbing about on an enormous sea of images. So I can't write any longer. (*GN* 462-563)

If subjective wholeness is deconstructed in *The Golden Notebook* through linguistic fragmentation and experimentation, Lessing challenges gender by the same token. When the feminine and masculine worlds clash in her novel, it is always with scathing irony that Lessing relativizes masculinity and femininity.

Anna Wulf and her friend Molly are presented as independent and unconventional women who are aware of the gendered roles assigned to them by western society. Speaking about the masculine social system, Anna ironically tells Molly "Free women! They still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them" (*GN* 16). They keep criticizing this constructed quality of gendered roles, as when Anna "laugh[s]" at these established western dichotomies of "Men. Women. Bound. Free. Good. Bad. Yes. No. Capitalism. Socialism. Sex. Love" (*GN* 44). Lessing suggests, through Anna's voice, that these concepts are unstable and need not be exclusively associated with either men or women.

The questioning of gender is manifest when Anna demystifies the concept of "real manhood" in relationship with Ivor's homosexuality in section three of "Free Women": She wonders whether the former concept should be related to sexual orientation:

> Anna needs a man, in her life; she misses a father. Ivor's very kind to her. And yet because he's not a man—yet what do I mean when I say he's not a man? Richard's a man; Michael's a man. And yet Ivor isn't? [...] Why then should I feel that in fact I ought to have a real man and even for Janet's sake, let alone mine, instead of that charming friendly perspective young man Ivor? (…) A real man—Richard? Michael? Both of them are very stupid with their children. And yet, there is no doubt I feel their quality, their liking women rather than men, would be better for Janet than what Ivor has. (*GN* 334-335)

Although Anna implicitly admits here her preference for a normative heterosexual orientation regarding the psychological growth of her daughter, she nonetheless questions the existence

of an essential core "masculine" identity. The narrator alludes to the invisible cultural bias that influences Anna Wulf's apprehensions about homosexuality. Anna ponders, "Why do I take it for granted that children can't be corrupted? What it amounts to is, I'm certain that my influence, the healthy female influence, is strong enough to outweigh theirs. But why should I?" (336) The latter question remains unanswered, as if Lessing wanted to suggest that Anna's fears are unfounded.

The novelist also destabilizes gender categories and challenges the concepts of phallogocentrism and normative heterosexuality through the way Anna produces a counter-discursive enunciative act[201] when she addresses Ronnie, Ivor's counterpart: "very *jeune fille,* you are," Anna thinks silently (336). This subversive strategy of linguistic displacement introduces new enunciative situations which are at odds with the classical system of socio-sexual pattern. This new act of counter-interpellation fluidifies a gendered self, which implies that the male sex and the masculine gender constitute a fixed and compact entity.

Furthermore, addressing Ronnie as a "jeune fille" reflects an assault on traditional views of representation, as it repudiates the idea of a one-to-one relationship between a word (a signifier) and some external fixed meaning (a signified). All the terms related to normative concepts of heterosexuality and masculinity like the "normal man" or the "real man" are written between commas, as if Lessing wanted to scoff at the illusory empty nature of such concepts, to suggest that the linguistic sign is actually differential. Ultimately, by overtly tackling the issue of homosexuality and creating a troubling instability of sexual identity, the novelist anticipates Butler's revolutionary idea that "gender is a free-floating artifice"—an unprecedented idea in the literature of the time, especially when the Women's Liberation Movement had not yet developed.

In conclusion, Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* radically decenters and fragments subjectivity and narrative by challenging generic categories and the hierarchical (and gendered) oppositions between men and women.

[201] For Lacan, since the subject comes into being through language he does so through the exercise of signifying articulation—the act *of* enunciation. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive limits of "Sex,"* New York and London, Routledge, 1993, p. 121. Judith Butler explains the phenomenon of "girling" as opposed to "boying" as the pragmatic result of a speech act—the "sexing" equivalent of Louis Althusser's act of interpellation.

I. 2. C. Doris Lessing and the female literary tradition

Studies such as Patricia Spacks's *The Female Imagination* (1975), Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) and Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1979) were among the first hundreds of critical projects which investigated women's position within literary history. They attempted in their works to understand why the female novelists before Jane Austen were erased from cultural memory and showed that male writers were privileged because of their engagement with warfare and politics, unlike the more domestically centered literary works by female authors. In the same way, Christine Battersby showed how the masculine perspective and the gendered view of aesthetic appreciation belonging to it were deeply "ingrained in standards of artistic merit."[202] Elaine Showalter's gynocritical book *A Literature of Their Own* was a pioneering study of British women's literary tradition in relation to the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and the struggle to conquer their place in a male-dominated world. I shall now before going further trace the evolution of the female literary tradition and situate Doris Lessing within this context.

According to Showalter, women writers constitute a "subculture" unified by "common values, conventions, experiences and behaviors."[203] Pursuing her project of revising the literary canon and establishing an alternative tradition of women's literature, she coined the term "gynocriticism," which she defines as

> the study of women as writers, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual or collective career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition.[204]

"Gynocriticism," according to Showalter, begins at the point when "we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture."[205] This

[202] Christine Battersby. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. London: The Women's Press, 1989.

[203] Elaine Showalter. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory.* New York: Virago Press, 1986. p. 11.

[204] *Ibid*. p. 248.

[205] *Ibid*. p. 250.

feminist critic has shown how women's literature has evolved starting from the Victorian period to the modern time. In *A Literature of Their Own*, she makes up three stages—the "Feminine," a period beginning with the use of the male pseudonym in the 1840s until 1880 with George Eliot's death; the "Feminist," from 1880 till women's enfranchisement in 1920; and the "Female," from 1920 till the present-day, including a new stage of self-awareness about 1960:

> First, there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.[206]

The mid-nineteenth century "feminine" phase, exemplified by Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, is marked by the internalization of the values of the "dominant tradition" (13), of "veneration of male culture" (44) and the pursuit of the educational standards of the "male establishment" (42). The transitional generation of so-called "sensation novelists" is praised for expressing "female anger" (160), "self-assertion and independence" (161). The late nineteenth-century "feminist" novelists, whose exemplary figure is Olive Shreiner (203), are criticized for their "revulsion from sexuality" (29) but extolled for their literature of protest. "Feminists" also elaborated socialistic theories of women's relationships to work, class, and the family, and entertained an "all-out war of the sexes" (29).

But no matter whether we follow Showalter's three-phase development or Toril Moi's three-period distinctions—feminist (political), female (biological), feminine (cultural)[207]—or Julia Kristeva's three-stage stage struggle—radical feminism (equality demanded), liberal feminism (femininity extolled), anti-metaphysical feminism (dichotomy rejected)[208]—women's literary history has evolved from oppression to expression through suppression.

Elaine Showalter was one of the prominent figures in American academia to be greatly influenced by French feminists like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, especially with their concept of *écriture féminine*, a characteristically female mode of expression which is supposed to reflect the female body, the physical closeness between

[206] Elaine Showalter. *A Literature of Their Own.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977. p. 13.

[207] Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary theory*. London: Routledge, 1985.

[208] Julia Kristeva. "Women's Times." *Signs*. Vol. 7. N° 1. 1981, pp. 13-35.

infant and mother. These women writers were strongly involved in the heady political climate of 1968 and intensely engaged with the theories of Jacques Lacan. Juliet Mitchell was one of the first English-speaking feminists to draw upon the liberating potential of French feminism. But this was not entirely new in the British context: Virginia Woolf had speculated years earlier on the way in which the sentence structure should be a "woman's structure." She began reconstructing a tradition of British women writers in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Realizing that she "[had] the feeling of a woman, but [had] only the language of men,"[209] she felt the necessity to theorize for a new British female writing and discourse.

Since language is male-oriented, she attempted to find a form of writing which might be inherently feminine and free from the male bias. Virginia Woolf explains that "Western civilization is patriarchal, history is his-story, literature is phallogocentric, language is man-made, and science is not sexless; she is a man… a father too."[210] If women were to become writers, it was not enough to get rid of the ghost of the father, the patriarchal tradition looming in the background. It was also necessary to do away with "Angel [of] the house," the phantom of ideal womanhood that dictated that women must be "sympathetic," "charming" "unselfish," "excellent in housework," self-sacrificial, "pure" and "without a mind or wish of her own."[211] Killing the angel, according to Woolf, was part of the occupation of a woman writer, for "had I not killed her [the angel woman] she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing." [212]

Critics such as Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin were the first to investigate the relationship between Doris Lessing and Virginia Woolf. Saxton writes that Woolf and Lessing share the mind/body split: "deep within each writer's work is a lurking suspicion that woman's biology may indeed be a trap for her brain."[213] Both critics also view in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Woolf's *The Waves* daring attempts to "break the mold of the novel" and to break the form of their lives.

Beside Virginia Woolf's influence on the literary scene of British women writers, the fierce enthusiasm of Second Wave Feminism in the 1960s produced a radically new phase for

---

[209] Virginia Woolf. *Women and Writing.* Ed. Michelle Barret. New York: Harcourt, 1979. p. 67.

[210] *Ibid*. p. 8.

[211] *Ibid.* p. 59.

[212] *Ibid.*

[213] Ruth Saxton, and Jean Tobin. *Breaking the Mold: Female Identity, Consciousness, and Form in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing*. New York: St. Martin Press, 1994. p. 122.

the female novel, even if the novelistic works of the sixties and seventies adopted both the literary aesthetics of nineteenth-century realism and the twentieth-century Freudian and Marxist analysis which led up to an authentic female literature concentrating on women's experience. From then on, Showalter writes, fiction writers such as Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble and A. S. Byatt were concerned with

> the conflicts between art and love, between self-fulfillment and duty. They have insisted upon the right to use vocabularies previously reserved for male writers and to describe formerly taboo areas of female experience. For the first time, anger and sexuality are accepted not only as attributes of realistic characters but also […] as sources of female creative power… Lessing and Drabble particularly see themselves as trying to unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision, and they are concerned with the definition of autonomy for the woman writer.[214]

a. An appropriate definition

> Because standards of literary value have always been masculine standards, and theories of narrative have generally been rooted only in readings of texts signed by men, then it is important to intervene into the production of literature and criticism from the points of view of gender. [215]

Sally Robinson warns that the term "women's writing" must be used with caution, insomuch as the term connotes a homogeneous object of study instead of a diverse field of cultural production. It threatens to erase differences between and within writings of women originating in different cultural locations. Although this assertion is partly justified, Robinson still believes that women's writing can be viewed as a single body, as gender is considered as the key to understanding a subtext of repression and fantasy running through female narratives. "This enunciation of gendered subjectivity is a process that can be ruptured through women's self-representation, which is a process by which subjects produce themselves as women within particular discursive contexts."[216] Women's self-representation is most often signalled by a double movement: simultaneously against normative constructions of identity that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and social

[214] *Ibid*. p. 35.

[215] Sally Robinson. *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. p. 10.

[216] *Ibid*. p. 11.

practices, and toward new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions.[217] This double position, where women are simultaneously part of culture and outside it is a common trait in women's self-representation. The term "subjectivity" used by Robinson in *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, is

> an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices, not some immanent kernel of identity that is expressed through that same engagement. It is not constructed, once and for all, at some locatable point in the individual's history; rather it is a continuous process of production and transformation (11).

The terminology Showalter applied to the literary history of women's writing, namely "feminine," "feminist" and "female," can be linked to Robinson's definition of subjectivity. During the past centuries, women writers have made various attempts to redefine themselves and one can assume that as long as society changes politically and culturally, female identity is far from being in its last stage of development. Subjects are constituted through historically changing attitudes involving one's relations to sociality, power and knowledge.

b. The "anxiety of influence"

In *The Mad Woman in The Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar ask the question, "What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental attitude of literary authorship is overtly and covertly patriarchal?" (45-46) To answer this question, the authors have examined what they call "the psychology of literary history, the tensions, anxieties, hostilities or inadequacies writers feel when they confront not only the achievements of their predecessors, but the traditions of genre, style and metaphor that they inherit from such 'fore-fathers'" (47). Examining the literary production of nineteenth-century women writers, they discover a pattern of frustration and anxiety, which they label "the anxiety of influence"—a term they borrowed from Harold Bloom, one of the foremost researchers in the psychology of literary history. Bloom coined the term "anxiety of influence," designating the "fear that he [the writer] is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and

[217] *Ibid.*

beyond him, assume essential priority over his own writings."[218] Bloom's model of literary history assumed authorship to be an exclusively male phenomenon. Gilbert and Gubar theorize that the male writer's "anxiety of influence" is experienced by the female writer as an "anxiety of authorship" which they define as "radical fear that she cannot create, and because she can never become a "precursor," the act of writing will isolate and destroy her."[219]

The woman author does not experience the "anxiety of influence" the same way men writers do, since she must confront predecessors who are almost exclusively male and from whom she is obviously significantly different. The woman writer's battle then revolves around trying to establish another version of herself rather than accept what her male precursors make of her. In order to define herself as an author, she must redefine her place in society. This revisionary struggle must therefore, as Lessing also ardently pleads for with respect to the valuation of a novel, try to approach it from a new direction situated outside our familiar premises of knowledge. In 1973, Lessing was still very critical about her book *The Golden Notebook:*

> If it were coming out now [1973] for the first time it might be read, and not merely reacted to: things have changed very fast. Certain hypocrisies have gone. For instance, ten, or even five years ago it has been a sexually contumacious time-novels and plays were being plentifully written by men furiously critical of women... But these attitudes in male writers were taken for granted, accepted as sound philosophical bases, as quite normal, certainly not as woman hating, aggressive or neurotic. It still goes on, of course, but things are better, there is no doubt of it. (*Preface to The Golden Notebook* ix-x)

Gilbert and Gubar suggest so start this revolt by seeking a female precursor who might prove that this struggle against patriarchal literary authority can be won. Moreover, as confirmed by Bloom's theory of "anxiety of influence," male writers feel exhausted by their need to revise, whereas women writers see themselves as pioneers in creative writing.

c. *The Golden Notebook:* An icon

The Golden Notebook was published in 1962, at the time when Second Wave Feminism began to emerge and one year before Betty Friedan's path-breaking novel *The*

---

[218] Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. p. 47.

[219] *Ibid*. p. 49.

Feminine Mystique (1963) came out. It is not surprising therefore that the novel should have been received as the feminist bible of the Women's Liberation Movement, for the book deconstructs the conventional ideological and cultural gender institution of the time. She was therefore crowned as a feminist icon by the Women's Liberation Movement. Her novel is in line with Second Wave feminism,[220] which attempted to reform or appropriate existing political structures in order to advance women's interests along a civil rights mode.

Doris Lessing was a pioneer in discerning social trends, anticipating rather than merely confirming them. In the newly added introduction to the 1972 edition of *The Golden Notebook*, she writes that

> [s]ome books are not read in the right way because they have skipped a stage of opinion, assume a crystallization of information in society which has not yet taken place. This book was written as if the attitudes that have been created by the Women's Liberation movements already existed. (ix)

Ellen Morgan also remarked upon the emergence of a new kind of literature from Second Wave feminism which marked a break with the traditional bildungsroman: "a neo-feminist text manifested itself in which adulthood, previously equated with marriage, now meant the achievement of authentic selfhood."[221] Women's Liberation writers consciously chose to challenge the literary standards and representational strategies which they had encountered as dominant in American culture. The movement sought to incite its readers to recognize the real conditions of their existence and to "liberate literature itself from its restrictive and prescriptive male-determined standards of good and serious writing."[222]

In *The Golden Notebook*, the protagonists are "free women" who embody the modernity of the late fifties: they are divorced, have lovers and have a career; they want to lead an independent life and obtain the same liberties men enjoy. They represent the new type of ''free women:'' as Molly states at the beginning of the novel, ''Free. Do you know […] I was thinking about us, and I've decided that we're a completely new type of woman. We

[220] The political and ideological foundations of Second-Wave Feminism reach back to the 1800s, a period noted, as Judith Hole and Ellen Levine observe in their study *The Rebirth of Feminism*, for its "geographic expansion, industrial development, growth of social reform movements, and a general intellectual ferment with a philosophical emphasis on individual freedom, the 'rights of man' and universal education" (2). Early advocates for women's rights focused on suffrage because disenfranchisement was the most notable official exclusion of women. They believed that securing women's right to vote would bring social recognition of women's value which would lead to the moral and social improvement of the entire population.

[221] Maria Lauret. *Liberating Literature*. London (EC4P 4EE): Routledge, 1994. p. 90.

[222] *Ibid*. p. 77.

must be, surely?'' (26) They are also actively involved in the communist party. But while communism finally failed to bring about social change, the women's rights movement of the 1960 succeeded in making profound changes in society by conflating the personal and the political.

Because it explores the social, political and psychic features of a woman's consciousness, *The Golden Notebook* is in several respects considered as a prototype for feminist fictions of subjectivity. In the complementary introduction to the 1973 edition, Lessing tackles one of the major themes of the modern novel: the predicament of the artist in the modern world. But although she creates a strong personality with Anna Wulf, it is never her intention to embed the story in a strictly gender-related context. She aims to "encompass connections between the dynamics of gender relations, the history of the Left, postcolonial struggles, the nature of love, the insights and limitations of psychoanalysis, and the crisis in literary representation—all at once."[223]

Nevertheless, two important features of the novel were received as typically influential feminist writing. Firstly, the theme of the alienated female artist who suffers from a writer's block and who attempts to create order out of the modern chaos was taken up by (American) feminists, who saw the grappling with traditional modes of representation and language as a condition for social change. A single woman with a child, an artist and a political activist, Anna Wulf certainly does not fit any of the models of womanhood offered by the English society of the 1950s, represented in the novel as a fragmented and divided society in transit, as she tells her friend Molly: ''[t]hey still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them'' (26), thus ironically criticizing the structure of society as a whole and recognizing the impossibility of escaping the social reality of sexual difference.

Even though Doris Lessing frequently pointed out that *The Golden Notebook* does not predominantly deal with the battle of the sexes, Ellen Morgan[224] points out in "Alienation of the Woman writer in *The Golden Notebook*," the peculiar problem of the woman writer working in a climate of assumptions about women and sex roles, which does not foster female authenticity.

Lessing, however, by writing *The Golden Notebook*, sought to create a radical transformation of the relationship between women and men, making the reader aware of how women writers

[223] *Ibid*. p. 109.

[224] Ellen Morgan. "Alienation of the Woman Writer in *The Golden Notebook*." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973.

such as Anna Wulf "can be, and have been, alienated from their own authentic, sensitive, and accurate perceptions of sexual politics."[225]

d. Lessing's ambivalent position towards feminism

Despite the fact that her writing themes involve issues regarding women, mothers and children, Lessing keeps an ambivalent distance from feminism. In an interview at the Edinburgh Book Festival in 2008, soon after her winning of the Nobel Prize, Lessing clearly acknowledged her distant relationship with feminism, saying "they [feminists] don't love me. I don't love them either."[226] She repeatedly and overtly expressed her dissatisfaction with the label of a "feminist writer" that most critics allotted her. But why was Doris Lessing so critical of feminism? Why was the label of a "feminist writer" so frustrating for her?

Lessing's ambivalent reaction towards feminism might originate in her skepticism towards Radical Feminism, which she viewed as an essentialist movement whose adversarial approach reignited the war between the sexes. As Hooks observed in *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*,

> Fundamentally, they argued that all men are the enemies of all women and proposed as solutions to this problem a Utopian woman nation, separatist communities, and even the subjugation or extermination of all men. Their anger may have been a catalyst for individual liberatory resistance and change. It may have encouraged bonding with other women to raise consciousness. It did not strengthen public understanding of the significance of authentic feminist movement.[227]

Lessing was opposed to the concept of the war between the sexes. While she supported social equality for women, she did not envision antagonistic behaviors or approaches as the means to achieve this goal. Her broad humanist concerns aligned her more with the views of First-Wave and Moderate Feminists and made her skeptical and wary of the more radical expressions of Second-Wave Feminism. Lessing would agree with Hooks that this fear could potentially lead to a significant misunderstanding of the aims of the Women's Liberation

[225] *Ibid*. p. 54-55.

[226] Hermione Lee. "A conversation with Doris Lessing." *Wasafiri*, 24 (3), 2009. p. 23.

[227] Bell Hooks. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.* New York: Routledge, 2015. p. 34-35.

Movement. In the 1997 Salon interview, she expressed her discomfort at being a feminist icon:

> I'm always astounded at the way we automatically look at what divides and separates us....Men and women, and old and young, and so on. And this is a disease of the mind, the way I see it. Because in actual fact, men and women have much more in common than they are separated.[228]

Lessing was clearly baffled by the dualism and the antagonistic approach that radical feminists advocate. She said that a "lazy and insidious culture had taken hold within feminism that reveled in flailing men."[229] She views the radicalism of Radical Feminism as potentially undermining the gains of the women's movement with a polarizing rhetoric that invites backlash and overemphasizes sexual politics at the expense of political reform.

She told *The New York Times* in 2008 that she did not think that "the feminist movement had done much for the characters of women" and claimed that "[her society] [had] produced some monstrous women. What [had] happened is that given the scope to women to be critical and unpleasant, by God they have taken it, so men are suffering from it." This consideration contradicts Harold Bloom, who attacked her for being too angry and anti-male, accusing her of "a crusade against male human beings."

Her objection at the label of a "feminist" writer also springs from her long-life determination to resist categorization: She avowed her belief in equality, but regarded the politics of difference, which had defined modern discourse on gender, as a reiteration of division. She was particularly uncomfortable with the reductive logic which seemed to follow from such a characterization—namely. In the same way, she refuted the monolithic perspectives of "ism" ideologies and attempted to find the way for narratives of happiness regardless of age and sex. She also strove to find the significance of being a human being before being a woman, wife or mother. What we can see in this attitude is her firm standpoint as a humanist. The pursuit of "humanism beyond feminism" is a prominent leitmotif throughout her writing, regardless of the setting of stories and of changes in her wide-ranging themes. In "The Small Personal Voice," Lessing also implies that she is "a humanist writer" (10), not a feminist: "Once a writer has a feeling of responsibility, as a human being for the other human beings he influences, it seems to me he must become a humanist, and must feel

---

[228] Dwight Garner. "A Notorious Life. An interview with Doris Lessing." *Salon.* New York, 1997. http://www.salon.com/1997/11/11/lessing/

[229] *Ibid.*

himself as an instrument of change for good or for bad" (6). This is further evidenced by Michael Thorpe's review of *The Golden Notebook*:

> By writing that Mrs. Lessing's aim was to produce a comprehensive work 'describing the intellectual and moral climate' of her time, not to produce […] a feminist broadside. […] She aspired instead to meet the need for the more varied view of the human condition such as a Tolstoy or a Stendhal could provide.[230]

e. *The Golden Notebook* and public readership

The publication of *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 triggered extreme reactions among its readers, who were "stimulated, illuminated or even annoyed" by what she had written whereas the book has now become a familiar item in academic courses on feminism. But Lessing was so concerned with what she regarded as misinterpretations of her novel that she gave an interview to Florence Howe in 1966 specifically "because she wanted to say things about *The Golden Notebook* to American readers." She also wrote a new Preface to the novel for the 1971 edition, explaining her intentions and deploring the interpretations of some of her readers. Lessing was mainly distressed because hardly any of them seemed prepared to see the book as a whole: In her autobiography, *Walking in the Shade*, she remarks that reviewers and readers "were so disturbed by the sex-war aspect of the novel that they did not see anything else" (112).

Lessing reiterated her frustration in a newly added preface to the 1972 edition of *The Golden Notebook*, about the fact that the novel was frequently one-dimensionally reduced as being about the sex war:

> [T]he book was instantly belittled by friendly reviewers as well as hostile ones, as being about the sex war, or was claimed by women as a useful weapon in the sex war. […] But this novel was not a trumpet of Women's Liberation (8-9). 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. Instantly a lot of very ancient weapons were unleashed, the main ones, as usual, being on the theme of 'She is unfeminine,' 'She is a man hater.' This particular reflex seems indestructible. (9)

Lessing implicitly invites her readers to go beyond a surface-reading of her novel. This depth

[230] Michael Thorpe. *Doris Lessing*. Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1973. p. 25.

in vision and analysis becomes clear when she delves into the unconscious of her characters, as we shall see in the second chapter

"Who looks outside, dreams; […] who looks inside, awakes."

Carl Jung

"I find dreams particularly useful. I myself think a great deal before I go to sleep and the details sometimes unfold in the dream."

Doris Lessing, *The New York Times*, April 22, 1984

CHAPTER II:

THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF

II. 1. The chaotic self and the unconscious

This chapter will discuss Doris Lessing's fiction within its psychoanalytical Jungian and Laingian frameworks and will focus on specific textual details such as the dreams of the female protagonists, which may help make sense of the heroines' construction of their subjectivities and sense of selfhood. Lessing's perspective shifted from the Marxist realist philosophy at work in *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage* to psychology, particularly Jungian and Laingian psychology, in the later novels of the series. Greatly influenced by Carl G. Jung and R. D. Laing after 1960, she put a premium on dreams and the non-rational and saw madness as a state of great creative potential. She viewed it as a dynamic process leading to change and a healing reconciliation within the person concerned. This change corresponded to a shift from realism towards a growing preoccupation with lyricism and psychoanalysis. She thus began to question the techniques of realism, the rational and the causal delineation of human experience, holding that the novelist needed different textual methods to convey the many layers of consciousness in his/her characters as well as their breakdowns and mental crises. Indeed, Lessing now considered that self-knowledge involved taking into account the psychic realities which were most of the time hidden from us. The move beyond realism to lyricism accompanied her evolving sense of female identity.

- From realism to lyricism

In his essay "*Landlocked*: A New Kind of Knowledge," Gayle Greene asserts that the first three books *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage* and *A Ripple from the Storm* are the most conventional realist novels of the series; they offer the "bleakest vision of the relation of individual conscience with the collective in their portrayal of the individual as determined by the collective."[231] Indeed, the female protagonist, in these narratives, is subjected to different institutional discourses binding her and constraining her quest for selfhood—The phallocentric discourse of the Cohen brothers, of her husband Douglas Knowell, and of the

[231] Gayle Greene. Doris Lessing's *Landlocked*: "A New Kind of Knowledge." *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 28. N° 1. (Spring 1987). p. 84.

men of the Sports Club, the discourse of matrimony and motherhood, as well as the discourse of Marxism, which proves to be as conditioning as the ideology of the colonial society.

Before 1965, Lessing's fiction was realistic, in the tradition of the great contemporary novelists of the nineteenth century, particularly Stendhal and Balzac as well as Turgnev and Chekhov, whose literature aimed at exposing the ills of their respective societies. For Lessing, realist writing was the highest literary form, "higher than and out of reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, naturalism or any other "ism."[232] Sharing the same view, Georg Lukács suggests that

> every major realist fashions the material given in his own experience, and in so doing makes use of techniques of abstraction among others. But his goal is to penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society. [233]

Lessing used the techniques of realism to uncover her characters' social flaws, and ultimately show the gap between public and private consciousness. Nineteenth-century realism, of which Lessing was such an admirer, concentrated on "truth to the observed facts of life" and "originated in the desire of writers to distance themselves from romantic idealism, melodrama and starry-eyed lack of concern for contemporary economic and social issues."[234] The realist artist was expected to concern himself with "the here and now, with everyday events, with his own environment and with the movements (political, social, etc.) of his time", not "with presenting the supranormal or transcendental."[235] It aimed at a faithful representation of the human condition, valuing the exact documentation of facts rather than what belongs to the fantastic or the improbable. That is why literary realism does not take plots from "mythology, history, legend, or previous literature:" it focuses on "individual experience, which is always unique and therefore new."[236] It is characterized by a considerable "amount of attention, [which] it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed

---

[232] Doris Lessing. *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews.* New York: Knopf, 1974. p. 16.

[233] Georg Lukács. "Realism in the Balance." *Aesthetics and Politics*. Ed. Ronald Taylor et al. London: New Left Books, 1977. p. 38.

[234] Monika Fludernik. *An Introduction to Narratology.* London: Routlege, 2009. p. 53.

[235] Cuddon, J. A. *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998. p. 729-730.

[236] Ian Watt. *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1987 [1957]. p. 13.

presentation of their environment" (18). The characters are made unique: they "set in a background of particularized time and place" (21). A quantity of seemingly superfluous detail allows for the creation of "an actual physical environment" (26), and the preservation of "a causal connection operating through time" (22). On the whole, the novel stylistically strives to become as "full and authentic [a] report of human experience" (32) as it can be.

In short, the realist novel answers the writer's attempt to capture his/her world and the spirit of his/her time or, to borrow Lessing's phrase, "the world-mind."[237] Realism is also in line with Lessing's social commitment, for she stressed, in her essay "The Small Personal Voice" (1957), the moral and social responsibility of the artist, describing him/her as "an architect of soul" and is therefore responsible for society.

In "Realism and the Contemporary Novel,"[238] Raymond Williams, an influential literary and cultural critic of the late 1950s, argues that there are different realisms, and different ways of viewing realism. But although a certain type of realism has been "associated with the rising middle-class, the bourgeoisie," other readings show it to be "in part a revolt against the ordinary bourgeois view of the world" (274). It is this particular kind of progressive or committed realism that Lessing pursued for most of the 1950s. To her, realism was "an art which sprung […] vigorously and naturally from a strongly-held […] view of life."[239] This genre was for her an aesthetic preference and a political imperative, as the realist technique enabled her to penetrate beneath the surface experience of individual characters, underlying the hidden socio-political forces controlling the actions and consciousness of individuals. In accordance with realist directives, *The Grass Is Singing* is meant to "draw the readers' attention to the social and political evils of which they are ignorant" (King 2). What is more, it begins with a newspaper report of a murder mystery, which is supposed to create an impression of authenticity. Commenting on the realistic technique of *A Ripple from the Storm*, Claire Sprague describes the work as "a superb political novel, an exploration at once satirical

[237] Lessing refers to the intertwined connections between humans or individuals and the collective as "a world-mind, a world ethic" in her preface to the second edition of *The Golden Notebook* (1971) (14), which Marxism is a first—unsuccessful—attempt at. She sometimes calls the world-mind "Zeitgeist," for instance in *Under My Skin*. This world-mind is, in my view, an essential idea for both Woolf and Lessing.

[238] Raymond Williams. "Realism and the Contemporary Novel." *Universities and Left Review*. Vol. 4, Summer 1958.

[239] *Ibid*. p. 16.

and painful of the contradiction between the surfaces of political discourse and the realities of political manipulation."[240]

By the end of *A Ripple from the Storm*, however, Lessing seems to become frustrated with the form of the realist novel. Discovering "the inability of realism to convey reality" (Whittaker 65), she starts experimenting with form. Structurally, the break with realism occurs in book IV, *Landlocked*, the novel preceding *The Four-Gated City* and following *The Golden Notebook*. In *Modern Novelists: Doris Lessing,* Ruth Whittaker observes that

> Martha cannot move on because Mrs. Lessing's use of narrative techniques at this stage of her development as a novelist does not allow her to convey the dynamics, movement and growth in the psyche. The linear convention of chronological story-telling—'and then, and then'—has to give way to other methods. Instead of moving *onwards* [original italics] in order to progress, Martha has to move *inwards*. To enable this in her characters, as well as to show it, Mrs. Lessing has examined the whole process of writing fiction to explore the ways in which the form can imprison the potential of the content, and how it can liberate it.[241]

Lessing grows aware of a contradiction between the conservative tendencies of realist narrative convention and her radical reevaluation of social conventions. She realizes that she cannot be innovative if she continues to write in the realistic discourses embedded within the ideologies she repudiates. She also explained why traditional realism was not successful in embodying the structure of modern-day reality: the works of the nineteenth-century realists were connected by a certainty of values which could no longer be found in literature. By contrast, what characterize modern literature are "a confusion of standards and the uncertainty of values" (*SPV* 4). If "the novelist's primary task was to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience" (Watt 13), one needed to search for new modes of representation that could embrace the present-day condition of uncertainty and insecurity. There then appeared the need for a radical change at the structural or narrative level as well as the level of characterization.

Whittaker stresses that Martha Quest reaches a point of stasis and sterility by the end of *A Ripple from the Storm*, especially after the demise of the communist group in which she has been involved. But this stagnation is also observed at the narrative and stylistic levels:

---

[240] Claire Sprague. "Re-reading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition." *Chapel Hill*, 1987, xi, p. 132.

[241] Ruth Whittaker. *Modern Novelists: Doris Lessing*. London: Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1988. p. 51.

"There is a sense of sterility, of wasted energy and dull exhaustion, not only thematically, but also in the tone of the narrative itself." She adds that "it is as if Mrs. Lessing too has come to a point of stasis, not through completion, but through a weariness with a linear chronology through which the story progresses but Martha does not."[242] In other words, in Whittaker's opinion, the traditional tools of realist fiction fail to convey the complex potential of Martha's self. This is why Lessing altered her narrative technique in her subsequent novel, *Landlocked*.

Written in 1965, *Landlocked* is different in tone and style from the first three novels. It is marked by fluidity and a lyrical rather than a realist mode. Its narrative and dramatic structures no longer depend on chronology and causation. This lyrical temporality is akin to "duration" as defined by Henri Bergson in the sense that it is a nonlinear, "mental" time, as opposed to what the philosopher refers to as the linear, "mathematical clock" time in his essay "Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness."[243] This Bergsonian duration indicates a qualitative approach to time in which past, present and future shade into each other and melt into an organic whole, a continuous flow similar to a moving stream so that time becomes spatialized.

The narrative world of *Landlocked* is dominated by memories of the past, prophetic dreams and projections into the future, visionary and intuitive moments as well as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. They all create an inner duration in which time stands still. Instructed by one of her dreams, Martha reconfigures time: on the drive across the countryside, she imagines a pre-war Europe and a post-war Europe, envisions a starving or revitalized Europe. All these scenes freeze the narrative flow of events. According to Gayle Greene, "nothing much happens to Martha in the course of *Landlocked*: her life is not only without the crises, turning points and resolutions that she had expected, but almost entirely eventless."[244] Her inner world overwhelms the external world of narration. Such a mode of writing is close to what the stream of consciousness writers aimed to achieve. In "Time and Free Will," Bergson suggests that "the juxtaposition of simple states [of mind] [creates] an infinite permeation of a thousand impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named" (133).

---

[242] *Ibid.*

[243] Henri Bergson. "Time and Free Will: An Essay on Immediate Data of Consciousness." Trans. F. L. Pogson. USA: Dover Publications, 2001.

[244] Gayle Greene. "Doris Lessing's *Landlocked*: A New Kind of Knowledge." *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 28. No. 1. Spring 1987. p. 102.

Bergson insists, however, in his essay, that language cannot always capture the living moments because it relies on analyzing, organizing, and spatializing experiences so that they can be communicated to others. In "Time and Free Will," he writes that

> [Language] will sometimes deceive us as to the nature of the sensation felt. […] In short, the word with the well-defined outlines, the rough and ready word, which stores up the stable, common and consequently impersonal element in the impressions of mankind, overwhelms or at least covers over the delicate and fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness. To maintain the struggle on equal terms, the latter ought to express themselves in precise words; but these words, as soon as they were formed, would turn against the sensation which gave birth to them, and invented to show that the sensation is unstable, they would impose on it their own stability. (131-132)

Like Bergson, Lessing becomes aware, while writing *Landlocked,* that language sometimes fails to convey elusive unconscious thoughts and strong feelings. The following passage highlights the failure of language to capture Martha's thoughts about her experience of love with Thomas Stern, which has led to her inner change (this intense love relationship will later be developed in further detail in this chapter):

> Her experience with Thomas had been so deep, in every way, that she was changed to the point that—but here it was that she was unable to go further. […] Some force, some power had taken hold of them both, and had made such changes in her–what, soul? (but she did not even know what words she must use) psyche? being?—that now she was changed and did not understand herself. […] But what had been the essential quality of being with Thomas? (*LL* 222)

The inability to find words and her unanswered questions (as "in what?," "soul?," "psyche?," "being?") suggest the ineffable quality of the heroine's feelings. Lessing also suggests that language fails to communicate the irrational thought processes attending daily events. Acknowledging the limits of language, she both describes and enacts in her writing her belief that another dimension is available to all of us provided we shift the perspective of our consciousness. Here is an example of this type of writing, which shows Doris Lessing's distrust of the rational mind as well as the failure of language to convey thoughts and feelings:

> There was always a point at which anything—loving someone, a friendship, politics: one went over the edge into… but she did not understand into what. Neither the nature of the gulf nor what caused it, did she understand. But a note was struck–and that it would strike could be counted on. And after that…

> When they occurred, these sharp, improbable moments, one felt as if they had nothing in common with what had gone before; that they were of a consistency, a substance, that were foreign. Yet, later looking back, it was always precisely these turning points, or moments which contained or announced the truth–harshly and improbably, because up till that time one had refused to acknowledge their possibility. And afterwards, it was not the moments like these, whose common quality was a suddenness, a dislocation, that were wrong, faulty; but one's way of looking at what had led up to them. (*LL* 193)

This passage is quoted at length to show its awkwardness and confusing syntax. These stylistic features underline the difficulty of writing about moments of non-verbal apprehension. The content described is non-rational to the extent that it eludes a conscious, linear progression of thought. Lessing shows Martha at the moment when her perception of her lover Thomas changes, but without an accumulation of rational thoughts leading up to it. Katherine Fishburn observes that Lessing recognizes that "a reliance on language and logical thinking" is a trap and that by abandoning an insistence upon reason and logic, "we can move beyond the world of reason to one of higher understanding."

The lyric mode creates a narrative world which is not dictated by clock time. An understanding of this different dimension of time, called "duration," stimulates her intuitive powers, making one less dependent on mechanical time, which is finitude, and more open to the non-measurable, qualitative aspects of phenomena. Past and present states of consciousness are fused into timeless moments, especially in dream scenes and memories which are clustered together in the same narrative.

The lyric mode is also felt in the overtly palpable rhythm and cadence of emotions and thoughts. The sentences are longer and more explorative, as demonstrated by the following passage describing Martha's love affair with Thomas:

> 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-laced light below her as if into water. At the same time, she watched Thomas's head a few feet below her through cracks in the floor: a roughly glinting brown head, recently clutched by fingers which now trailed through idling light, bent politely beside a large-navy blue straw hat. Thomas's voice, warm from love-making, answered questions about roses put in a voice that said it was going to get as much attention from the expert as her visit warranted. (*LL* 102)

The long descriptive sentences are evocative of a portrait or a painting. Emotions seem to overflow and pervade the whole scenery. In *Landlocked*, lyricism also emerges from a richly allusive system of imagery related to "landlocked" territories, deserted landscapes, "ruined cities […] pulverized ruins" (50-51) and nightmare houses. This focus on the inner thoughts and feelings of the female character derives from the interest Lessing developed in Jungian psychology, which influenced her in the early 1960s. She said that

> I think Jung's views are good as far as they go, but he took them from Eastern philosophers who go much further. Ibn El Arabi and El Ghazzali, in the middle ages, had more developed ideas about the 'unconscious,' collective or otherwise, than Jung, among others. [245]

II. 1. A. Carl Gustav Jung's influence on Doris Lessing

The renewed emphasis on inwardness highlights the major theme in Lessing's fiction: the construction of selfhood, which Jung calls "individuation." This term defines the process whereby unconscious impulses are assumed and integrated into the conscious life so that the self ultimately grows into full organic awareness. The Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung defines individuation as "becoming an 'in-dividual,' insofar as 'individuality' embraces our innermost and incomparable uniqueness; it also implies becoming one's own self." Individuation can be translated as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization.'"[246]

In the 1920s and 1930s, Jung travelled much, visiting North Africa, India and East Asia, and was inspired by Eastern cultures. This is why his analytical psychotherapy is to a great extent influenced by oriental cults, mythology, primitive cultures, alchemy, symbolism, intuition, dreams,[247] fairy tales and Eastern religions. He perceives the mysticism and spirituality lying at the heart of Eastern faith as a great challenge to Western psychotherapy. Standing outside the cultural traditions of the West and Europe gave Jung a vantage point from which to view in a fresh light not only the psychological and philosophical assumptions of the West, but also

[245] Doris Lessing in a letter to Roberta Rubenstein, quoted in her book *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979. p. 231.

[246] Carl Gustav Jung. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966. p. 173.

[247] In his autobiography Jung recalled that, in the years of inner struggle following the break with Freud, a wise prophet-like figure emerged repeatedly from his unconscious and became for him a kind of spiritual guide, an embodiment of a superior insight. This figure, which he called Philemon, was very real to him, and in his own words brought home to him the objective reality of the psyche. When he was in India, fifteen years later, he met a cultivated elderly Indian who told him, much to his amazement, that his guru was a dead person.

the foundational beliefs of his own culture as a whole, and to broaden the perspective from which to criticize Western civilization and the modern materialistic world. He was a pioneer in recognizing the possible contribution of the East to the discipline of analytical psychology and psychotherapy: "The philosophy of the East, although vastly different from ours, could be an inestimable treasure for us too; but in order to possess it, we must first earn it."[248] Jung was among other eminent psychoanalysts like Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Medard Boss, and R. D. Laing, who also made excursions into Eastern philosophy in order to enrich their theories and practices.

Jung believed that the quest for selfhood went beyond the narrow confines of the conscious ego and that self-transformation was possible through one's own efforts. Above all, he recognized the need for psychic wholeness, which was based on creative interaction between the complementary opposites of the conscious and the unconscious within the psyche.

The Swiss psychologist also believed that human beings could achieve self-knowledge by connecting themselves with their dreams and interpreting their symbolic and archetypal import. Through listening to the messages of our dreams and waking imagination, we could make contact with and reintegrate our various parts and ultimately become whole.
Doris Lessing was then clearly inclined to this Jungian valorization of dreams: In an extract from an interview by Jonah Raskin in 1969, she stressed that "with a few symbols a dream can define the whole of one's life, and warn us of the future, too."[249] It is this symbolic and predictable nature of dreams that Lessing acquired from her readings and friendship with Jung and developed in several of her novels.

a. Dreams

Doris Lessing shares in the nineteenth-century view that artists are the traditional interpreters of dreams and nightmares. For her, "dreaming," as Brewster puts it, "seems to be something of a discipline."[250] She writes, in her autobiography, that dreams are a vital part of

[248] C. G. Jung. "Civilization in Transition." *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. Ed. H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. London: Princeton University Press, 1953. p. 178.

[249] Jonah Raskin. "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview." *Doris Lessing, A Small Personal Voice. Essays, Reviews, Interviews*. Ed. Schlueter, Paul. London: Flamingo. 1994. p. 71.

[250] Dorothy Brewster. *Doris Lessing*. New York: Twayne, 1965. p. 30.

her life: "[they] have always been my friend, full of information, full of warnings" (*UMS* 297). She reiterates this view in an interview: "Dreams have always been important to me. The hidden domain of our mind communicates with us through dreams. I dream a great deal and I scrutinize my dreams. The more I scrutinize the more I dream."[251]

Lessing holds like Carl Jung that "dreams are the guiding words of the soul as they pave the way for life, and they determine you without you understanding their language." For her, dreams are states of greater perception than wakefulness.

Jung also interprets dreams as specific expressions of the unconscious with a definite, purposeful structure indicating an underlying idea or intention. According to him, the general function of dreams is to restore one's psychic equilibrium because they play a complementary or compensatory role in our psychic makeup. They are a source of communication from the unconscious and a regulating and complementary balance to the conscious mind:

> The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the psyche, opening into that cosmic night which was psyche long before there was any ego-consciousness, and which will remain psyche no matter how far our ego-consciousness may extend; [...] in dreams we put on the likeness of that more universal truer, more eternal man dwelling in the darkness of primordial night. There he is still the whole, and the whole is in him, indistinguishable from nature and bare of all egohood. Out of these all-uniting depths arises the dream, be it never so immoral.[252]

In "Civilization in Transition," Jung suggests that dreams illuminate areas that we do not have access to in conscious life. By reconnecting with his/her dreams, the individual achieves wholeness, self-knowledge and truth regarding the deepest recesses of the psyche. Wholeness is a key notion in Jung's thinking. It constituted for him the goal and purpose of psychic growth, and was central to his conception of the "Self."

b. The break with Sigmund Freud

After a long-term correspondence and friendship (from 1906 to 1914) during which Carl G. Jung recognized his debt to the discoveries of Freud in analytical psychology and psycho-therapy, the former ultimately opposed what he called the Freudian dogma regarding

[251] Jonah Raskin. "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview." *New American Review*. 8 (Jan. 1970). p. 172.

[252] C. G. Jung. "Civilization in Transition." *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. Ed. H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. London: Princeton University Press, 1953. p. 46.

the uppermost role of sexuality and the libido theory. In the preface to *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung*, the editor Alan McGlashan observes that the split of the father-son relationship between Freud and Jung was regarded by psychoanalysts as a "great tragedy." Yet, he adds that this break gave room for "the eventful full flowering of personality and achievement in both men," and subsequently "two magnificent and highly individualistic contributions to the understanding of the human psyche."[253]

Unlike Freud, who viewed most dreams as symbolic representations of unconscious impulses unacceptable to the conscious "I"[254], Jung thought that dreams contain symbols and archetypal images that are quite transparent and can be taken at face value if we are willing to hear what they tell us. The two men were interested in different schools of thought. While Jung was committed to the tradition of Kant and Plato, Freud was committed to empiricism. The latter was a rationalist, believing only in the power of reason in solving the riddles of life. By contrast, Jung was more the humanist than the scientist, and accordingly saw dreams within a larger cultural and spiritual context than Freud.

Besides, Freud and Jung's main difference lies in their conceptualization of the unconscious and the psyche. Although they both agree that the psyche is divided into areas with different functions corresponding to their degree of accessibility, they disagree on the nature and compartmentalization of the psyche. In the Freudian model, the unconscious contains material repressed from conscious awareness, primarily of a sexual nature, derived from past experiences and fantasies. In Jung's model, the unconscious contains all of these, as well as elements of a nonsexual nature, which may never have been conscious, but which are capable of filtering into awareness through the symbolic language of dreams. In essence, Jung describes a compensatory psychic system in which elements of the personality never function at the conscious level as a "shadow," as contrary to the conscious self. As Jung puts it,

> The activity of the unconscious is a balancing of the one-sidedness of the general attitude produced by the function of consciousness […]. The more one-sided the conscious attitude, the more antagonistic are the contents arising in dreams from the unconscious, so that we may speak of a real opposition between the two. As a rule, the unconscious compensation does not run counter to consciousness, but is

[253] Sigmund Freud. *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung*. Ed. Alan McGlashan. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979.

[254] Sigmund Freud. *An Outline of Psycho-analysis.* Trans. By James Strachey. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970.

rather a balancing or supplementing of the conscious orientation.[255]

Various aspects of this compensatory and self-regulating system function at different levels of psychic energy, and are manifested in dreams as well as in projections onto external objects and persons. The most rudimentary one is the "shadow"—the hidden and alien opposite component of the conscious, or acknowledged, personality. At a deeper layer of the psyche, the complementary qualities are personified in the form of an image of the opposite sex—the *anima* (for the male) and the *animus* (for the female). These entities are, according to Jung, products of an aspect of the mind's activity common to all human beings. They may correspond both to a person's actual life and to the larger collective experience of the human race.

Jung's method was concerned with relationships of meaning and the comparison of symbols and archetypal images. He used the term "archetype" to designate those symbolic, often personified configurations of dynamic mechanisms and experiences within the unconscious. The deepest of these potentialities is the "Self," a hypothetical construct representing the person as a whole, including both what an individual is and is not aware of.

Jung proposed that the ego is not an absolute monarch ruling the forces within the psyche, but an integral part of a dynamic system. The self, according to him, is "an unconscious prefiguration of the ego. The self is the totality of the psyche, "the sum total of conscious and unconscious contents."[256] This self is not a static entity but a dynamic process, "an active force whose essence is one of continual transformation and rejuvenation."[257]
In addition, the unconscious is for Jung a positive and creative force rather than a negative and dark one. This idea was congenial to Doris Lessing, who wrote that,

> there are difficulties about the Freudian landscape. The Freudians describe the conscious as a small lit area, all white, and the unconscious as a great dark marsh full of monsters. In their view, the monsters reach up, grab you by the ankles, and try to drag you down. But the unconscious can be what you make of it, good or bad, helpful or unhelpful. Our culture has made an enemy of the unconscious. (*SPV* 67)

[255] Carl G. Jung. "Psychological Types." *The Collected Works, Vol. 6.* Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959, p. 419.

[256] *Ibid*. Vol. 11. p. 140.

[257] *Ibid*. Vol. 9. p. 411.

If Freud views the unconscious as only made up of repressed or forgotten contents, Jung adds that the products of the unconscious are symbolic, spiritual and guiding messages.
Lessing's conception of her heroines' identity formation is in keeping with the Jungian model of psychic growth through the accommodation of opposing conscious and unconscious drives. In her fiction, the heroines' progress towards self-knowledge and their quest for wholeness is achieved through acknowledgement and incorporation of the elements of both the conscious and the unconscious mind. The four-gated city of Martha Quest's vision in *Children of Violence* is an eloquent imaginative structure embodying Jung's archetype of "quaternity" as defined in the following lines:

> The quaternity is an archetype of almost universal occurrence. For instance, if you want to describe the horizon as a whole, you name the four quarters of heaven [...]. There are always four elements, four prime qualities, four colors, four castes, four ways of spiritual development, etc. So, too, there are four aspects of psychological orientation. The ideal of completeness is the circle or sphere, but its natural minimal division is a quaternity."[258]

Lessing thus draws upon the Jungian model—the idea that the psyche is inherently divided, but will ultimately become whole as a result of its inner dynamic.

c. A Jungian interpretation of dreams in *Children of Violence*

The analysis of the characters' dreams in *Children of Violence* reveals the impact of the Jungian conception of the unconscious on the conscious. Lessing's use of dreams and Jungian symbols is extensive here, making the reader aware of the characters' hidden desires, motivations and potentialities. The whole narrative process of the *Children of Violence* series is driven by Martha's dream of the four-gated city which instigates her quest—a dream that initiates the first book of the series. Dreams proliferate mainly in book IV, *Landlocked*, in which Martha's condition is epitomized by two major dreams, that of the topsy-turvy house with the decayed rooms, which she must keep separate, and the nightmare of being landlocked. We shall now analyze the imageries of "house" and "landlock" and their Jungian symbolism. They signify internal psychological states as well as external phenomena.

[258] Carl G. Jung. "Psychology and Religion: West and East." *The Collected Works, vol. 11*. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959. p. 459.

- The house-dream

Martha's dream of the rotten house, decaying and "crumbl[ing] drily under her eyes into a pile of dust, broken brick, a jut of ant-eaten rafter, a slant of rusting iron" (*LL* 21) is symbolic of her disintegrating psyche, a metaphor theorized by Jung, who posits the house as an analogue for the psyche. With its "many rooms,"[259] the house is a fit symbol materializing the multiplicity of the psyche which is not an indivisible unity but a divisible and divided whole. This is clear in the dream he recounted in his autobiographical book, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*[260] (1983) about the house he had built for himself:

> The ground floor stood for the first level of the unconscious. The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene became. In the cave, I discovered remains of a primitive culture, that is the world of the primitive man within myself—a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness. (18)

Jung here describes the multilevel house as the symbol of self with its many levels of consciousness: the descent downward into lesser-known realms of the unconscious is represented by the ground floor; his final descent leads to a cave cut into bedrock, a part of the house grounded in the earth itself. This seems to be a symbol of the collective unconscious which is the deepest stratum of the psyche.

While the architectural design of the house is assumed to correspond to the structure of the psyche, the manner in which the rooms are used and the various movements between them correspond to the dynamics and libidinal processes of the psyche.[261] This imagery is to be found in *Landlocked*, where Martha's dream with its "house with half a dozen rooms" offers a striking evidence of the house-psyche symbol:

> […] she lived precariously, in a house with half a dozen rooms, each room full of people ([…] unable to leave the rooms they were in to visit the others, unable even to understand them, since they did not know the languages spoken in the other rooms) then what was she waiting for, in waiting for (as she knew she did) a man? Why, someone who would unify her elements, a man would be like a roof, or like a

---

[259] C. G Jung. "The Language of Dreams". *The Undiscovered Self: Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams*. *The Collected Works*. Vol. 18. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. USA: Princeton University Press, 1977. p 185.

[260] Carl G. Jung. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Recorded and edited by A. Jaffé. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983.

[261] In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung explains that activities involving this structure, such as its construction, reconstruction, dereliction and demolition, and its occupancy and vacancy, can likewise be construed as metaphors for libidinal psychic processes.

> fire burning in the centre of the empty space. (*LL* 37)

The compartmentalization of the house into "dozen rooms" materializes Martha's inner and psychic division; she is made up of different elements, each with often conflicting needs. These "elements" are personified as "people" who are "unable to leave the rooms" in which they live, "unable to understand" (*LL* 22) their conflicting needs.

Her psychic decomposition is further echoed in her dreams by the imagery of ants weaving around her soul, when she dreams of

> the house on the kopje, collapsed into a mess of ant-tunnelled mud, ant-consumed grass, where red ant-made tunnels wove a net, like red veins, over the burial mound of Martha's soul, over the rotting wood, rotting grass, subsiding mud; and bushes and trees, held at bay so long (but only just, only very precariously) by the Quests' tenancy, came striding in, marching over the fragments of substance originally snatched from the bush […]. (*LL* 21)

The crumbling house in Martha's dream connotes the unconscious dynamism underpinning the development of her chaotic psyche. While she is seeking wholeness and coherence, Martha can only feel fragmentation. The "red ant-made tunnels, weaving a net, like red veins, over the burial mound of Martha's soul" is an image conjuring up the idea of death and disintegration related to corpses eaten up by ants and insects.

As a matter of fact, at this point in the novel, the heroine feels spiritually dead and broken into pieces. Her psychological breakdown and consequent disintegration are the result of the death of an ideal community represented by the demise of the Communist Party of Southern Rhodesia, to which she was dedicated in *A Ripple from the Storm*. It is also intertwined with her failed marriage with Anton Hesse, a German communist refugee whom she met when she became involved with the Communist Group. This second marriage has turned out to be another fiasco, obstructing her search for wholeness and engendering further fragmentation. These events account for her psychic decomposition and its manifestation in her dreams. The message here is that the heroine needs a lover in her life or an ideal group with which she can identify in order to gain the wholeness she craves for in her quest for selfhood.

- The quest for wholeness through manly love

Within the Jungian perspective, Martha's quest for wholeness through manly love is a yearning for a synthesis of her personality. She seeks a center—a "mandala" self, an archetypal Jungian image and a Sanskrit word for "circle"—symbolizing wholeness, completeness, and perfection. A mandala is a "magic circle symbolically represented by the circle or quaternity, or both in combination, as in yantras of the Hindu gods and goddesses."[262] That is why Martha's quest is always intertwined with the search for a man who might fill her "empty center," for she always imagines that a man ("who would be like a roof, or a tire burning in the centre of [this] empty space") could "unify her elements" (*LL* 37). She dreams "persistently of that man who must surely be somewhere close and who would allow her to be herself" (*RFS* 274). This quest for wholeness is envisioned by Jung as a process of transformation, beginning with the psyche in a state of fragmentation, and ending with its eventual unification.

We discover at the beginning of *A Ripple from the Storm* that the absence of a lover in Martha's life triggers off a sense of fragmentation. Indeed, after her divorce with Douglas, she feels "not so much lonely as self-divided" (*RFS* 46). She then thinks "who, next, would walk into the empty space? She knew of no one; not one of the men about her now fed her imagination […]" (*RFS* 47). Ironically, the novelist reveals the illusion that leads to this inner division. Martha's self-delusion resides in her assumption that she can only be free without a man in her life. Yet, at each stage in her life, she needs a man to achieve wholeness and coherence. After leaving her husband Douglas, she has a brief affair with an airman but it is only short-lived. After he has gone, she once again feels incomplete:

> If the man goes away there is left an empty space filled with shadows. She mourns for the temporarily extinct person she can only be, with a man she loves; she mourns him who brought her 'self' to life. She lives with the empty space at her side, peopled with images of her own potentialities until the next man walks into the space, absorbs the shadows into himself, creating her, allowing her to be her 'self'—but a new self, since it is his conception which forms her (*RFS* 46).

However, the man who can help Martha fend off chaos and fill her "empty space" is comrade Thomas Stern, who becomes her lover during the latter part of her marriage to Anton. Since the alternative of a second marriage and a political cause have failed, Martha turns to the intense power of love. Her relationship with Thomas is both sexual and spiritual.

[262] A mandala is a drawing used in meditation which is designed to draw attention back to the center. It can be as simple as a geometric figure or as complicated as a stained glass window. Carl G. Jung. "Mandalas." *The Collected Works. Vol. 9.* Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959. p. 388.

Through her physical union with him, she finds out that "her body ha[s] become a newly discovered country with laws of its own, she studie[s] it with passionate curiosity" (*LL* 104). She "give[s] herself completely" to her lover:

> […] what was this absolute giving up of herself, and his need for it? What was the prolonged almost unbearable look at each other, as if doors were being opened one after another inside their eyes as they looked– how was it that she was driven by him back and back into regions of herself she had not known existed […]. (*LL* 105)

Most importantly, Thomas feeds Martha spiritually. He takes her "into an altogether new dimension" (*LL* 153). The description of their love in terms of "light" and "opening doors"—"as if doors were being opened one after another inside their eyes as they looked" (*LL* 105), "sinking deeper and deeper into light" (*LL* 153)—suggests that it allows access to the ideal city she sought in the earlier novels. Their union "amidst the leaf smelling warmth" of Thomas's shed and "reflected beams of orange light […] greenish sun-lanced light" (*LL* 99) evokes the rejuvenating forces of nature associated with the envisioned four-gated city: The "wooden walls" of the shed "grew from lawns where the swinging arc of a water-sprayer flung rainbows all day long" (*LL* 103). The imagery clearly evokes the harmonious ideal image of the four-gated city peopled by the rainbow of children of different races and colors as described in the first book of the series.

The "shed" that Thomas has built in the garden of his brother's house is the place where the two lovers meet. This new room "ends the division" of the house of her dreams and symbolically points to her newly-found integrity and wholeness. Whereas at the beginning of the novel, Martha was wandering from one room to another, in her dreams and metaphorically in her waking life, her experience with Thomas takes her into another room by giving her new knowledge and power. The "shed" which she resorts to "either to make love or simply to turn a key on herself and be alone" (*LL* 103) is the center from which she lives and feels whole. It is clearly the locus for revelation and spiritual succor.

> She has 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 has ended the division. (*LL* 103)

> By herself it would have taken weeks of thinking; I should do this or that, and then a drift into a decision. But now she lived from this new center, the room she shared with Thomas, a room that had in it, apparently, a softly running dynamo, to which,

through him, she was connected. Everything became easy suddenly. (*LL* 112)

Labovitz concludes that Martha's experience with Thomas has allowed a growth process which eventually enables her to bring all parts of her self together.[263] Through Thomas, Martha learns to listen to deeper voices in herself. It is "the most real thing that happened to her" (*LL* 155). Thomas is presented as a gardener nurturing growth in an alien environment and nurseryman in the city. Metaphorically, he feeds her spiritually. To Roxane Fand, "their attunement is a reciprocal opening up of doorways to each other's multiplicities,"[264] so that Martha's "empty center can be read as a dialogic space where her subjectivity mingles with his in relaxed re-creation, each reconstructing the other" (124).

Yet, Thomas fails once again to maintain her wholeness. His departure to fight the British deportation of Jews leaves her center empty. She feels "as if some part of [her] has died." This is why Martha will then, in her search for wholeness, turn to an ideal group related to communism.

- The quest for wholeness through group-identification

Martha's quest for wholeness is clearly visible in her identification with a group-ideal materialized by communism (and marriage with a communist leader), which rekindles her youthful vision of the ideal city. Pondering, as she first joins the Communist Group, upon the situation of "ragged, bare-footed" black children, Martha thinks that

> because of [her] vision (and ideally the group's), [black children] [were] protected and saved: the future [she] dreamed of seemed just around the corner; [she] could almost touch it. [She] saw an ideal town, clean, noble and beautiful, soaring up over the actual town […]. The ragged child[ren] [were] already citizen[s] of this ideal town, co-citizens with [whites]. (*RFS* 34)

The four-gated noble city, circular in structure, dreamt of by Martha as she joins the Communist party is a reincarnation of the Jungian "mandala." It indicates the center of the individual psyche in which the dominance of the ego is contested by the assimilation of the contents of the collective unconscious (symbols or archetypal images). The Communist group

[263] Esther K. Labovitz. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Peter Lang, 1986. p. 177.

[264] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood.* London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 124.

in which Martha is involved functions as a sort of home base, a container of archetypes where she creates and re-creates her sense of who she is.

Yet, contrary to her great expectations, she finds herself dispersed in a harsh world of politics. The discrepancy between the communist group's stated ideals and its strategic *Realpolitik* shatters her belief in a whole body unified around the ideals of equality and justice. The rhetoric of the Party, its meetings, agendas and procedures, contradict its expected commitment to the rights of the working class and the fight against racial prejudice. While Martha seeks to make her ideals real, the Communist Party grows more equivocal and absurd. While she yearns for wholeness in the ideological union of belief and action, the group falls apart and disbands. The inner split and contradictions of the Communist Party bring about its destruction. Martha becomes aware that the group's function is purely theoretical: "we talk and talk and analyze and make formulations, but what are we doing? What are we changing?" (*RFS* 110) Ironically, the only black African member is a spy planted by the local magistrate, who has no real cause to worry about the revolutionary capacity of the self-divided party. As a result, Martha's utopian dreams turn into dystopia. She becomes disillusioned with the socialist dream. She feels "herself cut off from everything that had fed her imagination" (*RFS* 278) and is "overwhelmed with its futility" (*RFS* 281). As a consequence, the two experiences of marriage and communism fail to feed her missing center and generate fragmentation and breakdown. Martha then feels that her "continuity [depends] on her determination to survive […], a watchfulness, a tension of the will […]" (22). She has to contain her chaotic splintering self and feels the need to "preserve wholeness through a time of dryness and disintegration" (*LL* 20). But we see that the heroine's inner split can be redeemed in her dreams.

- The search for equilibrium in dreams

Jung held that dreams perform a compensatory function by balancing the unconscious with the conscious. This is clear in Martha's dreams, where metaphors of the controlling woman are an attempt to compensate for her psychic chaos. Indeed, in her dreams, she is often the "housekeeper" responsible for keeping the "six or so rooms, […] furnished

differently" (*LL* 21) of the house separate, for "keeping separate" means for her "defeating, or at least holding at bay what was best in her" (*LL* 21). Allowing them to merge would mean chaos and disintegration. Meanwhile, Martha's dreams reveal "a faithful watchdog, or record, of what was going on, obligingly providing her with an image of her position" (*LL* 20). Her dream of the house is always associated with images of "the monitor," "the guardian" as is exemplified by the following passage:

> Her dream at this time, the one which recurred, like a thermometer, or gauge, from which she could check herself, was of a large house, a bungalow, with half-a-dozen different rooms in it, and she, Martha (the person who held herself together, who watched, who must preserve wholeness through a time of dryness and disintegration) moved from one room to the next, on guard. (*LL* 20)

The control of physical space gives Martha a sense of wholeness. She "move[s] from one room to the next, on guard." Her position as "monitor" or "guardian" enables her to avoid disintegration. Metaphorically, she seeks to contain her chaotic self. We can clearly see the Jungian idea that the conscious and the unconscious communicate in a balanced manner. Dreams here serve to guide the waking self in achieving wholeness.

In addition to the fact that the metaphor of the rotten house is significant of Martha's decaying psyche, it also reflects a profound psychological truth about the female protagonist: it is intimately bound up with Martha's feeling of displacement and deterritorialization in the mud house on the kopje. She needs territoriality in her imagined ideal city of London. In *Landlocked*, Martha experiences herself as cut off and living in a lonely vacuum, an "empty space" (*LL* 37). She is utterly rootless and feels suffocated by "the colonial small-town atmosphere;" Life appears to her "meaningless, wasted" (*LL* 212). By contrast, the dream of the noble city in London, with its potential of happiness, mitigates such feelings of dislocation.

Other dreams related to images of "sea" and "landlock" haunt the female protagonist. We shall analyze their function in the coming section as they instruct us further in Martha's psychic landscape.

–"Landlock" *versus* "sea" dreams

Before moving to England, Martha also has a recurrent dream of being imprisoned on a high, dry plateau, unable to reach her friends who are sailing across the sea: "Across this

sea which she could not reach […] sailed people she had known […] Athen, […] Thomas" (*LL* 128). This dream is emblematic of the prison of mortal life in Southern Rhodesia in which Martha feels locked up. This sense of mortality or the metaphor of dryness associated with it is expressed in the novel as follows:

> But there, if this city were to be, nothing would happen for a long time, except that dust would slowly film the roofs which now stood glistening in the changeable October moonlight. Then dust would fill the corners of verandas and pile up around the trunks of trees. This city, if emptied, would be conquered at last by dust, not by wet; its enemy would be dryness, the spirit of the high veld where tall, dry grasses have grown since—well, long before man first stood upright here, that's certain.
>
> For how many millions of years has the central plateau stood high and dry, dry above all, lifting upwards to the drought-giving skies? Where Martha stood on dry dust beneath the great tree, bones of drought-bred creatures had lain for—but what use was it to say words like millions, if she couldn't imagine, really feel them, longer (say) than twenty thousand? Dryness, dryness—the air snapped with it, she could feel the pressure of dryness shaping her substance, the dust was its creature and the air of October gritted on her tongue. (*LL* 197)

The Rhodesian landscape and its weather are used as both index and icon—a measure of the condition of society and a symbol of the heroine's inner state. Dryness is a central motif in the four novels, *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, *A Ripple from the Storm* and *Landlocked* to signify cynicism, frustration and paralysis. The "dry terrible October" refers to Martha's "birth month" (*MQ* 217) and to her claustrophobia as a wife and mother: "dryness, barrenness, stunted growth, the colors that are fed from starved roots—[…]—all under a high, dry, empty sky" (*PM* 282). Aridity is also prominent when the political communist group in which Martha is involved "collapses" (*RFS* 320). Martha's love-making with Anton is described as taking place under a "dry sky, clashing with barren thunder, split with dry lightning" (*RFS* 247)—an omen of the failure of their marriage. After Thomas Stern leaves her, Martha can only feel "the tense fighting smell of October, like cordite […], a smell of dry leaves" (*LL* 201). In *Landlocked*, the dream imagery of "landlock" is symbolic of her spiritual inner aridity, and the frustration of being unable to leave Southern Rhodesia: "In that ugly city, […] the sound of wind moving in dry leaves came into her sleep and she sat up in bed, incredulous that she was still here (*LL* 206).

Against these images of dryness are set a series of metaphors of rain, wetness as well as sea dreams. In *Landlocked*, desert landscapes, ruined cities, nightmare houses are offset by

regenerative forces of water. Dreams about water and the sea come to counter the general atmosphere of aridity and the dry and dusty land of Africa. More specifically, Martha's dreams take the form of a sensual wallowing in the salty atmosphere of England's seashore:

> 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. She woke again and again, with the smell of the sea in her nostrils and a tang of salt on her tongue. Then she sank back to sleep to hear waves crashing on rocks, to hear the slap and the suck of waves on distant shores. (*LL* 206)

The poetic and Woolfian sea-images ("waves like horses racing") and the smell of the sea in her nostrils, ("the slap and suck of waves") highlight the effect of the sea upon Martha's senses. She is at once the watcher, the smeller and the listener. She yearns for her beloved shore. In her subconsciousness, the sea-dream is so intense and vivid that it engulfs her conscious feelings in her waking life: "she could not hear the dry wind in the trees, she heard waves hissing on a grey, chalky shore" (*LL* 206).

The dream suggests the transformative and regenerative nature of the ocean, a Jungian archetype signifying rebirth and transformation. Jung described the water symbolism in these terms:

> Whenever water appears it is usually the water of life, meaning a medium through which one is reborn. It symbolizes a sort of baptism ceremony, or initiation, a healing bath that gives resurrection or rebirth […].
>
> […] The baptismal font […] is the return to the womb of consciousness, since consciousness has arisen in that state […]. The return to such a condition has a healing value, because it brings things back to their origin, where nothing is distributed, yet everything is still right.
>
> It is as if one were gaining there a sort of orientation of how things really ought to be. Return into the mandala is something like a sleep or a trance in which the conscious is done away with to a large extent and things can find their natural way again. And the water is healing simply because it is the low condition of consciousness where everything is undisturbed and can therefore fall into the right rhythm.[265]

Moreover, dreams about the sea have another function: they re-launch the theme of the journey and voyage at the narrative level, and foreshadow Martha's voyage to England.

[265] C. G. Jung. *Visions, Seminars*. Vol. 2. Notes of Mary Foote. Zurich: Spring Publications, 1976. pp. 409-410.

Her dreams fill her with longing for the indefinite space of the seashore. She thinks, "I'm going to get off this high, dry place where my skin burns and where I can never lose the feelings of tension and I shall sit by a long grey sea and listen to the waves break, I shall hear the waves break and sink in a small hiss of foam" (*LL* 147). This compulsive and obsessive nature of dreams of the sea reflects Martha's desire find rescue and light in the sea:

> Martha shut her eyes and listened–water, water falling, water. Somewhere was water, was rescue, was the sea. In this nightmare, she was caught, […], somewhere else, was light, was the sound of water breaking on rocks. Somewhere lay shores where waves ran in all day with a jostling rush like horses racing. (*LL* 295)

Martha's dreams about England's seashore foreshadow a transformative and alchemical experience which will take place in the following novel *The Four-Gated City*. At this stage in the novel, the prospect of a utopian land in England seems to be full of promise for the heroine, who feels the urgent need to sail to her homeland.

II. 1. B. The significance of dreams in *The Summer Before the Dark*

In *The Summer Before the Dark*, Lessing delves into her heroine Kate Brown's unconscious through the use of dreams which light up her journey to knowledge. She has a recurring seal dream, during her quest, which haunts her the whole summer. The dream unfolds gradually. It begins in the dark cold north. "Because it had appeared twice, it was announcing its importance to her" (*SBD* 50-51). To Whittaker, "the dream is not incidental but central to the plot. It acts both as a continuing motivating force for the heroine, and as a commentary from her unconscious on her behavior."[266] As will be shown, it is the seal of her dreams that will help Kate find her inner self and identity. That is why the centrality of the dream will be the focal point of this section.

a. Background

A forty-five year old woman, Kate Brown is first introduced to the reader as a demure and delightful woman, fully drilled in her conventional roles as a devoted mother and housewife. She has fitted into her social role in life as Michael's wife and as mother to her children. She is well known for her charming personality and her pleasant appearance. Without her roles, she does not, however, really know who she really is. But at one point in her life, she decides to rebel against this conventional phase of her life and undertake a journey in search of freedom from family responsibilities: "Looking back over nearly a quarter of a century, she saw that that had been the characteristic of her life, passivity, adaptability to others" (*SBD* 21). She therefore decides to leave her husband and children, discarding a stifling domesticity and opting for a rewarding career as a translator for an international Global Food company. In this quest for selfhood, she will question her identity as a wife and relinquish her traditional role as a mother.

[266] Ruth Whittaker. *Modern Novelists: Doris Lessing*. London: Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1988. p. 87.

b. Kate's self-knowledge

The journey undertaken by Kate involves a physical movement from England to Turkey with Global Food, the company for which she works, then to Spain with a young lover called Jeffery Merton, and to London where she shares a flat with younger women, and another one back home. Her quest for enlightenment is described in terms of two journeys—consisting of a circular real-life journey of departure and return intersected by a linear dream journey. Janis P. Stout comments that

> If the dream journey is more linear, and thereby seems more purposeful than the real journey, it is perhaps because the dream, for all its puzzling symbolism, is a clarification of Kate's important needs and purposes which are obscured by […] day-time life.[267]

The dream journey, as we shall see, fosters Kate's understanding of her real-life journey. The dream sequences function as a parallel journey to her actual literal journey. In Gayle Greene's words, they "express her voyage of self-discovery." The lead motif to Kate Brown's quest is her recurring dream about the seal, which offers a guideline to her emotional growth and awareness. She obsessively dreams that, though beset by many obstacles, she tries to carry a wounded, moaning seal northwards to the sea. In her real or physical journey towards survival, which she completes at the same time she does the dream journey, she puts the seal back to the sea northwards safely.

The symbolism of the north is very telling: in ancient Rome, for instance, "the Etruscans located the abode of the gods in the north;" for them, "to face the north was to pose questions,"[268] which suggests that Kate moves towards a place of awakening, or "revelation." The whole journey is marked by self-questioning. Indeed, she will question her choices in life and the meaning of her existence. Whittaker, however, interprets the northly direction as related to hardships: "We understand the northward journey to be a metaphor for the pain of self-discovery" (89), indicating simultaneously direction and the climatic chill of the north.

The real life journey starts at Global Food where Kate works. Her job involves flying to Istanbul, where she works as "a group mother" for lots of people from many countries who

[267] Janis P. Stout. "A Quest of One's Own: Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*." *A Review of International English Literature*. Vol. 21, N° 2, April 1990. p. 6.

[268] J. C. Cirlot. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Routledge New Edition, 1990. p. 245.

attend the conference. But she soon realizes that her work is similar to her caretaking and organizing role in her family. It implies conforming to the same role as in her household:

> Then she would nourish and nurture in herself that person which was all warmth and charm, that personality which had nothing to do with her, nothing with what she really was, the individual who sat and watched and noted from behind the warm brown eyes, the cared-for skin, the heavy curves of her dark-red hair. (*SBD* 46)

The new job as executive for Global Food offers no soothing answer to her quest for true selfhood. She feels she is performing the same task as the one she carried out at home, taking care of others.

Kate's identity crisis, however, is not solely due to her traditional restrictive role as a mother; it is also due to her lost attractiveness. She recognizes that as she grows older, she becomes more dislocated and ignored by her fellow workers. As her beauty fades away, she experiences a spiritual crisis related to her ageing: "The light that is the desire to please" has been extinguished. "Her face had aged," (*SBD* 48) Kate thinks to herself. She retreated into the disconnected world of ageing and socially invisible women. She feels disillusioned with this initial phase of her quest. When she looks at her life in retrospect, she is embarrassed about how much time she has spent in front of the mirror trying to adapt herself to the male conception of an attractive woman: "Men's attention is stimulated by signals no more complicated than what leads the gosling; and for all her adult life, let's say from twelve onwards, she had been conforming, twitching like a puppet to those strings…" (*SBD* 186). In her role as Michael's wife, she conformed to his preferences; she has dyed her hair and dressed in the clothes that he considered attractive. Mrs. Kate Brown understands that, in order to fulfill her journey for selfhood, she should not base her self-esteem on people's perception of her. But she cannot accomplish this task without being guided by her dreams.

c. The role of dreams in *The Summer Before the Dark*

The exploration of Kate's dreams as factors configuring her identity reveals that she cannot work out her ordeal by rationality alone, but must work through the unconscious symbolism of her dreams. We will see how the dream teaches Kate to fight and overcome her inner fears and suffering by making her struggle against the odds to save the little seal. It also

triggers an introspective analysis, enacting a kind of psychological therapy. Ultimately, the female protagonist emerges with a new sense of self after a process of re-assessment fuelled by her dreams.

The first instance of the seal dream occurs after Kate's disappointment with her job: In her dream, where the landscape appears rocky, slippery and dark, she sees a seal "lying stranded and helpless" on dry rocks in a northern landscape, and starts hoping to get it to water (*SBD* 30). She understands that she has to carry the animal north. The dream expresses her doubts and fears and bespeaks her terror of ageing and loneliness.

The wounded seal embodies her stranded and stunted sense of self. In her article on "dream and action,"[269] Barbara Lefcowitz suggests an interesting interpretation of the seal symbol related to the journey for self-knowledge. She traces a correlation between the phonetic pronunciation of the word "seal" and the German one "*seele,"* which means "soul," as well as their link to the sea of consciousness:

> The seal's peculiar appropriateness as a symbolic form for the energizing inner self, is grounded in the unconscious, linked with a primal state of being, and emerging occasionally from that fluid primacy to spur the conscious self along its journey toward self-awareness (110).

The pun on the words "seal"/"*seele*" and its connection to the "soul" reflect the pivotal role of the seal dream and its impact upon Kate's soul. It will serve to guide the waking self to spiritual awakening and wholeness. Indeed, the female protagonist has to confront different challenges in her dreams in order to save the wounded seal and symbolically heal her inner self.

The second seal dream occurs by the end of her first conference: "Because it had appeared twice, it was announcing its importance to her" (*SBD* 50-51). At this point, Kate feels dissatisfied with her work and hesitates to go to the next conference. In her dream, she is equally uncertain about the seal's ability to survive its injuries and whether she is leading it to "the right direction" (*SBD* 47).

Meanwhile, in her real journey, in a long chapter entitled "The Holiday," in the middle section of the novel, Kate travels to Spain. Defensively evading her fears of growing old, she goes there with Jeffery, a younger man from America with whom she has a sexual

[269] Barbara Lefcowitz. "Dream and Action in Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark." Doris Lessing Newsletter*. Brookly College Press, 1979. pp. 107-120.

affair. But during her stay, she becomes disappointed when he is taken ill and she becomes compelled to perform the role of a mother to him: "He was wet with sweat, and shivering. But he was determined to continue north. She took him by both shoulders and said: 'You are sick. Do you hear me? You are ill. You have got to let me put you into bed and get you a doctor'" (109). She repeats once again the conventional motherly task she had repudiated. Consequently, neither her attempt to forge a new career nor her attempt to awaken her sexual self seems to satisfy her quest. This event is a marking point in her emotional life, influencing the subsequent seal dream.

As the dream unfolds, Kate's struggle to save the seal will help her overcome her inner woes and leads to self-healing. She undergoes different states before her breakthrough. After assisting Jeffery with his illness, she herself falls ill in the hotel in Spain; she then "fell asleep and was at once on a rocky hillside. Yes, there was her poor seal, slowly, painfully, moving itself towards the distance, the invisible ocean. She gathered the slippery creature up in her arms; she ought not to have left it there" (*SBD* 102). In the returning dream, she is imprisoned in a dark pit of which she must get out to help the seal she has abandoned. The seal is weaker; its dark eyes blame her; she ought not to have left it. Nevertheless, Kate fights to rescue it, even though they are beset by wild animals "leaping up and snapping and snarling at her feet" (*SBD* 129). She lifts the seal up out of the way of their fangs and claws. She then dreams of snow falling "softly, drifting into the cracks and the hollows of the sharp black rocks." She carries the seal northwards, believing "that somewhere ahead must be the sea, for if not, both she and the seal would die" (130). In this dream Kate and the seal are, for the first time, clearly identified as they share the same destiny and they compulsively must complete their "painful journeys."[270]

The symbolism of the seal as guiding towards the discovery of the self is very telling here,: "She knew that walking into the winter that lay in front of her she was carrying her life as well as the seal's—as if she were holding out into a cold wind her palm, on which lay a single dried leaf" (130-31). The image of the cold, bleak, northly wind prevails, conveying a sense of utter desolation, symbolizing the state of dreariness and decay related to old age. In her dream, the female protagonist realizes that she must head northwards towards the sea.

[270] Whittaker's evaluation is relevant at this point in the novel: This dream seems to symbolize Kate's "youthful marriage, and her subsequent domestic imprisonment, as well as the more subtle incarcerations of ageing" (88).

When she recovers from her illness at the hotel, she understands that she must complete the dream journey before she can complete the real-world journey and initiate a new phase in her life. She has another dream in which she once again carries the seal, which she fears is dying, "north, north, always north" (*SBD* 146). In her dream, she is "in a heavy twilight [...]. The seal is "inert in her arms [...];" it is "in a coma, or dying" (*SBD* 145). But despite the dark and frozen landscape, she discovers that, after all, the seemingly hostile land holds within it—"in a hollow between this rock and another"—a minimal bit of saving moisture. Once she finds this water and spreads it over the seal, it greets her and is "saved," and she is able to go on (*SBD* 146). The latter dream offers a reassurance that old age may provide the means to restore her real self. It involves a prospect of hope and rebirth related to water, whose symbolism was earlier mentioned in the analysis.

The hopeful prospect of the above-mentioned dream is confirmed by the concluding one, where Kate reaches the sea and puts the seal in the water, the place where it belongs. She is no longer anxious about the little animal because "she knew it was full of life, and, like her, of hope" (*SBD* 241). Despite the difficulties she has been facing, the dream-journey ends in a spring landscape symbolizing rebirth: The snow melts, spring grass grows along with flowers, the sea reflects "a sunlight sky, blue deepening on blue"—the color symbolizing eternity. The seal gives her a last look through dark soft eyes and dives into the deep, joining its playmates in the sea. The sun is not behind, but in front of her, "a large, light, brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seemed to sing" (241). This dream provides Kate with the emotional hope and expectation that marks out her return.

As the seal returns to the sea, Kate in a parallel way chooses her own direction and decides to return home to London: "Her journey was over. She sees that the sun is in front of her, not behind, not far behind, under the curve of the earth, which is where it had been for so long. She looks at it, a large, light, brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seemed to sing" (235). The returning of the seal to the water signals Kate's rebirth and her returning to her husband and children. Her state has changed after she has undertaken a journey within herself and she is not the same as she was.

Change is signaled by Kate's relation to her hair: while she used to dye it[271] at the beginning of her journey, she now keeps its natural grey color. She also decides to return to

[271] I previously analyzed this idea in the section developing the concept of performativity and Kate's submission to the masculine gaze in Global Food circle as well as her use of cosmetics and hair color to look younger.

her family with her unstyled hair, showing a band of grey at the roots. This new appearance is the symptom of her newly gained self-confidence and self-assertion:

> Her discoveries, her self-definition […] were concentrated here—that she would walk into her home with her undressed, rough and streaky [...], the widening grey band showing like a statement of intent. […] All her adult life, she had been in an atmosphere where everything was said […]. She had lived among 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 […]; She was saying no: no, no, no, NO: a statement which would be concentrated into her hair. (*SBD* 244)

Refusing to change her hairstyle and color signifies the liberation from the mirror of the others' desire. It is at the same time an acceptance of ageing. Kate realizes that she needn't conform to people's expectations. She now discards the idea that one's corporeal bodily image is a source of self-assurance. Thanks to her dream journey, Kate gains a measure of self-acceptance and self-understanding.

Commenting on Kate's newly-acquired sense of selfhood after her dreams, Whittaker suggests that "it is unimaginable that she will revert to the person she was at the beginning of the summer. Having restored her scarred and wounded self from aridity into its element, she can begin anew anywhere she chooses, even in her old environment" (89). Similarly, Gayle Greene acknowledges an inner and spiritual change: "Whereas Kate in her life has drawn boundaries and resigned herself to "the dark," in her dream, as the seal merges with the whole and is left staring at the sun," (l39) she comes to see light. The choice of returning home brings the dilemma experienced by Kate to an end; she does not choose a "new life" with a different man, a new job, or another identity, but the return to the character of Kate Brown with her former selves ready to accept new ones.

II. 1. C. The role of dreams in *The Grass Is Singing*

The most important aspect of *The Grass Is Singing* is that it is a psychological novel focusing on a woman caught up in contradictory feelings and desires because she lives in a colonial and racist society where it is forbidden for a white woman to fall in love with a black servant. Roberta Rubenstein says in "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing"[272] that Mary's "personal vulnerabilities intersect with the repressive social and psychological pressures of her environment" (174). She lives in it as a misfit and is probably killed by her houseboy Moses. The female protagonist's psychological breakdown and failure to adapt to her life in the colonial Rhodesian society is best explained by her dreams, in which past and present are united to convey a deeper truth about her.

Dreams illuminate the marginal and uncharted psychic realities of Mary Turner and enlighten the "shadow" region of her dynamic unconscious. We shall interpret three important dreams in the novel which reveal the unconscious of the heroine and may account for the process of construction of her selfhood. This interpretation will be based on Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic perspectives. We shall see that the memories and flashbacks which emerge in Mary's account to a large extent for her psycho-sexual adult life.

In the first dream, Mary sees herself as a child playing in the "dusty" garden replicating her parents' sordid house in the "dusty village" (*GIS* 20). She is the leader of a group of "faceless" (*GIS* 162) children. Upon hearing her mother calling her inside, she goes into the house with a sense of terror and stops at the bedroom door "sickened," seeing her father and mother locked in a covert sexual scene:

> Her father, the little man with the plump juicy stomach, beer-smelling and jocular, whom she hated, holding her mother in his arms as they stood by the window. Her mother was struggling in mock protest, playfully expostulating. Her father bent over her mother, and at the sight, Mary ran away. (*GIS* 162-3)

In her second dream, Mary sees herself playing a kind of "hide-and-seek" game with her parents, brother and sister. When it is her turn to cover her eyes, "her mother hid[es] herself" and her brother and sister disappear from the scene. She can only see her father

[272] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing. Breaking the Forms of Consciousness." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 12. N° 2. Summer 1980.

holding her head in his lap laughing and mocking. She "smelt the sickly odor of beer and through it she smelt too—her head held down in the thick stuff of his trousers—the unwashed masculine smell she always associated with him" (*GIS* 163). Half-suffocated, she tries to escape but her father forces her stay while mocking at her. Throughout the dream, she is the only person to take the game seriously while the others are laughing.

This nightmare is followed by another one which is as disturbing as the previous ones: One night, she sees her husband Dick dead and she feels menaced by an ominous event which is about to happen at her home. In her dream, Dick looks "ugly, yellow-faced" and she feels "relief" and "exultation" at his death. Yet, she becomes "guilty" and ashamed "of her gladness" and tries to arouse in herself the "sorrow she ought to feel" (*GIS* 164). Afterwards, her deep apprehension and horror arise towards the end of the dream, where the figure of her father and Moses merge in an image of sexual dominance:

> He [Moses] approached slowly, obscene and powerful, and it was not only he, but her father who was threatening her. They advanced together, one person, and she could smell, not the native smell, but the unwashed smell of her father. It filled the room, musty, like animals [...]; he came near and put his hand on her arm. It was the voice of the African she heard. He was comforting her because of Dick's death, consoling her protectively; but at the same time it was her father menacing and horrible, who touched her in desire. (*GIS* 165)

As her black servant approaches her lasciviously, "smelling foul" (*GIS* 164), Martha also sees her father in his image. The condensation of the three male figures (Dick, Moses and her father) in one nightmare reveals the inexorable link between the protagonist's childhood and her present life. Even though Mary struggles against her repressed past memories, they explode in her unconscious while sleeping. We shall now interpret these three dreams in a Freudian as well as a Jungian perspective.

The first dream manifests the Freudian concept of "wish fulfillment." In *The Interpretation of Dreams*[273], Sigmund Freud suggests that "the content of the dream is the fulfillment of a wish, its motive is a wish."(34). [274] The dreamer's latent motives come to the surface during sleep owing to the lifting of the censorship exerted by the "superego" (the regulator of social norms and values). Sleeping is a condition in which "the psychic self

[273] Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997.

[274] Jung believes that there are such dreams that are the fulfillment of a repressed wish but they are far from proving that all dreams are wish-fulfillments.

renounces the external world and the principle of reality which dominates it" (35). It allows the "*id*" to express itself freely. Thus, the desires and wishes that the protagonist has long repressed in her unconscious find their expression in this initial dream. Mary sees herself in a game where she is the leader among "faceless" children. This image reflects her desire to be the leader and superior to others. The children are faceless because she does not care to whom she will be superior. It is obvious throughout the novel that Mary has a tendency to authority and mastery. She likes dominating Dick and becomes imperious towards the natives. She relishes power: While supervising the native workers on the farm when her husband falls ill, she always carries "the long thong of leather looped round one wrist. It gave her a feeling of authority" (*GIS* 111). When "one of the men paused for a moment in his work to rest, or to wipe the running sweat from his eyes, she waited one minute by her watch, and then called sharply for him to begin again" (*GIS* 112). Thus, Mary takes over the role of the white master, her repressed self (which she identifies with her father).

However, in a society where women are treated similarly to the natives, it is impossible for Mary to gain supreme power over men. Only when her husband Dick fails in his business and suffers from malaria does she take control of the farm and the native workers. She exerts this power only when the male figure is weak. Mary's dream consequently mirrors her unfulfilled wish for superiority over the males in the white patriarchal society. As she represses it, it comes out at night when her "ego" is in its relaxed condition, free from the norms of the white society. Thus, in a Freudian sense, Mary's dream stems from her preconscious thoughts, which cannot be fulfilled in daily life because of the restrictions imposed on her.

We shall further see how dreams play an important role in exploring Mary's unconscious life, helping decipher aspects of her conscious attitudes towards the different male characters she has known and thus illuminating the construction of her selfhood. The second dream sheds light on Mary's sexual inhibition in her adult life. Before her marriage with Dick, the heroine already feels "uncomfortable with men." She recoils at a man's first kiss: "A violent revulsion overcome[s] her and she run[s] away" (*GIS* 42). Throughout her life Mary finds sex "a silly business" (*GIS* 47) and has a "great distaste for it" (*GIS* 46). This denial of sexuality results in a dull and sexless marriage with Dick Turner, a man whom she does not love. Her wedding night

> […] meant nothing to her, nothing at all. Expecting outrage and imposition, she

> was relived to find she felt nothing. She was able maternally to bestow the gift of herself on this humble stranger and remain untouched. Women have an extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship to immunize themselves against it in such a way that their men can be left feeling let down and insulted without having anything tangible to complain of. Mary did not have to learn this, because it was natural in her, and because she had expected nothing in the first place. (*GIS* 57)

When Dick tells her that he cannot afford a honeymoon, Mary feels "relieved to escape a honeymoon" (*GIS* 50). She also hates the idea of motherhood and child bearing:

> [She] liked other people's children but shuddered at the thought of having anyone of her own. She felt sentimental at weddings, but she felt a profound distaste for sex; there had been little privacy in her home and there were things she did not care to remember, she had taken good care to forget them years ago. (*GIS* 39)

Mary's fear of sexuality and frigidity are deeply rooted in her childhood. Her traumatic oedipal experiences as a child resurface to torment her and make it impossible for her to cope with the vicissitudes of her life. Freud explains that memory is "far more comprehensive in dreams than in waking life. Dreams bring up recollections which the dreamer has forgotten, which are inaccessible to him when he is awake."[275] In her second dream, the protagonist's memories arise from "the ugly menacing store of her childhood" (*GIS* 93). It is the memory of the "unwashed masculine smell" she always associates with her father that activates her dream.

Critics have interpreted Mary's second dream in light of Freudian psychoanalysis as reflective of her unresolved "Oedipus complex" which Freud views as having a vital role not only in the construction of sexuality but also in the behavior of individual adults. Unlike Jung, Freud does not exclude little girls from the Oedipus complex that little boys unconsciously experience between the ages of three and six. He believes that in the Oedipus complex, "the little boy" has a sexual desire for his mother and wants to get rid of his father—the "rival." The Electra complex is the equivalent for the girl: she desires her father and yearns to get rid

[275] Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997. p. 45.

of her mother, whom she sees as her rival.[276] She both desires the father and fears the threat of castration.

Mary's second dream proves that she is unable to overcome her Oedipus complex and fulfill her sexual development. The contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion towards her father manifest in her second dream clearly testify to her the Oedipus complex. During the "hide-and-seek" game, she waits for her mother's absence in order to come close to her father and envisions herself as held down to the "thick stuff of his trousers," another clear sign of her incestuous desire.

This Oedipal drama cannot be resolved because Mary, as a child, has witnessed her parents' sexual intercourse—"there had been little privacy in her home and there were things […] she had taken good care to forget years ago" (*GIS* 39). Although it is not overtly stated, the narrator clearly refers to a sexual scene which was painfully traumatic to the little girl, who ultimately fails to repress this memory as it crops up in her dream when she sees her father holding her mother, who is struggling in "mock protest." Mary then feels "sickened" upon seeing her beer-smelling father at the door. She immediately runs away. The sexual allusion in this dream is obvious.

The two previous dreams provide symbols and clues to decipher the third nightmare. Dick's death in this third dream can be explained in terms of Mary's desire to get rid of her husband, who stands as an obstacle to her relationship with her back servant. Her relief at Dick's death in this dream reveals her sexual attraction to Moses. Yet, Moses embodies another figure: Mary's father. His biblical name, "Moses," connotes both paternity and deliverance. This is suggested when Dick gets malaria and the houseboy "touches her protectively as if he were her father. She can smell the "unwashed" odor of her father in the native" (*GIS* 158). Mary allows him to comb her hair, undress her and bring her food as if she were a little child in need of affection and care. The fusion of the "odor of her father in the native" suggests that father and lover are combined into one identity—a man's sexual identity. This is confirmed when the dream shows the fusion of the two male figures. Moses is then "her father menacing and horrible, who touched her in desire" (*GIS* 204).

Moses absorbs the image of Mary's father, who is the source of her frigidity, of her need and dread of domination, and of her repressed sexuality. The conflation of the three men

[276] Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works.* Vol. XXII (1932-1936). Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1986. p. 127-29.

in Mary's life is subtly and effectively accomplished. "It shows Lessing in firm command of psychological and social meanings, able to construct and to tie together several strands of motivational matters: personal, social, racial, psychological, and historical,"[277] Claire Sprague observes. Such insights into the psyche provided by the interpretation of Mary's dreams in *The Grass is Singing* shed light on her psycho-sexual development into an adult frigid woman.

A second reading of the third nightmarish dream in light of Jungian psychoanalysis reveals a different interpretation of Mary's psyche in relation to Jung's notion of the "shadow." We discover in the dream that "Mary feels Moses's menace in the shadow" (*GIS* 164). We can see Moses and what he stands for as the shadow or the dark side that Mary tries to repress. Indeed, Carl Jung identifies the "Shadow" as one of the four principle archetypes of the collective unconscious. It is composed of the dark elements of the personality, having an emotional and primitive nature which resists moral control. For Jung, to become conscious of the "shadow" involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.

In Jungian terms, Moses represents Mary's "shadow"—the repressed, dark, hidden and alien side of her personality which contradicts those aspects which she can acknowledge consciously. He functions on the symbolic level as a screen upon which Mary projects the pent-up sexual urges she has denied all her life. Martha's shadow or dark side is her forbidden attraction to a black servant as the only man who can stimulate her sexually. Roberta Rubenstein holds that Moses represents the "shadow" functioning as the "opposite of conscious self."[278] In a Jungian sense, he stands for "the dark realms of unconsciousness, the denied self, as the 'self-hater,' the 'shadow' which is 'Luciferian' in the most proper unequivocal sense of the word." Thus, Moses forces her to come into contact with the dark forces of her denied sexual self, the self excluded from her conscious awareness. Rubenstein considers Moses as the "embodiment of her self-hatred and need for punishment of her illicit desire." He is the only one who "can bestow that upon her" (175).

---

[277] Claire Sprague, *Rereading Doris Lessing, Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987, p. 24.

[278] Rubenstein, Roberta. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing. Breaking the Forms of Consciousness." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 12. N° 2. Summer 1980. p. 174.

The analysis of Mary's dreams shows that she is imprisoned in the traumatic childhood past. This is why in her adult life, she has become a depressed and frustrated wife until the fateful arrival of her black servant Moses. Yet she is trapped with the latter in a web of mounting attraction and repulsion.

In conclusion, dreams prove their centrality to Lessing's narratives: In the case of Martha, they have a compensatory and healing function as they mitigate the harshness of an arid external reality; For Kate Brown, dreams and their interpretation help as guides in her spiritual awakening. For Mary Turner, they shed light on the dark side of her psyche and account for her trauma as an adult woman.

As will be further shown, dreams, archetypes, symbols, schizophrenia and madness are not, however, in Doris Lessing's fiction, merely literary devices used to alert the reader to the paucity of realism, but they are modes of expression conveying her experience of another dimension than that of the everyday world. In other words, she does not make an aesthetic choice like many postmodern writers; rather, she enlarges her technical range to cope with her expanded consciousness of what constitutes reality.

II. 2. Martha Quest's schizophrenic breakdown

As the series unfolds, explicit forms of visions, irrational moments, violent psychic states, extra-sensory powers and cosmic energies press against the general realistic narrative and ultimately explode in the final novel of the *Children of Violence* series, *The Four-Gated City* (1969). The latter narrative spans a period of approximately fifty years during which Martha becomes the center of three overlapping worlds: the outside world of politics and wars, the immediate community of the Coldridge family, and the inner world of her expanding consciousness. Doris Lessing shows how these three circles affect one another, and how Martha's search for wholeness has changed from the preceding novels. The heroine first seeks integration through marriage or a political cause but these alternatives finally fail to satisfy her, thus revealing the fragile nature of loyalties to ideologies and political movements.

After the pursuit of and disillusion with the political ideal of communism, Martha begins to transfer her attention away from the outer world to the inner world, in a process that suggests a new dialectical relationship between conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind. Susan Watkins points out that for Lessing and many other writers and thinkers at that time, "changing the thinking process means taking seriously the possibilities occasioned by extraordinary psychic phenomena."[279] We find that the quest in the worlds of Lessing's female protagonists always turns into an imaginative inner journey whose effect is to blur boundaries between the inner and the outer world.

This section will analyze Martha's growth and development through her experience as a wanderer in the city of London and her subsequent inner journey. Both experiences are developed in connection with the events in the Coldridge household so that her individual quest is placed in the context of family and political life in Britain. It will also show how the female protagonist's maturity involves the recognition of the self's construction through the collective. We shall see that Martha's process of development is shown to require the breaking down of ego-centredness through schizophrenia and madness in accordance with the principles of Laingian psychology, as in addition to being influenced by Jung's psychology, Lessing was inspired by R. D. Laing's unconventional (even radical) ideas of sanity, insanity

[279] Susan Watkins. "'Grande Dame' or 'New Woman': Doris Lessing and the Palimpsest." *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*. Vol. 17, issue 3-4, 2006. p. 244.

and schizophrenia. We shall show that rather than being perceived as mental illness, schizophrenia is the sign of an existential identity crisis in *The Four-Gated City* and a positive force.

II. 2. A. Ronald David Laing's influence on Doris Lessing

In the 1960s, Lessing was greatly influenced by the anti-psychiatrist movement advocated by the British psychologist Ronald David Reagan. The term "anti-psychiatry" was first used by the South African psychiatrist David Cooper[280] in 1967. The movement was dissatisfied with orthodox institutional psychiatry and the traditional definition of madness as a dysfunctioning of the psychic mechanism. It was an outcry against the practice of psychiatry which consisted in forcing mental patients to enter state institutions, where they were coerced into taking high doses of neuroleptic drugs and undergoing convulsive and psychosurgical procedures such as "shock therapy" and "lobotomy."[281] The antipsychiatry movement was instigated by a group of scholarly psychoanalysts and sociologists who shaped an organized opposition to what were perceived as biological psychiatry's abuses in the name of science. They opposed traditional psychiatric institutions, which emphasized drugs and other physical forms of treatment such as the "brain surgery" advocated by William Sargant in his *Battle for the Mind* (1957). On the whole, the group challenged the fundamental claims and practices of mainstream psychiatry. This protest was supported by the 1960s worldwide counterculture, which was already rebelling against all forms of political, sexual, and racial coercion.

Laing's anti-psychiatry movement was also part of a wider international trend in the early to mid-sixties, including the French philosopher Michel Foucault with his *Histoire de la folie*[282] in Paris and Erving Goffman with *Asylums* in the United States. Both writers gave birth to new views of lunacy as a social construct in a given time and place, varying from one civilization to another and from one time to another, and of asylums as rigid institutions, thus breaking the cultural rules and conventional labels of the mentally ill and psychic illnesses. They were joined by critics like Deleuze and Guattari, and others who criticized the power

[280] David Cooper. *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry*. London: Paladin, 1967.

[281] Nick Crossley. *Contesting Psychiatry: Social Movements in Mental Health*. USA and Canada: Routledge, 2006. p. 91.

[282] In *The History of Madness*, Foucault argued that the concepts of sanity and insanity were social constructs that did not reflect quantifiable patterns of human behavior, and were rather only indicative of the power of the "sane" over the "insane."

and role of psychiatry in society, including the use of "total institutions," "labeling" and "stigmatizing."[283] When Joyce Carol Oates asked Doris Lessing, in an interview, if she sympathized with the work of Ronald Laing, whose ideas resemble her own, she replied:

> Yes. We were both exploring the phenomenon of the unclassifiable experience, the psychological 'breaking-through' that the conventional world judges as mad. I think Laing must have been very courageous, to question the basic assumptions of his profession from the inside... In America, the psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, in *The Manufacture of Madness,* has made similar claims. He has taken a very revolutionary position.[284]

The similarities between Laing and Lessing are visible at different levels: They both had similar anti-conformist views regarding post-Second World War English life and culture. Having witnessed the disastrous repercussions of the war and felt the threat and emotional horror arising from such an experience, they vehemently opposed the rise of nuclear power. They criticized the nuclear age and attacked science, technology and reason for their failure to improve the human condition. They viewed post-war English life as spiraling downward and producing dysfunctional personalities. They also assumed that the increasing division of the modern world had caused the divorce between mind and body and had brought about an ontological insecurity accounting for the alienation and inner division of the modern man. Laing's idea—that beyond our culture's 'normal' consciousness, which he called egoic or rational-analytic, there was a different mode of cognition, which he termed non-egoic or intuitive[285]—is to be traced in Lessing's fictional works in *The Four-Gated City* and *The Golden Notebook*. Her writings are impregnated by both his theoretical claims in the field of psychiatry and his cultural and political stance. In her essay "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy,"[286] Marion Vlastos argues convincingly about the necessity of studying Lessing and Laing alongside each other because of their similar approach to madness. She stresses that Lessing's ideas are attuned to those of Laing as "an unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician" (246).

---

[283]Doespsychiatrystigmatize?(http://www.jrsm.org/cgi/reprint/94/3/148.pdf?ijkey=07b5d6fed040a1f4c99d9e0fe381f33314e70145).

[284] Oates, Joyce Carol. "A Visit with Doris Lessing." *Southern Review,* ix. 4, October 1973, pp. 873.

[285] In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing contrasts the "transcendental experiences," which are "the original well-spring of all religions," with what he calls the "egoic" approach to reality of most people— the experience of "the world and themselves in terms of a consistent identity, a me-here over against a you-there, within a framework of certain ground structures of space and time shared with other members of their society." pp. 137-138.

[286] Marion Vlastos. "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy." *Modern Language Association, PMLA.* Vol. 91, No. 2, March 1976. p. 245-258.

a. Laing's understanding of schizophrenia

While Freud understood schizophrenia (which he called *dementia praecox*) as a pathology in which the patient regresses to a state of primary narcissism in which the distinction between the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* disappears,[287] R. D. Laing had a radically new apprehension of it. In *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, published in 1960, he examined the experience of psychosis, specifically schizophrenia, from an ontological perspective. His allegiance to the existential and phenomenological tradition of Sartre, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Kierkegaard accounts to a large extent for his conception of schizophrenia. Laing notes that a psychotic breakdown is not a symptom of genetic abnormality or neurological disorder *per se*, but an existential crisis or an understandable reaction to an inescapable and persecutory social order. He no longer regards schizophrenia and madness as pathological phenomena but as existential states originating in an ontological insecurity in regard to identity. In 1964, he sums up his position in these terms:

> I have given a glimpse of a revolution that is going on in relation to sanity and madness, both inside and outside psychiatry. Modern psychiatry came into being when the demonological point of view gave way 300 years ago to a clinical view-point. The clinical point of view is now giving way before another point of view that is both existential and social. The shift, I believe, is of no less radical significance.[288]

Laing was one of the first psychiatrists who argued for a revolutionary and phenomenological treatment of schizophrenia and madness, whose symptoms were to be interpreted as a meaningful comment on an indefensible and unbearable existential experience of social reality rather than as merely pathological symptoms. His argument was that when one's existential totality is forced to split into fragments, one experiences as a form of defense a kind of schizoid world, a world where affective relations are weakened and the real appears as if screened off from the self, distorted and strange. "Psychosis" is thus viewed as the consequence of an incongruity between the self and others. The schizophrenic suffers from the conflict of the "desire to reveal himself ([herself]) and his/[her] desire to conceal

[287] Malcolm Macmillan. *Freud Evaluated: The Complete Arc*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997. p. 363.

[288] R. D. Laing and A. Esterson. *Sanity, Madness and The Family*. London: Penguin, 1964. p. 22.

himself/[herself].”[289] When he/she tries to live out the “truth” of his “existential position,” to claim his/her real situation, which is not accepted by common sense, he/she must pay the price of “being mad.”[290] In order to understand his patients, the therapist therefore needs to adjust himself to the patient’s perspective and to try and enter their worlds as a place that becomes meaningful from within their own space.

Vlastos argues that Lessing is influenced by Laing’s interpretation of schizophrenia as “an intensification of the divisions within the normal self” (247), an idea which is useful to the exploration of Lessing’s characters’ “false-self-systems” (to take up Laing’s terminology, (to which we will revert in our analysis) or divided selves, as evidenced in *The Four-Gated City* and *The Golden Notebook.* The novelist was also drawn to Laing’s pioneering view of schizophrenia as an intelligible and potentially healing response to destructive social demands. In London, in the early 1960s, she, Laing and Clancy Sigal “formed a circle of mutual influence.”[291] They all saw the schizophrenic as the sane performer in a mad society. Vlastos adds that both Lessing and Laing were also “convinced that the only hope for securing our future lies in the individual’s journey ‘back and in’ to his self.”[292]

Moreover, Vlastos points out that Laing and Lessing believed that “the social ‘values’ on which the doctor’s [psychiatrist] authority rests were hostile not only to the individuality, the insight, and the potential creativity of the schizophrenic but also to the survival of the society itself,”[293] a view which Lessing first expressed in her portrayal of Lynda Coldridge in *The Four-Gated City.* Like Laing, Lessing also held that social behavior was based on the principle of compartmentalization, which led people to make a false division between the sane and the insane.

The Four-Gated City, published at the end of the 1960s, offers a view of the changing map of post-war London through the eyes of the white South African Martha Quest, a female Quixote who acts as a mirror of society and politics of the post-war period. As a white immigrant from South Africa, Martha, like Lessing herself, is both an insider and an outsider, both in South Africa and in England. Martha’s “quest” in England is about her search

---

[289] R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965. p. 38.

[290] *Ibid*. p. 39.

[291] Gayle Greene. *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change.* USA: University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 8.

[292] Marion Vlastos. “Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy.” *Modern Language Association*, PMLA, Vol. 91, No. 2, March 1976. p. 257.

[293] *Ibid*. p. 250.

for an ideal world, or simply, her search for home. All along the series, she is chasing the phantom promise of a new world and a renewed liberal spirit in the presumed golden city of London. Is this city as ideal as she has expected? Does it contribute to the mental progress of the heroine or isn't it the locus of her schizophrenic breakdown? Does it reshape the quest? All these ideas will be discussed in the coming section.

b. Martha's experience of the city: Utopia or dystopia?

The city is presented from the perspective of Martha Quest, the outsider and watcher, coming to London for the first time in her life. As she walks the streets and wanders from "room to room, cheap hotel to hotel" (*FGC* 14), she paints a clear picture of post-war life in London, offering to the reader the image of the "ruined" and "poisoned" (*FGC* 86) city in the grimy the Britain of the 1949:

> A few days after her arrival in London she had been wandering among the wharfs and the docks, three, four miles lower down the South Bank, in a world of black greasy hulls, dark landing stages, dark warehouses, grey dirty water, gulls, and the smell of driven salt, when she had come on a landing stage where a mushroom shape of rusting iron held thick coils of rope which tethered a flat barge that had a lorry on it. (*FGC* 22)

Unlike the ideal city of her dreams, the urban reality strikes Martha as an ugly vision of post-war London. She discovers a post-Second World War city devastated by an atomic bomb, as if "some great thumb had come down and rubbed out buildings, carelessly" (*FGC* 16). This event evokes the London Blitz of 1941[294]. The lexical field related to post-war reconstruction conveyed by such words as "iron," "walls," "rubble," "metal grille," "cables," "bricks," "debris," "walls," "rocks," "skull" and "crossbones" (*FGC* 17-18) dominates the first part of the narrative, conjuring up the image of a war-damaged city. In this "doomed" city, "all cracked and thinned and darkened by war" (*FGC* 46). Martha finds herself in the midst of a devastated sunless region without sand and vegetation, as she walks "through unaired rootless soil, where electricity and telephone and gas tubes ran and knotted and twined" (*FGC* 16). The entire world seems numb and blinded.

[294] "The destruction of vast tracts of the city, the docks and other districts in the Blitz of 1941 was further compounded by the random devastation of the V1 and V2 'vengeance' weapons of 1945, revealing urban vistas not seen for centuries." Laurence Philips. *London Narratives: Post-War Fiction and the City*. London: Continuum, 2006. p. 10.

The gloomy picture of post-war London is also conveyed through the grey color imbuing the whole mood of the initial chapters: "Great ugly grey houses […] were boarded up or empty or in makeshift use; no longer houses; all in condition of transformation towards being hotels. And unpainted." All was ugly. "Even in this changing racing wild light, ugly. […]. The grey cliff of buildings on her right being the start of the city" (*FGC* 43). Wandering randomly through the urban landscape, Martha notices that the Southern area of the city is a "world of greasy hulls" and "bombed streets" (*FGC* 44). The city center, Piccadilly Circus, though considered as the "hub of the empire" is characterized by its "ugliness" (*FGC* 43). Walking across the Queensway, she notices that "the pavements were lined with prostitutes, standing singly or in pairs, dozens of them," (*FGC* 45) waiting to be consumed, not only physically, but also by men's fantasies.

Far from the golden city of her childhood dreams, Martha also discovers a class-bound society. This dystopian vision evokes Charles Dickens's works, where the city is first represented as a lure but ends up as a trap. Although they are not aware of their rigid class categorization, English people are defined according to their classes and ideologies. For instance, Martha realizes that her friends Iris and Jimmy, who offer her a room in which she stays at her arrival at London, are deluding themselves about their social condition. She thinks "a good deal about class" (FGC 92) and presumes that her friends are blind to their class belonging:

> […] what she had found on the other side of the river, […] was something not very far off conditions described in books about the thirties. Were Stilla and her people poor? Very. They were better off they said; but their demands were small and had not grown larger. Were Iris and Jimmy poor, though they owned their café on mortgage and ate well? Very: they expected so little. These were all people who had no right to expect much. (*FGC* 24)

The invisible lines of class and ideology are only perceptible to an outsider like Martha. She alone can perceive her own plight and the plight of others—"there's something wrong with me that I do see what's going on as ugly, as if I were the only person awake and everyone else in a kind of bad dream, and couldn't see that they were" (*FGC* 68). The whole society seems oblivious to the fact that it is oppressed and that war is an unbelievable atrocity. During the weeks of her search for a job, Martha encounters depressed and poverty-stricken people and discovers the gap between the "working classes" and the middle class. She gains insight into "the nature of separation and division" (*FGC* 92) ruling English society and

becomes aware of the "selfishness of the middle classes" (*FGC* 93) and the destitution of "workmen clustered around a crater in the road" (*FGC* 75). Such class categories organize public life and define citizens. Martha bitterly realizes that, in order to be well-integrated, she has to conform to class classification in British society, "choose a slot to fit [herself] into, and narrow [herself] down for this stratum or that" (*FGC* 34). Her great expectations are soon shattered as she faces this new frightening reality.

The modern city also epitomizes both closure and fragmentation. To Frederick R. Karl, *The Four-Gated City* begins with "suffocation and strangulation." The key images in the first pages are of "grime, globules of wet, gritty smears, grease, thumb marks."[295] These "inside images" seem to convey a sense of "enclosure" and a closed society (87). Martha realizes that she lives in a country "where people could not communicate across the dark that separated them." Everything seems to be "fragments" to her. Through her acquaintance with Phoebe, a member of the communist party, who is sharply critical of English life, she becomes aware "how human beings could be separated so absolutely by a slight difference in the texture of their living that they could not talk to each other, must be weary or enemies" *(FGC* 92).

The negative picture of London debunks the image of the ideal city of Martha's childhood dreams. Das suggests that *The Four-Gated City* "goes beyond documenting culture to become a counter-cultural treatise undermining the very culture it apparently documents."[296] Emerging later as a problematic voice of the counterculture in the 1960s, Lessing would loosely be associated by the mid-fifties with the energy of the social protest of The Angry Young Men, a group of British intellectuals, novelists, playwrights and leftist dissidents who questioned after the Second World War post-war orthodox literature for its compliance with the socio-political order of their country. Dissatisfied with the drabness of the post-war state, the group used social realism to criticize the H-bomb, the British class system, the hypocrisy and mediocrity of upper-and middle-classes and social injustice. It was dominated by men, who were not particularly young, but also included women. The three archetypal "angry young men" were the playwrights John Osborne, John Wain and Kingsley Amis. They were joined by Lindsay Anderson, Kenneth Tynam, Bill Hopkins and Doris

[295] Frederick R. Karl. "Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy." *Modern Critical Views Doris Lessing*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986. p. 87.

[296] Liza Das. "Interrogating Culture: Sexuality, Madness and Marxism in the London Novels of Doris Lessing." *Studies in Women Writers in English*. Vol. VI, 2007. p. 28.

Lessing, whose powerful essay "The Small Personal Voice" gives her definition of the artist's role in the atomic age:

> It is a question of life and death for all of us; (…) even if some madman does not destroy us all, our children may be destroyed or mad… Yesterday we split the atom. We assaulted that colossal citadel of power, the tiny unit of the substance of the universe. And because of this, the great dream and the great nightmare of centuries of human thought have taken flesh and walk beside us all, day and night. (*SPV* 16)

c. The existential malaise

The London's unfriendly urban environment is far more alienating than the South African one. It emphasizes Martha's sense of homelessness, for she has left the African mud house seeking "home" but ends up homeless. She is denied the ontological security she needs in order to survive. This is why the first part of the narrative is imbued with a sense of existential malaise. We shall now attempt to clarify the underlying features of Martha's schizophrenic experiences, from a phenomenological angle, and explain their causes, which are, which are, we shall try to demonstrate, due to the failure of integration in her new English setting, her feelings of ontological insecurity and her fear of "engulfment."[297]

In Iris and Jimmy's upper-room café, where she stays temporarily at the beginning of the novel, Martha feels isolated and confined. Her new reality becomes one of alienation and "suspicion" (*FGC* 13). As a stranger, she grows anxious about what she feels: "She had been careful of saying too much of what she had watched around London on this tide or that" (*FGC* 20). In Laingian terms, she is under the anxiety of engulfment, a notion referring to the form of threat felt by the individual whenever he/she is in a relationship with another individual who endangers his/her identity. Indeed, she cannot express herself genuinely: "To whom in the world could she say what she had found in London? […] She opened her mouth to say: I am thinking a good deal about class […] but shut it again" (*FGC* 92).
Martha's restlessness also arouses feelings of otherness: "Down in Stella's territory, or with Iris, or walking through streets she did not know, she was skinned, scaled, vulnerable, an alien, always fighting in herself that inner shrinking, which was the result of surroundings that did not know her […]" (*FGC* 58).

[297] "Engulfment is felt as a risk in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply in being seen." R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965. p. 44.

The sociologist Anthony Giddens points out that ontological security is sustained primarily by "routine" and "continuity."[298] Martha's life on the contrary is marked by discontinuity and loss of anchoring points, which elicits anxiety and a sense of ontological insecurity. The "hideousness of the English climate" makes her feel estranged. While she was used to "the splendid golden explosiveness of Africa" (*FGC* 13), she now feels alien in the sunless new environment and "rootless" soil of England. The loss of familiar referential points ultimately leads to her existential malaise. The discovery of how the city of London is vastly different from what she understood it to be has caused profound feelings of dislocation (*FGC* 24).

In *The Divided Self*, Laing defines the "ontologically insecure" person as someone who "cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy and identity of himself and others for granted" and who consequently contrives strategies to avoid "losing his[/her] self" (42-43). As Martha's sense of ontological security is threatened in London's gigantic space, she is haunted by existential questioning:

> In a street full of strangers, on top of a bus in a part of London all barren little houses and smoking chimneys–who was she? Martha? Certainly not 'Matty'. She became lightheaded, empty, sometimes dizzy […]. Today, she could see herself […] a tiny entity among swarms: then down, back inside herself, to stand, arms on damp concrete: this was what she was, a taste or flavor of existence without a name. (*FGC* 25)

Martha starts questioning her identity and her whole existence: she feels she is nothing but "a tiny entity among swarms" or "a flavor of existence without a name." This suggests that the individual may get lost in mass society, where alienation is unavoidable. Martha's psychic state at this point is akin to what R. D. Laing calls the existential state of "implosion," which he characterizes in *The Divided Self* as

> full terror of the experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity as a gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum. The individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But this emptiness is him. Although in other ways he longs for the emptiness to be filled, he dreads the possibility of this happening because he has come to feel that all he can be is the awful nothingness of just this very vacuum.[299]

[298] Anthony Giddens. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Identity in the Late Modern Age*. California: Stanford University Press, 1991. p. 39.
[299] R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965. p. 45.

Reality becomes for her implosive, threatening to engulf and obliterate any sense of identity:

> 'Matty' was an intolerably tedious personage she could think of only with exhausted nausea and fear that she might ever again be afflicted by her. Martha–well, ordinary Martha too had moved away, could be looked at: she did well enough, was not important. As for 'Hesse,' it was a name acquired like a bracelet from a man who had it in his possession to be given to a woman in front of lawyers at the time of signing the marriage contract. But who then was she behind the banalities of the day? A young woman? No, nothing but a soft dark receptive intelligence, that was all. (*FGC* 47)

Martha loses a stable sense of identity. The ontologically insecure individual, having a fragmentary sense of self, questions his/her being on three levels: his/her existence, his/her essence (what one is) and his/her identity (who one is). With such insecurities, interpersonal and intrapersonal relations may be interpreted as threatening and potentially destructive. Coming to this new country, Martha has "to fight paranoia," a condition similar to that of the many other "aliens" whom she has met in "the pubs." She has to "break rules invisible to those who lived by them" (*FGC* 31).

Fearing engulfment, Martha leaves the real world and retreats temporarily to the world of fantasies and dreams, where she experiences complete freedom. As she cannot relate to real persons, she only relates to the "Martha of the past," to an object of her imagination and memory. In Laing's terms, she is precariously cut off "from the rest of the world, [her] identity and autonomy are always in question. [She] lacks the experience of [her] own temporal continuity. [She] may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness."[300]

As a result of this insecurity, Martha becomes a modern schizophrenic character. Lessing's understanding of schizophrenia is similar to Laing's apprehension of this process as the individual's response to cope with the modern world whose increasing division causes a split between body and mind. According to Daniel Burston's interpretation of Laing's idea of schizophrenia,

> Schizophrenia is a symptom of extreme ontological insecurity, with its attendant fears of engulfment, petrification, and implosion; the consequent defense mechanisms are designed to maintain the person's precarious sense of identity, such as the flight into fantasy and the deliberate cultivation of the rupture between the

[300] *Ibid*. p. 42.

so-called real and false selves.[301]

The state of schizophrenia is what we are going to look into in the next section.

d. Martha's experience of schizophrenia in London

In London, Martha exhibits signs of schizophrenia which manifest themselves in a split between the inner or true self and what Laing calls "the false self-system," and a schism between the body and mind. We shall see that this type of schizophrenia, far from being an illness, is rather a social phenomenon, a defense mechanism and a normal reaction to an external threatening world and to social repression. The heroine of the series will therefore attempt to disentangle herself from it.

Upon arriving in a devastated unknown city, Martha who feels only loss and anonymity, takes on different *personae* and invents names and fictitious histories as she feels only loss d. Under different "disguises," she "call[s] strange identities into being with a switch of clothes or a change of voice—until [she feels] like an empty space without boundaries […]" (*FGC* 26).

> A stranger last week had said: 'What's your name?' Her mind dizzying, Martha had said: Phyllis Jones. For an afternoon and an evening she had been Phyllis Jones, with an imaginary history of war-time work in Bristol. […] A week later, […] Martha had been someone called Alice Harris instead. […]. What difference did it make to her, the sense of identity, like a silent statement 'I am here', if she were called Phyllis or Alice, or Martha or Matty; or if her history were this or that? (*FGC* 26)

These different *personae* or masks correspond to Laing's concept of the "false-self system" of the schizoid, which "exists as the complement of an 'inner' self occupied in maintaining its identity and freedom by [disembodying itself in order to escape] being grasped, pinpointed, trapped, possessed. Its aim is to be a pure subject, with no objective existence" (95). In the Laingian perspective, Martha keeps a "true self" and develops a separate "false-self system" which functions as a façade behind which the "true self" can hide.

[301] Daniel Burston. *The Wings of Madness. The Life and Work of R. D Laing.* Cambridge, Massachusttes: Harvard University Press, 1996. p. 238.

Her existential insecurity prompts her to deliberately create "false-self systems" as a defense mechanism, which is for Laing a way for the schizophrenic to "transcend the world and hence be safe" (84). They provide her with the anonymity and freedom she was denied in the African environment: "Coming to a big city […] means first of all, […], freedom: all the pressures are off, no one cares, no need for the mask. For weeks then, without boundaries, without definition, like a balloon drifting and bobbing, nothing had been expected of her" (*FGC* 12). She can thus retain the freedom she has just discovered merely by relinquishing any attempts at identity categorization and labeling.

The schizophrenic or schizoid person lives assuming roles and impersonating others. But when the schism between the "real" and the "false-self system" grows wider, the schizoid organization turns into psychosis, with all interactions taking the form of splits: splits between the real and false self, between the real self and the body and between the false self and others. Martha experiences such psychotic states and personifies what Laing calls "the disembodied self" when she errs alone along the streets of London. In fact, she experiences a split in body and mind: "Her body [is] a machine, reliable and safe for walking" while "her mind [is] a soft dark empty space" (*FGC* 46-47).

Schizophrenia or the displacement of personality functions for Martha as a defense mechanism for much of her life. This phenomenon matches Laing's definition of schizophrenia as "a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation."[302] In her dual state of "schizophrenia," she acquires the capacity to transcend the restrictive pressures of her social environment, either on the African farm or in London, by creating the 'Matty' persona. In her childhood, the "false self-system" functions as "as an act of survival," especially in the Sports Club when she was 'Matty,' the "hip-swinging sexually gallant girl" (*FGC* 115)—a false self created to mingle with the community of the "wolves."
In *The Four-Gated City*, she repeatedly discovers that her old self 'Matty' is "reborn" (*FGC* 12) after having lain dormant for years: This old self "had […] been in abeyance for many years, ready at the touch of a button to chatter" (*FGC* 13). The role of 'Matty' is similar to a clown's or jester's, a mime's and a parodist's: This other self is "amusing, outspoken, […] free from convention, free to say what other people did not say" (*FGC* 12). It has "freedom from whatever other people must conform to, not so much by ignoring it, but when the point was reached when conformity might be expected, gaining exemption in an act of deliberate clumsiness—like a parody" (*FGC* 12). When she stays in the café with Jimmy and Iris,

[302] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 115.

Martha is "shut inside this person; it was 'Martha' who intruded walking into 'Matty'" (*FGC* 13).

The mask of the "false self" is meant to superficially conform to social expectations. Martha, as a matter of fact, uses the "bumbling, charming" (*FGC* 25) 'Matty' to communicate with the people she encounters, for she would not have been welcomed by Jimmy and Iris, who would have been suspicious of a stranger renting a room in their café, "had not 'Matty' been here for weeks now, the freakishly 'charming' visitor from such different worlds" (*FGC* 15). "Could they have been so kind to Martha, had she not offered them 'Matty'?" (*FGC* 22)

When she arrives at the Coldridge household, Martha has once again experienced an inner split between Martha, the detached observer or watcher, and "Matty," the "clumsy self-denigrating clown." At this point in the novel, she reaches an acute state of schizophrenia, telling her friend Lynda that she is succumbing to it "more than before" (*FGC* 240): Martha "was making a discovery—unexpected: 'Matty' was being summoned back into existence" (*FGC* 143), especially after she receives a letter from Mrs. Quest informing her of the latter's imminent visit to London: "Putting down that letter, [she] was shaking from head to foot […]. She trembled […]" (*FGC* 227). The prospect of her mother's visit to London brings back memories of her childhood and adolescence battle with Emily Maude. The ghost of the mother is too haunting that her daughter recalls her childhood strategies of survival. Consequently, 'Matty' continues to be Martha's survival role in the Coldridge household just as it had been in the African town where "Matty" was created as a weapon against her mother, who had always preferred boys over girls, as Martha tells Dr. Lamb, Lynda's psychiatrist:

> she (Mrs. Quest) was always making fun of [her] because [she] was not good at the boys' things. […] I'm a girl, why should I be good at boys' things? No, I did them, but I did them badly and laughed at myself. I clowned, and she laughed at me. It was a way of protecting myself. (*FGC* 150)

In "Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel," Barbara Hill Rigney observes that "Laing's description of schizophrenia corresponds to Lessing's: he sees it as, first, an alienation from the self, which leads to an alienation from other people as well" (70). Martha's state of alienation stems from her loneliness: "Since she had been in London, she had been alone, and had learned that she had never been anything else in her life. This was the best thing she had known, to walk down streets interminably, […] alone, not knowing she was" (*FGC* 46). But "far from being an enemy," loneliness becomes "her friend" (*FGC* 46).

She refuses any attachment, any particular identity or solidarity. Martha's normality becomes "a condition of disparateness" for the "compartmented, pigeonholed" human mind compulsively separated and divided" (*FGC* 33, 61, 79). For Laing as well as for Lessing, this condition ultimately leads to schizophrenia.

Yet, Laing underscores the "aloneness and isolation" felt by a "schizoid" individual more forcibly than Lessing. To him,

> The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself—together with others or 'at home in' the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and soon. (17)

What Lessing perceives in her characters and what Laing argues in *The Politics of Experience* is that if the world is inhospitable and "unhomelike," then perhaps withdrawal from that world is a sane and reasonable method of self-preservation. In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing evokes this idea by situating her characters' experiences of schizophrenia in the post-war and pre-antipsychiatry period. The protagonist finds herself in the Coldridge household in the post-1950s London, a hostile environment marked by paranoia and schizophrenia.

Soon after her arrival at the Coldridge household, Martha discovers an alienated family made up of depressive mothers and traumatized children. Suffering from the absence of his mother as a result of her temporary stays at the mental hospital, Francis has developed signs of strain at school. Paul's mother, Sally-Sarah, is a traumatized, "passive" (*FGC* 162) mother because of her husband's involvement in international espionage; she often flees her marital flat in Cambridge to Mark's house. Consequently, her son Paul is more attached to the Coldridges than to his own parents. The alienated family is like the house, with "leaking roofs and plumbing" and Martha feels "as if an underground guerrilla war went on" (*FGC* 140).

The psychic breakdown of the family overlaps with the political events and social problems of the outer world, including the atmosphere of the Cold War, which reached its peak in 1956, when the "Russell-Einstein Manifesto" was issued. "Mutually Assured Destruction" was announced in 1956, reflecting the potential destruction of civilization as a result of the thermonuclear conflict. Ironically, while nuclear deterrence was promoted as the

best guarantee of peace, it had generated an atmosphere of paranoia. In 1966, Susan Sontag argued that there was a collective psychological persecution evident in human history, and predicted that "every person would spend his individual life under the threat of something almost insupportable psychologically—collective incineration and extinction which could come at any time, virtually without warning."[303]

In *The Four-Gated City,* the international scene is depicted as having a "quality of horror, […] senseless horror," (220) especially after Mc. Carthyism and the Red Scare spread in the United States between 1950 and 1956 in a reaction to communism and the fear of espionage by Soviet agents. Watkins suggests that Lessing best describes post-war London in *The Four-Gated City*, which conveys "the closed-off, paranoid legacy of the Cold War in the 1950s."[304] At that period, "any attitude remotely associated with 'communism' was suspect, indeed, dangerous" (149). All these facts had repercussions on the social and political life in Britain. These events are reflected in the novel:

> To listen, to read, to watch the news […] was to submit oneself to incredulity: this barbarism, this savagery, was simply not possible. […] The war in Korea was at the height of its danger for the world, the propaganda on both sides had reached a point where no one sensible could believe a word of it, and for months it looked as if nothing could stop America using 'the bomb' there. In America, the hysteria had grown till that great nation looked from outside like a dog driven mad by an infestation of fleas, snapping and biting at its own flesh; and a man called Mc. Carthy, who had no qualities at all, save one, the capacity to terrorize other people, was able to do as he liked. (*FGC* 220)

The Cold War is also perceptible in the claustrophobic atmosphere of the family. It is marked by "threat," "insecurity" and illness (*FGC* 133). Mark's brother, the scientist Colin Coldridge, is accused of being a "traitor" (144) to the British government because of his alliance to the Soviet Union for "handing information about the atomic bomb to Russia" (145). His consequent flight from England has led to a paranoid atmosphere inside the Coldridge family. The house is besieged by reporters and spies, giving the family notoriety and traumatizing to young Francis and his cousin Paul. The whole affair of Colin ends tragically with the suicide of his wife, who "gasse[s] herself" (*FGC* 164), and the psychological breakdown of his son Paul and his brother Mark.

---

[303] Susan Sontag. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966. Print. p. 224.

[304] Susan Watkins. "Remembering Home: Nation and Identity in the Recent Writing of Doris Lessing." *Feminist Review*, 85, 2007. p. 98.

What emerges in Lessing's *The Four-Gated City* is an understanding of schizophrenia as an existential state and a social phenomenon caused by the horrors of the cold war period. It is the result of one's failure to adapt to a harsh and alienating social environment. The schism between the individual and the social world ultimately leads to a split in body and mind, between what one should be and what he/she actually is.

But is this schizophrenia an expression of female powerlessness? Is it, as Chesler argued, "the result of women's involvement in cosmic powerlessness, evil and love […] of the human race?"[305]

- Schizophrenia: a positive force/a form of rebellion

In her essay "Switching off to See Dallas," in *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, Lessing describes "a certain type of schizophrenia" as "the condition of intelligent doubt about ourselves" (34). Self-doubt and self-awareness entail liberation from dogmatic habits of mind through intelligent activity. This positive aspect of schizophrenia is best epitomized by the self-conscious duality which Lynda and Martha experience in *The Four-Gated City*. Self-observation is a valuable strategy allowing self-awareness. Lynda, diagnosed by Dr. Lamb as a schizophrenic person, tells Martha about the two persons within, the one who watches and the one who is watched; even though the latter cautions her to keep this fact secret, she nonetheless acknowledges its positive aspect:

> You'd better be careful, you mustn't tell them about the two people. Sometimes you are more than the one that watches, and sometimes that one gets far off and you are more the one that is watched. But they look out for that, you see, and when you make a mistake and say it, then that proves it. You're a schiz. […] But, there is pleasure in it. (*FGC* 239-241)

Lynda is "someone who watches herself" (*FGC* 188). Likewise, Martha remembers that there has been that "other person, the silent watcher, the witness, ever since her adolescence" (*FGC* 218). The dual parts of the self—characteristic of schizophrenia—shared by Lynda and Martha enable them to gain a critical distance about themselves and the world around them. In

[305] Phyllis Chesler. *Women and Madness*. London: Allen Lane, 1974. p. 14-15.

The Four Gated City, she continues her role as the judging watcher, observing London and Londoners with the critical eye of an outsider:

> Walking down damp smelling pavements under the wet London sky in the summer of five years after the war, she was (but really became, as if nothing had intervened), Martha Quest, a young girl sitting under the tree from where she could see a great hot landscape and a sky full of birds and clouds. Or she was the Martha who had pushed a small child under leafy avenues with the smell of roses coming off town gardens. But really, there she was: she was nothing to do with Martha, or any other name she might have attached to her. (*FGC* 48)

Martha's growth as an individual relies on the reassessment of her past experiences thanks to the dual aspect of her identity. According to Pickering, "the judging observer in Martha is the one constant factor in [her] personality. The observer is critical both of Martha and others, providing some stability […] in her spiritual quest."[306]
She observes her past in Africa and scrutinizes herself from a distance, realizing that throughout her life she "had been hot-eyed, angry, violent, unable to listen" (*FGC* 195). She is now "ready to wake, to listen" to others (*FGC* 45).

Unknown to ordinary people or even to conventional psychiatrists, who designate this state as a pathological one, the positive aspect of schizophrenia means giving up all certainty about the self and the universe. It is a release from dogmas and the beginning of new thinking habits. This is what happens to Martha, who starts questioning the validity of both communism and liberalism after being a radical communist throughout her life: "For some days she kept switching from one viewpoint to the other; one day she was violently anti-communist—and self-righteously so. The next, she was a pure dedicated, self-righteous communist." (*FGC* 215) But unlike Lynda, Martha is thus able to achieve a schizophrenic insight without losing her sanity.

Through her conversations with Lynda, Martha gradually understands that the labeling of schizophrenia as "mental illness" is mostly a definition imposed on those who see the world differently by those who have a single picture.

> For years she had been listening, half-listening to talk in the basement which she had thought was too crazy to take as more than pitiable. Now, she was understanding it—or a lot of it. She was even learning the language [of the

[306] Jean Pickering. "Martha Quest and the Anguish of Feminine Fragmentation" in Sprague, Claire and Tiger, Virgina (ed). *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*. Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co, 1986. p. 96.

> schizophrenic]. Several of the visitors to the basement had been in mental hospitals, or were under some sort of treatment. (*FGC* 240)

This is confirmed by Lynda when she warns Martha not to tell the psychiatrist, Dr. Lamb, about the watcher, since this will be diagnosed as schizophrenia and she will be given drugs or shock therapy to kill the second voice. We can here see an implicit indictment of the psychiatric establishment, which she thinks would mute the second voice in her and label every patient's (especially women) disorder as "nothing but depression, schizophrenia, etc" (*FGC* 240). Psychiatrists would automatically interpret the second voice in Lynda as illness. In this respect, feminist critics have pondered upon and criticized traditional psychiatry's automatic link between women and schizophrenia. Their arguments find echoes in *The Four-Gated City*. Lessing's interest in Laing's anti-psychiatrist movement and feminist critiques of schizophrenia explains her indictment of traditional psychiatrists' interpretation of schizophrenia as a gendered "female malady."

- A critical view of traditional psychiatry

In 1974, Elaine Showalter argued that mental disease had always been in some sense gendered as feminine insofar as schizophrenia has traditionally been used as an instrument of patriarchal coercion:

> In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population.[307]

Although "for years, the world of mental illness, and the doctors who dealt with it, had been alien, […] and too distant from her," Martha realizes that "all her life she had lived in atmospheres of strain, stress, neurosis, which were freely admitted, freely discussed. People were neurotic" (*FGC* 240). Coming to London and specifically to the Coldridge household, she discovers that conventional psychiatry has locked up the "insane" women and neurotics in mental asylums and hospitals. There is "an absolute separation" between the "sane" people and women who are "under psychiatrists" (*FGC* 240).

[307] Elaine Showalter. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture*. 1830-1980. London: Virago, 1987. p. 73.

Chesler analyzes the extent to which, in contemporary Western society, women account for far greater numbers than men of those drawing on mental health services, and how far the norms of mental health differ according to the sex of the patient. Asking whether such observations might call for a definition of mental illness as in some sense a specifically 'female malady', Chesler answers with a qualified affirmative. She argues that mental health norms are implicitly gendered as masculine within patriarchal culture, whereas femininity is marked as in some sense always already pathological:

> Since clinicians and researchers, as well as their patients and subjects, adhere to a masculine standard of mental health, women, by definition, are viewed as psychologically impaired—whether they accept or reject the female role—simply because they are women.[308]

According to Chesler, schizophrenia is alienation from one's sex-role stereotype and hence rebellion against the constraints of femininity. The idea that the schizophrenic woman stages a protest against the limits of gender in refusing to conform to the feminine ideals acquired significant critical currency for feminists in the 1970s and 80s. Showalter (1985) was the first to discuss social demands and their relation to the building up of a female consciousness. She said that schizophrenia is the product of the repression and oppression of women within the family in patriarchal societies. She argued that schizophrenia could be read as the spirited refusal of "feminine dependence, passivity, chastity, dutifulness, obedience, and docility." *The Four Gated City* illustrates this idea:

> Gerald Smith has lost his wife into a mental hospital: she had been unable to stand the social isolation of being his wife, an isolation which was never explained, put into words, defended; just slowly deepened till she cracked. (*FGC* 221)

Lessing here attempts to expose the mental trauma resulting from women's confinement to a restricted role dictated by the patriarchal ideology. What may appear to the world as schizophrenia, madness, a deformity of the norm, is for the narrator a revolt against the *status quo*.

Drawing on Laing's anti-psychiatry stance, Lessing further debunks the psychiatric orthodoxy of the time, which presumed that schizophrenia was most likely hereditary, a consequence of faulty innate biological hard-wiring or defects in the neurological configuration of the brain. Elizabeth Wilson writes that "orthodox psychiatrists explained

[308] Phyllis Chesler. *Women and Madness*. London: Allen Lane, 1974. p. 108.

schizophrenic or mad behavior as an effect of illness," a view "individualized the patient past the point of moral responsibility."[309]

Lessing subverts orthodox psychiatry and psychotherapy mainly by discrediting the character of Dr. Lamb, Lynda's psychiatrist, whose method is to label persons according to psychiatric types. His psychotherapy is revealed through Martha's encounter with him, after the breakdown caused by a letter from her mother informing her about her impending arrival at the Coldridge household. In a session with Dr. Lamb, Martha realizes that the psychiatrist is trying hard to pigeon-hole her into the category of "maniac-depressive with schizoid tendencies":

> With great skill, playing her like a fish, he brought her again and again to points where she would be angry. Watching, she avoided, fought, backed away, because more than anything else she dreaded the exhaustion that would follow. Then she cracked as she was bound to: she wept, she screamed, she shouted. […] She knew she ought not to go back to Dr. Lamb. (*FGC* 250)

Martha's confrontation with Dr. Lamb awakens her to the power exerted by the analyst or psychiatrist upon the patient. She notices that "Dr. Lamb possesses all the power," and hence, all "truth" (*FGC* 251). Whatever he says in his diagnosis is to be assumed as right whether or not it makes sense to his patient. Helpless, the latter remains subject to the control of a person who usually represents and enforces the destructive and conventional aspects of a society against which the patient rebels.

Dr. Lamb epitomizes society's tendency to protect itself by separating the unknown, the irrational and the insane from the familiar, the rational and the sane. The conventional psychiatrist is expected to classify in order to label the malady. The patient is supposed to submit to the psychotherapeutic process unquestioningly. Lynda tells Martha that the psychic establishment has, as a consequence, deprived her of her freedom:

> Lynda sat tracing [a circle] with her finger [...]. 'That is freedom,' she said. "That's mine." It's all they let me have. They wouldn't let me keep that if they knew how to take it away. But if I say to them I don't hear voices, you've cured me, the voices have gone… they can't prove anything. That's my freedom. But I suppose they will develop machines–they always do, you know. They won't be able to stand that amount of freedom. So they'll make a machine and clamp it to our heads and

[309] Elizabeth Wilson. *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968*. London: Tavistock, 1980. p. 114-115.

> they'll be able to say: you're lying, we can measure the shape of the voices on this machine. What are you trying to hide? What do you hear? … (*FGC* 135)

In her essay, "Switching Off to Watch Dallas," Lessing discusses the effect of the institutional powers like psychoanalysis and its impact upon people like Lynda:

> As the methods of society for control and manipulation became more refined, it was discovered that the extremities of physical violence were less effective than drugs [...]; and more effective than the drugs, were techniques of persuasion and brainwashing. By these means these members of the population with capacities above normal (those people now considered to be in the main line of evolution) were systematically destroyed, either by fear [...] or by classing them with the congenitally defective. (36)

Like Lessing, R. D. Laing, a psychiatrist in rebellion against the authority of his own professional power, opposed traditional psychotherapeutic techniques and the conventional analyst-patient relationship:

> Psychotherapy consists in the paring away of all that stands between us, the props, masks, roles, lies, defenses, anxieties, projections and interjections, in short, all the carryovers from the past, transference and countertransference, that we use by habit and collusion, wittingly or unwittingly, as our currency for relationships… Of course, such techniques in the hands of a man who has not unremitting concern and respect for the patient could be disastrous.[310]

In *The Divided Self*, Laing also criticized the fact that traditional psychiatry studied the patient outside the context of his/her life in general, and outside the context of the psychiatrist-patient relationship in particular. He further argued that every psychiatric description was not a statement of fact but an interpretation. Yet, the interpretations found in psychiatric textbooks were determined in advance by the categories of the theoretical stance and the terminology of the traditional school:

> It is just possible to have a thorough knowledge of what has been discovered about the hereditary or familial incidence of manic-depressive psychosis or schizophrenia, to have a facility in recognizing schizoid "ego distortion" and schizophrenic ego defects, plus the various 'disorders' of thought, memory, perceptions, etc., to know, in fact, just about everything that can be known about the psychopathology of schizophrenia or of schizophrenia as a disease without

[310] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 115.

being able to understand one single schizophrenic. (33)

Laing understands schizophrenia as a way of being in the world, a way of experiencing the world. Experience can be rendered comprehensible only by finding a new language rejecting the classical terminology of conventional psychiatry. He wrote:

> I do myself believe that there is not any such 'condition' as 'schizophrenia. Yet the label is a social fact. Indeed, this label as social fact, is a *political* event [original italics]. This political event, occurring in the civic order of society, imposes definitions and consequences on the labeled person. [311]

For Laing, the words used in psychopathology were designed to isolate and circumscribe the meaning of the patient's life to a particular clinical pattern. These entities may sound as rigorous and clear as any other medical terminology, which are not so in real fact. For him, naming individuals as "schizophrenic" or "psychotic" was nothing but vague terms which failed to describe the predicament of those people and estranged us from them even more. Laing expatiated upon the consequences of these practices in these terms:

> After being subjected to a degradational ceremonial known as a psychiatric examination he is bereft of his civil liberties in being imprisoned in a total institution known as a 'mental hospital.' More completely, more radically than anywhere else in our society he is invalidated as a human being.[312]

Lynda's free communication of her views about existence destabilizes the institutionalized categorization of Dr. Lamb. Her resistance to the conventional psychotherapy leads her nevertheless to hospitalization, drugs and shock treatments. She tells Martha that all she receives from psychotherapy is "pills" (*FGC* 250). This is when Martha realizes that Lynda and Dorothy "lived on pills, their lives were regulated by pills and their visits to the doctors where they got prescriptions for more pills" (*FGC* 251).

Lessing thus exposed society's systematic labeling and policing of difference. She denounced the hierarchical and conventional nature of the psychoanalytic experience of patient and doctor, which she believed cannot lead to possible cure. She drew upon Laing's belief that therapy could be successful only if the search for understanding was a personal interaction between equals. She was especially inclined to his emphasis on the need for "an initiation

[311] R. D. Laing and A. Esterson. *Sanity, Madness and the Family*. London: Penguin, 1964. p. 64.

[312] *Ibid*. p. 64.

ceremonial" through which the person on the verge of schizophrenic breakdown would be "guided further into inner space and time" and back again "by people who have already made the journey."[313]

These ideas point to the importance of the experience of breakdown as a necessary prelude to "breakthrough." We shall then study the pattern of breakthrough after breakdown in *The Golden Notebook* which best encapsulates the image of the schizoid person in the character of Anna Wulf who is sustained by Saul Green in an inner journey of awakening.

[313] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 86.

e. Breakthrough through breakdown in *The Golden Notebook*

Lessing initiates her novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962) with a preface in which she states that "the theme of 'breakdown,'—[…] when people 'crack up'—[…] is a way of self-healing, of the inner self's dismissing false dichotomies and divisions" (8). This statement highlights the importance of breakdown to the experience of breakthrough in this novel. Lessing's female protagonist, Anna Wulf, is a novelist-heroine, a *divorcée*, a mother, an intellectually and sexually free woman who is described as undergoing a schizophrenic breakdown, which results in a paralysis of will and a writing block. She is a British left-wing writer who spends her youth in central Africa where she is part of a communist cell. She has moved to London in 1956 after her divorce with Max Wulf. With her daughter Janet, she shares a London flat with her friend Molly and gets involved in the British Communist Party. She finds herself in an atmosphere of violence, terror and fragmentation typical of the post-war atomic age.

Anna's psychological and artistic breakdown is bred by many factors, among which the demise of communism, her disillusionment with its political ideals as well as the failure of her love affair with Michael, and later her involvement in a sado-masochistic relationship with another lover, Saul Green. It is mainly the latter fact that will accentuate her schizophrenic breakdown and her mental collapse. Anna undergoes a descent into insanity with the American writer Saul, who suffers from a serious case of schizophrenia. Their long trip into madness and schizophrenia comes to an end when they finally realize the common necessity to resume writing, bestowing upon each other the "gift of writing" by composing the first line of the other's novel. By the end of the novel, Anna manages to regain her artistic creativity and achieve a state of breakthrough and awakening through mental breakdown, psychic fragmentation and struggle through her sado-masochistic relationship with Saul Green. Her regained psychic health and creativity result from allowing herself to fragment and dissolve into others.

The depiction of Anna's descent into schizophrenic dissociation—which occupies much of the blue and inner golden notebooks—becomes Lessing's vehicle for exploring the subliminal psychological states negated by the rational world. While the blue notebook is a record of breakdown, the inner golden notebook is a record of breakthrough, as the rifts and

splits inside Anna's psyche ultimately resolves into her psychic rebirth. This is best described by Lessing in the preface to the *Golden Notebook*, where she writes that finally in the inner golden notebook:

> things have come together, the divisions have broken down—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 patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other, dissolve. They hear each other's thoughts, recognize each other in themselves. Saul Green, the man who has been envious and destructive of Anna, now supports her, advises her, gives her the theme for her next book, *Free Women*. (*GN* 8)

Here again, the novel suggests Anna's possible emancipation from total breakdown by drawing upon the theories of R. D. Laing regarding schizophrenia and psychological recovery. Roberta Rubenstein observes: "One of Laing's central hypotheses is that the psychotic breakdown manifested in acute schizophrenia is a natural process of mind-healing, which, if allowed to run its full course will be therapeutic rather than destructive."[314]

This section will therefore deal with Anna's and Saul Green's descent into schizophrenia—the kind of schizophrenia that becomes a means of healing, rebirth and transformation rather than a sign of disintegration. We shall firstly account for the reasons that cause Anna's breakdown, which are at the intersection of the political and the psychoanalytical. There appear to be two conflictual personalities within the central protagonist, the political activist and the lover, each contending with each other and materializing her schizophrenic state.

Breakthrough finally occurs in the inner golden notebook when Anna experiences the explosion of the boundaries of her self the moment she encounters her lover Saul Green. Jean Pickering quotes R. D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience* to describe the "sense of "ego-loss" that she goes through at his crucial moment as an "inner voyage [which] is not what we need to be cured of, but […] is in itself a natural way of healing our appalling state of alienation called normality."[315]

---

[314] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*, 1979. p. 179.

[315] Jean Pickering. Martha Quest and "the Anguish of Feminine Fragmentation" in Sprague, Claire and Tiger, Virgina. (ed) *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*. Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co, 1986. p. 96.

- The causes of Anna Wulf's breakdown

–Fragmentation and "crack-up"

Anna Wulf's first words in the novel's opening page strike a note of division and fragmentation: "The point is, that as far as I can see, everything is cracking up" (25). The theme of the "crack-up" evoked by the main protagonist reverberates on social, formal and psychological levels. The story of Anna Wulf takes place in the London of the 1950's, in a city torn assunder, devastated by the destruction of the second World-War. England was then striving for political stabilization, economic reconstruction and a return to normality. But it was impossible to smooth over the cracks in the socio-economic edifice and the schisms of class and gender. This chaotic external world overwhelms the female protagonist.

Within this disturbing context, *The Golden Notebook* depicts Anna Wulf as a woman submerged by the growing vastness of the chaotic world, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of identity and historical material conditions. The fragmentation of the outside world invades the female protagonist's own subjectivity: "The division," Lessing says, "is both internal and external" for "human beings are so divided, are becoming more and more divided and more subdivided in themselves, reflecting the world" (*GN* 61). Anna's mode of being becomes one of a split nature; she thus incarnates the schizoid individual who lives in "a world that threatens [her] being from all sides, and from which there is no exit."[316] The "pressure of chaos outside" is so much threatening that she "cracks under it" (*GN* 60). This sense of total disintegration is further intensified by her alienation from the Communist party, of which she used to be an active member, as well as by the emotional betrayal of her lover, Michael.

–The disillusionment with communism

In order to ward off the fragmentation of the outer and inner worlds, Anna, like the heroine of *Children of Violence*, turns to political activism in an attempt to find meaning. Like Martha Quest, she first thinks that she can attain a more unifying sense of life by dedicating herself to communism, but all her expectations are frustrated: "I came home thinking that

[316] R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965. p. 79.

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. Yet, joining the party intensified the split […]" (171). Anna discovers that "inherent in the structure of a Communist Party or group is a self-dividing principle. Any Communist Party anywhere exists and perhaps flourishes by this process of discarding individuals or groups" (*GN* 85).

Consequently, Anna's experience with the Communist Party bears the seeds of her schizophrenic state later in the novel. The internal division of this political organization has contaminated her, breeding two contending personalities within herself: one is detached and wise; the other is a party fanatic. Talking with her friend Molly about politics, she "never kn[ows] what person is going to reply—the dry, wise, ironical political woman, or the Party fanatic who sounds, literally, quiet maniacal" (*GN* 170). The woman becomes a self-contradictory character: She finds herself repeatedly "doing the automatic-defense of Soviet Union act which [she] can't stand when other people do it" (*GN* 167). She also sees that "everything [she] writes is critical of the Party. Yet, [she is] still in it" (*GN* 168).

In the red notebook, Anna records all the lies and contradictions of the British Communist Party which will finally compel her to renounce her membership. Her involvement in this political organization has laid bare the dual nature of communism and its totalitarian nature. She thinks like other intelligent communists that the party "has been saddled with a group of dead bureaucrats who run it, and that the real work gets done in spite of the center" (142). Inside the Party, she lives in "an atmosphere of suspicious disgust. With another Party member Maryrose, she expresses her disappointment: "We believed everything was going to be beautiful and now we know it won't" (*GN* 189). Discovering that the Communitarian ideal is a mere illusion, Anna then turns instead to the interpersonal relationships with the men she encounters in her life after her divorce.

–The failure of Anna's love relationships

The yellow notebook is emblematic of Anna's emotional crisis and the corrosion of her identity as a result of the failure of her love affairs with the men she encounters in her life. Living in a gender-biased society where women "are still defined in terms of relationships with men" (*GN* 26), she seeks to be independent of the male characters and to transcend the

patriarchal social scripts inflicted upon women. She is however trapped to a large extent in the old patterns of romantic love and loyalty to men: she tells her friend Molly that she is submerged by "a sudden resentment, a rancor—because after all [their] loyalties are always to men" (*GN* 66). Her dilemma is the consequence of her waverings between the claims of love and the search for independence. Indeed, once she falls in love, the "free," independent woman Anna Wulf becomes the dependent, sacrificial, passive and acquiescent woman. This paradoxical psychological state occurs whenever she feels betrayed by her men, of whom Michael is the first example. In fact, Anna's disappointment with her love affair with him causes her ultimate schizophrenia and identity crisis. Roberta Rubenstein stresses that the most profound dimension of Anna Wulf's psychic split is "generated, […], not at the political but at the emotional level, by the dissolution of a five-year relationship with her lover, Michael, the dynamics of which form the central subject of the yellow notebook."[317]

Michael, an ex-communist activist whom Anna has encountered in the Communist Party after her divorce, is the man who brings to the surface two beings or facets of Anna Wulf: the loving, all-caring Anna and the spiteful, loathing woman. This is also clear in her confession to her psychiatrist Mrs. Marks that while she "go[es] to sleep in [Michael's] arms dissolved and happy," she will "wake in the morning hating and resenting him" (*GN* 240). This schizophrenic state is fuelled by her expectation of Michael's impending desertion and betrayal of her:

> Now the cooking for Michael, […]. I am happy, so happy, I can feel the warmth of it through my whole body. Then, there is a cold feeling in my stomach, and I think being happy is a lie; it's a habit of happiness from moments like these during the last years. […] I think, I'm bolstering myself up: the cooking for Michael and the waiting for him. What does it mean? He already has another woman, whom he cares for more than he does me. (*GN* 357-358)

The breakdown of Anna's identity is thus generated by Michael's love affairs with other women and his rejection of her by him. She is fully aware of it: "when had this new frightened vulnerable Anna been born? She knew: it was when Michael had abandoned her" (*GN* 398). Soon after her lover's desertion, she feels that "an awful black whirling chaos is just outside [her], waiting to move into [her] (*GN* 360). It is clear that her failure as a woman in love has led to a total splintering of her own subjectivity, for whenever she loses a lover,

[317] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*, 1979. p. 79.

she feels the loss of "the synthetic unity of the self."[318] All the barriers and divisions she has built in order to stay sane tumble down: "I could feel that the walls of myself were thin or in danger" (*GN* 477). But equally important is the fact the woman's breakdown after being betrayed by Michael is heightened by her writing block and the loss of her creativity.

–The writer's block

Anna's failure as a political activist and a lover affects her career as a woman writer. Her plight resides in her inability to write a novel "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life" (*GN* 76), a book with "the quality of philosophy" (*GN* 75). Every time "she sit[s] down to write, and let[s] [her] mind go easy, the words, it is so dark, or something to do with darkness." (*GN* 75) The darkness surrounding Anna stifles her artistic creativity. The narrator depicts her wrestle to give "form" (*GN* 463) to a strained consciousness: She "can't write any longer. […] the words swim and have no sense. […]; [she], Anna, [is] like a pulse in a great darkness, and the words she writes down are nothing or like the secretions of a caterpillar that are forced out in ribbons to harden in the air" (*GN* 463). This writer's block intensifies Anna's crisis. She is haunted by existential questions, wondering:

> What then am I, Anna […]. Who am I, Anna? […]. She saw herself, Anna seated on the music-stool, writing, writing; making an entry in one book, then ruling it off, or crossing it out; she saw the pages patterned with different kinds of writing; divided, bracketed, broken—She felt a swaying nausea […]. (*GN* 382)

Gradually, she enters a state of self-division: "It occurs to me that what is happening is a breakdown of me, Anna, and this is how I am becoming aware of it. For words are nothing, then I am nothing, […]" (*GN* 383). The words that have been Anna's link to sanity obviously begin to lose their meaning. She has reached a "pitch where shape, form, expression" (*GN* 476) become meaningless to her. Meanwhile, she experiences the breakdown of her ego or what Laing calls "the point of non-being [where] we are at the outer reaches of what language can state."[319] This writer's block arouses feelings of meaninglessness and nihilism and makes her yearn for total annihilation in death.

---

[318] *Ibid*. p. 51.

[319] R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965. p. 40.

The woman-artist's breakdown manifests itself at the level of narration: The fragmented and chaotic structure of the notebooks is meant to illustrate the protagonist's own self-division. Her notebooks multiply and flow into one another, shifting backward and forward in time, oscillating between the linear and the timeless, recording "a process of schizoanalytic experimentation."[320] Yet, the project of the golden notebook suggests that integration is possible and the only real way forward. At the end of the book, the four notebooks weave into one golden notebook pointing to integration and healing. It is the experience of Anna with the American writer Saul Green that has brought about her utter downfall into schizophrenia and psychological recovery. This journey will then be analyzed in detail in the coming section.

- The schizophrenic descent with Saul Green

The encounter with the American writer Saul Green after Janet has been sent to a boarding school drives Anna to "another step down into chaos" (*GN* 571) "full of jarrings and discordancies" (*GN* 534). The heroine of *The Golden Notebook* considers that Saul has been the cause of her disintegration and descent into schizophrenia. Discovering different "men" in Saul's personality that she "couldn't connect" (*GN* 544), Anna gets trapped within conflicting feelings of love and hatred. They both indulge into a "sado-masochistic relationship," (*GN* 540) deriving pleasure and gratification from inflicting and receiving physical pain, reaching the edge of total breakdown. Both Saul and Anna experience desire, power and powerlessness, playing out relationships of sexual and violent, exchanges dominance and subordination:

> We sleep together every night and it is a marvelous deep sleep. Then the friendliness switches to hate in the middle of a sentence. Sometimes the flat is an oasis of loving affection, then suddenly it's a battleground, even the walls vibrate with hate […] (*GN* 557).

At this point in the novel, Anna's schizophrenic state springs from her fear that, while she longs for love, she will be absorbed and annihilated by her lover: As Laing puts it, "the other's love is therefore feared more than his hatred, or rather all love is sensed as a

[320] Linda S. Kauffman. "Sexuality, Sexual Politics and the Displacement of Identity in *The Golden Notebook*." *Epistolary Modes In Modern Fiction*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1992. p. 141.

version of hatred."[321] Anna then incarnates the "psychotic conviction of being possessed by others."[322] She feels being invaded by Saul's split selves, manifest in his repetition of "I, I, I, I," "shooting like bullets from a gun" (*GN* 496) and entangling the protagonist in his schizophrenic state. In many tense conversations with Saul, she actually feels as if she were "spattered by machine-gun bullets" (*GN* 560). During some of his fits, he starts talking randomly, making incessant use of the pronoun "I:"

> Then he began talking, and I swear it was at random, he might have chosen any other subject. He was talking about how to bring up a small girl. He was very intelligent about it all, and very academic. He talked and talked – I said something, but he did not know that I had. He talked—I found myself absent-minded, then with my attention half on what he said, realized I was listening for the word *I* in what he said. I, I, I, I, I—I began to feel as if the word I was being shot at me like bullets from a machine gun. (487)

Saul's stream of "I, I, I, I, I," "shot" (*GN* 605) at Anna functions as a metaphor for the deadly combat or the war of sexes over the issue of subjectivity. Saul seeks to dominate Anna linguistically: "his mouth, like a spoon or a spade or a machine-gun, shot out, spewed out hot aggressive language, words like bullets." Correspondingly, she can "feel the violence of his black power attack every nerve in [her]" (*GN* 605). In her article, "Freedom as Effacement in *The Golden Notebook*: Theorizing Pleasure, Subjectivity and Authority," Tonya Krouse suggests that Anna's negative feelings about the word "I" reflect her feeling towards subjectivity for when she rejects Saul Green's "I" in *The Golden Notebook*, she reacts against the engulfment of her subjectivity[323] Yet, this engulfment seems to be inevitable: Anna realizes that she has gradually gone "inside [Saul's] craziness" (*GN* 497) and understands that she "could no longer separate [herself] from him" (*GN* 567). Thus, she becomes aware that she cannot remain immune to the crack-up overwhelming her, and whose cause is Saul's own disintegration. She tells her American lover: "you'll crack both of us" (*GN* 561).

Trapped within the "same cocoon of madness" (*GN* 562), and gradually affected by his anxiety and split personalities, Anna realizes that her own selves become split in reaction to the different "Sauls." In this context, the view, shared by Lessing and Laing, of insanity or schizophrenia as an intensification of the divisions within the normal self underlies Anna's

---

[321] R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965. p.45.
[322] *Ibid*. p. 144.

[323] Tonya Krouse. "Freedom as Effacement in *The Golden Notebook*: Theorizing Pleasure, Subjectivity and Authority." *Journal of Modern Literature.* Vol. 29, No. 3, Spring 2006, p. 44.

plunge into madness in company with Saul. The man's split personalities are those of "the gentle, brotherly, affectionate man," "the furtive and cunning child," and the "madman full of hate" (*GN* 569). Anna's different selves contradict with one another and interact with Saul's. They are those of the "obedient child," the "snubbed woman in love" and the "detached sardonic" Anna (*GN* 544). The interplay of these different personalities is evidence of the "sado-masochistic" (*GN* 545) scheme in which Anna and Saul are trapped. The latter assumes a more sadistic posture than Anna. He repeats "a pattern over and over again: courting a woman with his intelligence and sympathy, claiming her emotionally; then when she began to claim him in return, running away. And the better a woman was, the sooner he would run" (*GN* 587-88). Saul's sadism shows through a nightmare in which Anna is "held tight by [him]" while he says, "I am going to hurt you, I enjoy" (*GN* 559). The cycle of "bullying and tenderness" (*GN* 561) created by Saul arouses her feelings of guilt: "I got off the bed, furious at being patronized and at myself for allowing it, and got a cigarette" (*GN* 501). These feelings of guilt drive her to develop masochistic tendencies. Waugh suggests that "the experience with Saul enables Anna to see the extent to which her masochism is a function of her split-off fear of disintegration, her overwhelming dependency on others."[324] Lynn S. Chaucer also suggests that patriarchy creates a tendency for sado-masochism because of "gendered divisions basic to societies organized around patriarchal principles, as women are socialized into a relatively more masochistic position while men into roles that are relatively more sadistic."[325]

Living in a patriarchal society, Anna and Saul reiterate the gender roles imposed upon them by social conventions. She knows that her "need to comply was part of the sadistic masochistic cycle [they] were in" (*GN* 517). In this cycle, Anna has lost the wholeness she had been seeking. The boundaries of selfhood are blown up by Saul's invasion.

The nervous breakdown that threatens Anna's sanity ultimately turns out to be a positive phenomenon, however.

- Anna Wulf's breakthrough through breakdown

Anna's breakdown and "crack-up" lead to a new understanding of her self that supersedes the egotistic "I." They also allow her to go through transgender experiences, which

[324] Patricia Waugh. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern.* London: Routledge, 1989. Print. p. 204.

[325] Lynn S. Chaucer. *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness*. USA: Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1992. p. 27-28.

transcend the limits of gender scripts. The female protagonist ultimately achieves a psychological and artistic breakthrough and succeeds in breaking out of the sadomasochistic relationship that has been binding her to Saul. Indeed, her experience of schizophrenic breakdown with Saul Green enables Anna to expand the boundaries of her self by merging into different others. Saul is the catalyst for her most radical metamorphoses. As Kauffman points out, with him, Anna "participates in a violent process of splitting and projecting multiple selves, multiple "others" (145). She is changed "by the experience of being other people" (*GN* 602), "expand[ing] [her] limits beyond what has been possible" (*GN* 619). Giancarlo Lombardi comments in this regard that "breakdown slowly turns into breakthrough; it actually evolves into a disruption of boundaries, into a collapse of those same distinctions that, while safeguarding Anna's sanity, were also keeping her away from the epiphanic revelations brought about by the Shakespearean "reason in madness."[326]

In her schizophrenic descent, Anna is gradually metamorphosed, encapsulating different individualities: she tries to conjure up images of sanity embodied by the respectable leader, Mr. Mathlong. She "could see him clearly walking rather stooped across a sun-lit space of dust" (*GN* 572). The latter is the man whom Anna met when she was in Africa. Harold Bloom describes the character of Tom Mathlong as a "saint,"[327] the incarnation of communist idealism and a high ethical sense. Anna has also acquired "the knowledge of destruction as a force" (*GN* 568). She "summon[s] up" her other "Annas" from the past, as well as her political comrades in Africa, the "mad, paranoic" Charlie Themba, "the black person hated by the white men and disowned by his comrades" (*GN* 571-572). At once, she "become[s] [Charlie Themba]. It was as if he stood there slightly to one side of [her], but part of [her] […]. Then, he melted into [her]." This character epitomizes insanity and psychosis, approximating the opportunistic superiority of the whites in colonial Africa. Anna views him as "violent, passionate, quarrelsome and even psychotic" (*GN* 444), "cracking up" because of the pressure of politics, which are "full of intrigue, jealousness and spite" (*GN* 441). The female protagonist melts into these two extreme personalities, representative of both rationality and insanity. She ultimately experiences an "immensity" in which there is no sanity or madness—what Laing would identify as a fifth dimension of mystical revelation in which the boundaries of the self temporarily dissolve and the person becomes able to piece together the fragments of the psyche and achieve a sense of wholeness:

---

[326] Giancarlo Lombardi. *Rooms with a View: Feminist Diary Fiction, 1952-1999*. London: Associated University Press, 2002. p. 58.

[327] Harold Bloom. Doris Lessing. USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. p. 35.

> Now I was thinking about my experience of being Charlie Themba. I could no longer remember it, as I could no longer remember how I had understood that war was working in us all, towards fruition. I was, in other words sane again. But the word sane meant nothing. I was oppressed by a knowledge of immensity, feeling the weight of hugeness […]. (*GN* 573)

In the process of merging into sane and insane persons, Anna realizes that she has been radically altered by experiencing the consciousness of other people: "I woke a person changed by the experience of being other people. I did not care about Anna, I did not like being her." She adds that "it was a weary sense of duty that [she] became Anna, like putting on a soiled dress" (*GN* 602). She no longer considers the disintegration of the self as an all-terrifying experience. As Waugh suggests, Anna experiences "a loss of boundaries which no longer expresses the desperate projections of paranoia but a new possibility of connection, of discovering one's identity through others."[328] This is what R. D. Laing calls the experience of "ego-loss,"[329] which he holds to be elemental to psychological recovery. The idea of the creative power of destruction is also shared by her Jungian psychoanalyst Mrs. Marks, who asks her to consider "the creative implications of the power locked in the atom" and "allow [her] mind to rest on those first blades of tentative green grass that will poke into the light out of the lava in a million years time" (*GN* 528). "It is possible after all," she adds, that in order to keep ourselves sane we will have to learn to rely on those blades of grass springing in a million years" (*GN* 528-529). The "atom" symbolizes the tiny individual materialized by Anna Wulf, who, though small and minute, may encapsulate magmatic power, the power of vast potential energy.

From then on, Anna understands chaos as a "new sensibility, a half-conscious attempt towards a new imaginative comprehension" (*GN* 61-62). In Sage's words, the only way to survive such crises is to accept one's failures and "try not to [put] yourself in order."[330] Anna Wulf voices this view in the words of her character Ella:

> I've got to accept the patterns of self-knowledge which mean unhappiness or at least a dryness. But I can twist it into victory. A man and a woman—yes. Both at the end of their tether. Both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits. And out of the chaos, a new kind of strength. (*GN* 411)

---

[328] Patricia Waugh. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern.* London: Routledge, 1989. Print. p. 204.

[329] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 30.

[330] Lorna Sage. *Doris Lessing*: *Women in the House of Fiction*. New York: Palgrave, 1992. p. 13.

Through her breakdown, Anna has learnt to accept the chaotic pattern of her life and turn her crack-up into a new creative force. She ultimately acknowledges and even honors all that accompanies chaos. "Watching other personalities bend over to invade her" (*GN* 592), she has succumbed to them, gaining "moments of knowing" after "weeks of craziness and timelessness" (*GN* 591). Anna Wulf no longer fears neurosis or psychosis. She reaches the conclusion that

> Perhaps the word neurotic means the condition of being highly conscious and developed. The essence of neurosis is conflict. But the essence of living now, fully, not blocking off to what goes on, is conflict. In fact I've reached the stage where I look at people and say—he or she, they are whole at all because they've chosen to block off at this stage or that. People stay sane by blocking off, by limiting themselves. (*GN* 456)

If sanity is synonymous with limiting the self then order becomes synonymous with confinement and restriction. Insanity transforms limits to limitlessness. This idea underlies the overall logic of *The Golden Notebook*. Lorna Sage suggests that

> gradually, we realize, this filing system undermines its own purpose—each notebook spells out the same message, that putting yourself in order is the problem, not the solution. Joining the Party, or finding a genial Jungian analyst, or making up stories to live inside are all strategies for denying the underlying incoherence of things. Or rather, their common ground in violence and diversity. You represent the world best by letting yourself fall apart, crack up, break down.[331]

In addition, the process of splitting the self and breaking down the limitations of the bounds of selfhood enables Anna to go through trans-gender experiences. This takes place in her dreams, where she simultaneously becomes the "malicious old man," the "spiteful old woman," and is finally transformed into a "sexless" creature (*GN* 544-545). In another dream, she and Saul incarnate the "malicious male-female dwarf figure". They are "dancing in some open place, under enormous white buildings which were filled with hideous, menacing black machinery which held destruction" (*GN* 573). They are emotionally united, celebrating destruction¸ and representing "the essence of love, of tenderness" concentrated into "a kiss or a caress" between them (*GN* 574). The leering, ambiguously sexed dwarf in this dream is an androgynous symbol that transcends the male-female dichotomy. This figure symbolizes the subversion of gender-categories, allowing Anna to break out of the narcissistic, oedipal

[331] *Ibid*. p. 15.

coordinates of femininity and masculinity which constrict sexuality. To Linda Kauffman, Anna's breakthrough occurs when she identifies the principle of "joy-in-destruction" as part of herself ("her selves") and strives to transform it into something creative. For the first time, she dreams the dream "positively," realizing that "madness and sanity, male and female are boundary concepts which have hardened into prescriptive behavioral formulas that are socially and politically repressive."[332] In another dream, Anna even tries to play out these differing male and female roles:

> It was a night of dream. I was playing roles, one after another, against Saul, who was playing roles. […] We played against each other every man-woman role imaginable. As each cycle of the dream came to an end, I said: "Well, I've experienced that, have I, well it was time that I did." It was like living a hundred lives. I was astonished at how many of the female roles I have not played in life, have refused to play, or were not offered to me. Even in my sleep, I knew I was being condemned to play them now because I had refused them in life. (*GN* 582)

In playing these different roles and feeling like "living a hundred lives," Anna realizes how restricting her understanding of men and even of women has been. In the process of exchanging man-woman roles, she seems to experience, together with Saul, the possibilities of a definition of gender that eluded their previous understanding. The subversion of gender categories in dreams thus allows Anna to break out of the narcissistic, oedipal coordinates of femininity and masculinity which constrict sexuality. This new recognition was necessary because Anna can afterwards abandon the repetitive sado-masochistic pattern and the self-pity concerning her situation as a woman. The experience of Anna's and Saul's fusion creates mutual spiritual influence. Their connivance is such that "you can no longer distinguish between what is Saul and what is Anna" (*GN* 8).

Anna, moreover, through the experience of breakdown with Saul Green, manages to rein in the dark aspects of her personality. In *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*, Roberta Rubenstein observes that the experience of madness and psychic disintegration with Saul Green is for Anna a necessary encounter with and recognition of "the underside of her personality."[333] The female protagonist confronts the violence and masochism within herself,

---

[332] Linda S. Kauffman. "Sexuality, Sexual Politics and the Displacement of Identity in *The Golden Notebook*." *Epistolary Modes In Modern Fiction*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1992. p. 149.

[333] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*, 1979. p. 110.

the self-hurter and self-hater repressed by the conscious mind. She finally succeeds to break through the sadomasochistic pattern which had been caging her as well as Saul.

In order to overcome her desire for sadomasochism and self-destruction, Anna must find some way to stop being "sunk in subjectivity" (*GN* 560) and experience the co-presence of others around the globe. She realizes that she and Saul can be influential on each other in a non-destructive way. After the water dream, Anna expresses her conviction that people in the world should be able to "be invaded by alien personalities" just "like them" (*GN* 533). Indeed, the water dream gives Anna the possibility either to submerge herself in subjective pain or fight it. Anna is "driven" to face the fear of destructiveness in her dream. One of the voices reminds her that she has to "fight, fight, fight" with her life (*GN* 526). Trying to fly away, she sees the tiger, which is Saul, hurt by the cage and about to be caught, yet she wants him to run wild through the world. This dream is an illustration of Anna's reconciliation with Saul Green, for she finally decides to be a fighter and refuses to kill the tiger. She understands that she must be a "boulder-pusher" (*GN* 555)—a Sisyphean character whose task is to push a great boulder up the high mountain. Every so often it rolls down, almost to the bottom, and the boulder-pushers begin again. This image of perpetual effort with the prospect of new achievements replaces Anna's antagonistic pattern of sado-masochism with Saul.

Furthermore, Anna regains her artistic creativity when she finally submerges herself in the experience of others and loses herself in a symbiotic relationship with Saul Green. Linda Kauffman comments that "the schizophrenic process of opening herself to the invasion of these "others" frees "artistic production for after every descent with Saul, she goes directly to her notebooks to record these unfathomable, unnamable experiences thus freeing the flows of language and desire"[334] (162). She finally succeeds to alter the battle of sexes between them through the power of creation:

> They break down into each other, into other people, break through the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other, dissolve. They hear each other's thoughts, recognize each other in themselves. Saul Green, the man who has been envious and destructive of Anna, now supports her, advises her, gives her the theme for her next book, *Free Women*. (*GN* 8)

[334] Linda S Kauffman. "Sexuality, Sexual Politics and the Displacement of Identity in *The Golden Notebook*." *Epistolary Modes In Modern Fiction*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

The inner golden notebook starts with the sentence that Saul Green gives to Anna: "The two women were alone in the London flat," which is the first sentence of *Free Women*. Anna tells Saul that "you've become a sort of inner conscience or critic," and Saul replies that "If I've become your conscience, then it's a joke, you're certainly mine" (*GN* 531). He says, "if you can do it, then I can" (*GN* 547). He also asks Anna to give him the first sentence for his novel. They thus stop the ruinous pattern. Anna thus feels that Saul has become her brother and a part of her (*GN* 548). Anna is finally transformed by her schizophrenic voyage with Saul Green. Her breakdown makes her grow and overcome her condition as she ultimately realizes that psychic openness and fusion widen the boundaries of her consciousness and expand her creative potential and subsequent recovery.

It is also interesting to observe that this recovery is enhanced by a sympathetic male character. Lessing clearly rejects rigid categorization and the essentialist approach to the man/woman relationship. This position accounts for her claim in the preface to *The Golden Notebook* that the novel is not "about sex war" or sex antagonism, a view that crystallized years later, especially in 2001, when she spoke at the Edinburgh Book festival, causing shock waves with a blistering indictment of the "the unthinking and automatic rubbishing of men which [was] now so part of our culture that it [was] hardly even noticed."[335] Lessing then condemned the female culture that reveled in humiliating the other sex and attacked radical feminists: "We have many wonderful, clever, powerful women everywhere, but what is happening to men? Why did this have to be at the cost of men?"[336]
This was not an isolated outburst. In a *New York Times* magazine[337] seven years later, she was even more scathing: "The feminist movement," she said, "had produced some "monstrous women" by encouraging women to be "critical and unpleasant" at men's expense.

Yet, Lessing never rejected the ideals of equality and liberation and the "great things [that] have been achieved through feminism," including the rise of "many wonderful, clever, powerful women"—much as she deplored the male denigration that came with those gains. Far from re-embracing a traditional view of the sexes, she asserted that "men and women have much more in common than they are separated."[338]

---

[335] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/aug/14/edinburghfestival2001.edinburghbookfestival2001.

[336] *Ibid.*

[337] http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/magazine/27wwln-Q4-t.html?pagewanted=print.

[338] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/aug/14/edinburghfestival2001.edinburghbookfestival2001.

"Much Madness is Divinest Sense."

Emily Dickinson

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

William Shakespeare,

Hamlet

"The new, an opening up, had to be through a region of chaos, of conflict. There was no other way of doing it."

The Four-Gated City, Part II

II. 2. B. Breakthrough through breakdown into madness in *Children of Violence*

a. Madness in women's literature: an overview

Western culture has diminished under the label "madness" ("non-sense, alienating strangeness, a transgressive excess, an illusion, a delusion, a disease")[339] all non-normative, abnormal, unacceptable or senseless behavior. The western logocentric thought established clear-cut distinctions between sanity and insanity, the normal and the abnormal, inclusion and exclusion. In his important study *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie* à *l'âge classique,*[340] Michel Foucault suggests that the entire history of Western culture turns out to be the story of the conquest of reason and the consequent repression of that which it calls madness. He also contends that anthropology, philosophy, psychology and psychiatry are built upon a radical misunderstanding of the phenomenon of madness and a deliberate misapprehension of its language. Besides, literature long dealt with madness as an exclusively "female malady,"[341] as the words "madness" or hysteria originally derived from the Greek word "uterus" and is supposed to be a female pathology.

Yet, in the nineteenth-century, many women writers like Charlotte Bronte, have tackled the issue of madness. Indeed, the figure of the madwoman in the attic was central to nineteenth-century women's literature, as shown by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their landmark study *The Mad Woman in the Attic*.[342] Jane Eyre's monstrous female double, the mad Bertha Mason, is the archetypal figure of hysteria and insanity. It is, however, a figure of rage without the power to alleviate her sufferings or express it in terms that make sense to society.

In the twentieth-century, the madwoman archetype and the issue of madness became the focal point of the feminist debate. Feminist critics have since attempted to unmoor the association of madness with mental illness and decipher the symbolic presence of the madwoman in literary texts in relation to the sex-gender system. In this context, Elaine

[339] Shoshana Felman. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5 (1975). pp. 2-10.

[340] Michel Foucault. *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Guallimard, 1964.

[341] Elaine Showalter. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture. 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987.

[342] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Showalter studied, in her *Female Malady* (1985), the correlation between madness and women, and found out that women's refusal to conform to sex-role stereotypes has very frequently been treated as a form of psychiatric disorder. Phyllis Chesler has also voiced this idea in *Women and Madness* (1974): "It is clear that for a woman, to be healthy, she must 'adjust' to accept the behavioral norms of her sex even though these kinds of behavior are generally regarded as less sociably desirable [...]. The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture" (68-69). Both Showalter and Chesler have argued that the theme of madness in women's literature is intrinsically gendered, for it is often females who are labeled as mad by male characters.

Within the general context of dichotomous thought and the feminist debate over the issue of madness, Doris Lessing encountered a major theoretical challenge while writing about madness in her fictional works: How can madness be conceived of outside its dichotomous opposition to sanity without being subjugated to reason? In general terms, how can thought escape from the logic of polar oppositions? How can madness break through the universe of discourse? These questions relate to many problematics in Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*: Is Lynda Coldridge a version of the madwoman in the attic—another replica of Bertha Mason in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*? Can madness be a strategy of dissent and subversion in Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*? How can madness lead up to "breakthrough" and awakening?

To tackle these dilemmas in *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing drew upon R. D. Laing's psychiatric findings about madness and psychic breakdown as productive of extraordinary insight. The idea is not a revolutionary one: it is perhaps as old as human beings' interest in the mind and is reflected in the self-revelations of the ancient myth's mad protagonists and in Plato's remarkable descriptions of prophetic and inspired madness. But what intrigues Lessing in her study of Laing is, in particular, his conception of the "true self," which is supposed to emerge in the regression of the ego when it breaks down into madness. She is also puzzled by his refusal of psychic differentiation between conscious and unconscious processes—in brief, his devaluation of the function of the ego in the realization of human potentiality. Lessing thus agreed with Laing in his view of madness as an encounter with primary feelings and impulses, an encounter which makes a rebirth possible for the "true" self:

> 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."[343]

Lessing believes with R. D. Laing that madness is a positive state/stage of the mind and a way to recover from the modern predicament of chaos. Laing argues that "madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breaking through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death" (45). That is why, drawing on Laingian ideas, we are going to analyze how Martha experiments with modes of self-induced psychosis as a vehicle for Lessing's conception of a new mode of consciousness. The climactic fourth part of *The Four-Gated City* reveals Martha's last gate—madness—and the loss of self before she merges into the collective consciousness. In her self-conscious journey into madness along with Lynda Coldridge, she embraces insanity as a means to enlarge the boundaries of her ego-consciousness.

b. Breakdown into self-induced madness

Martha's wanderings through the city unexpectedly concludes with her arrival at the Coldridges, where she prepares to work as a secretary for a writer, Mark Coldridge, who is trying to conjure up a vision of the ideal city in the novel that he is writing. The posh Coldridge house near Bloomsbury is a microcosm of "grey, colorless, post-war Britain" (*FGC* 123). The house is "in a dreadful state beneath the surface of order" (*FGC* 127). It is "as sick and neurotic and hopeless as you can imagine: […] a dominating mamma over all, and a wife in a mental hospital, and a man just sitting, waiting for some sucker […] to cope with everything" (*FGC* 115). Gradually, Martha gets emotionally entangled in the lives of the family members, who "all suffer in separate rooms of the house" (*FGC* 131) because of Mark's wife, Lynda, "a madwoman," variously diagnosed by "a large variety of doctors […] as "depressed," "maniac depressive," "paranoiac," "schizophrenic," "neurotic" and "psychotic" (*FGC* 206). Lynda cannot fulfill her role as a wife to Mark and mother to her son Francis. At strained times, she is forced to remain in a mental hospital until her symptoms "abate" (*FGC* 143). When she comes back home, she inhabits the basement with another schizophrenic woman, her "mad" friend Dorothy. The place becomes a place of refuge for these cultural misfits. The house is thus symbolically made of two worlds: on the one hand, the upstairs world where the "sane" Mark, his son Francis, his traumatic sister-in-law Sally-

[343] *Ibid*. pp. 144-45.

Sarah and her son Paul live. They are regularly visited by Mark's mother, the "dominating mama" and later by some of his communist friends. It seems to be the world of order and reason. On the other hand, the underground world materialized by the basement, a territory belonging to "weak-minded fools" (*FGC* 248), is peopled by the "insane" or neurotic Lynda, her mad friend Dorothy and some astrologists. This lower region of the house is the locus of Martha's psychic trip, in which she is aided by the schizophrenic Lynda. We shall analyze it later. To Roxane Fand, "Martha's sojourn in various houses becomes symbolic of the still darkened compartments in herself that she must explore and open up to inner dialogue" (132). Her individual growth is gradually intertwined with that of the generations of the Coldridges.

In accordance with R. D. Laing's theories that madness can represent a form of sanity and a journey into insanity can be a transformative experience, Martha self-consciously induces Lynda's mad world. Suspecting that her experience will lead her to some valuable discovery, she voluntarily ventures into the "madwoman's" area which challenges the conventional perception of lunacy or madness as a disease or pathology. In *The Four-Gated City*, she becomes immersed in the inner life of the basement and transgresses what is generally deemed to be a "forbidden territory, unclean like lepers" (*FGC* 329). While Mark Coldridge opts for "holding on to sense" and "ordinariness," Martha deliberately chooses to "let go" and "sink herself" (*FGC* 506) into Lynda's "tempting, dangerous [and] glamorous territory" (*FGC 482*) of madness, which has the features of a paranoid reaction manifesting itself in her fight with the walls of the basement. Martha ultimately follows Lynda in her journey "around the walls" of the basement, trying to fathom its symbolism.

- Following Lynda's journey "around the walls"

Martha describes her stay at Lynda's basement as "being under water, or shut away, or looking at ordinary life from another dimension" (*FGC* 512), "the location being symbolic of the depths she has to plumb."[344] She starts her journey into this world as a "controller of [Lynda's] movements and words" (*FGC* 512) during her fits and strives to decipher their mysteries. She observes Lynda as she sits "on the floor, like a child, humming to herself, and swaying back and forth" (*FGC* 509). She then inspects her as she is "moving around the space between "the two walls visible and invisible with her back to the room. Lynda move[s] slowly staring, directing the pressure of the gaze up and down, and around the area of wall she

[344] Ruth Whittaker. *Modern Novelists: Doris Lessing*. London: Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1988. p. 57.

face[s]" (*FGC* 508). She continues her progress around the wall "feeling, pressing, banging—around and around and around" (508). While she is sensing her way across the wall with "subtler gentler touches of her fingers," Martha wonders about the significance of "her pressing and pushings at the wall," presuming that she may be testing whether she can "get out" (508).

The journey around the wall is symbolic when we consider the external walls of the basement as a metaphor for the boundaries imposed by society to mark off a bounding space that limits the freedom of those who deviate from the norm. Symbolically, these walls stand for the social and cultural forces that create, define and stigmatize Lynda as an "insane" woman who has to be shut away or confined. These metaphorical "walls" establish barriers between the inside and the outside, the sane and the insane, the rational and the irrational. That is why Lynda is afraid of "expos[ing] herself to a world that would judge her 'sensibly'" (*FGC* 512). The reader, along with Martha, comes to understand that Lynda's fight with the walls as she "move[s] faster using her fists in a series of short violent bangs on the walls, looking at Martha all the time" (*FGC* 509) is actually her way of looking beyond her confinement and "step[ping] outside, free" (*FGC* 542). The metaphor of the visible wall as a symbol of entrapment is also represented by the "large long high red brick wall" (*FGC* 333) of the mental hospital in which Lynda has been admitted, a reminder of "barracks, or prisons" (333).

Knapp suggests that "the invisible wall" that Lynda imagines in her room is "a literal metaphor for Lynda's testing of life boundaries."[345] This is why Martha finally understands why Lynda behaves as if there were an invisible wall partition within the exterior walls of the basement, which she constantly "tests"; these invisible walls are projections of the internalized social barriers that she is trying to break through. The narrative voice makes it explicit: "When [Lynda] pressed, assessed, gauged those walls, it was the walls of her mind that she was exploring" (*FGC* 516) and which are based upon labeling and stigmatization. Laing puts it in these words:

> Already everything in our time is directed to categorizing and segregating this [inner] reality from objective facts. This is precisely the concrete wall. Intellectually, emotionally, intuitively, theoretically, we have to blast our way through the solid wall, even if at the risk of chaos, madness and death. For from the

[345] Mona Knapp. *Doris Lessing*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984. Print. p. 98.

> side of the wall, this is the risk. There are no assurances, no guarantees.[346]

Drawing on Laing, Lessing suggests that Lynda's madness is the result of social "categorization" and "segregation." The outside world which establishes "walls" or barriers is a maddening one, best represented by the visible walls in Mark's study—they duplicate those of the basement which covered with evidence of social breakdown, and on which she can see

> the carts of the death factories, the poison factories, the factories that made instruments for the control of the mind: the maps of Hunger, Poverty, Riot and the rest; the atlases of poisoned air and poisoned earth and the places where bombs had been exploded under the sea. (*FGC* 418)

In *The Four-Gated City*, Mark's entire room has become a text: the walls are covered with "notes, newspaper and magazine clippings, all kinds of information. Even the ceiling has been used, to September, 1959: A rocket launched from the earth lands on the moon" (*FGC* 448). Mark has been trying to make sense of the chaos of data available to him by compartmentalizing it in order to try and understand what is going on in the world. Yet, he fails to find rational explanations and to connect in a logical sequence one event with another. Thus, in Mark's study room, another kind of madness related to the external world of violence, horror and chaos is juxtaposed with Lynda's socially recognizable insanity, so that the distinction between the rational and the irrational, the public and the private becomes blurred. Meditating upon the maps and newspapers pasted on the walls of his study, Mark tells Martha that there is a "wavelength of madness" and "anyone could hook into it" (*FGC* 441).

Rigney observes that Martha realizes that "conscious madness, as opposed to the world's *un*conscious madness, is the way to truth itself."[347] It is because "Lynda ha[s] been mad, ha[s] not tested certain limits," that they are able to "go beyond what might have previously seemed absurd or scary" (*FGC* 415). In this logic of thought, Lessing's dividing line between the sane and insane becomes an extremely fine one, in a world in which insanity may well be a sane alternative. Laing's observation on madness or insanity seems to be relevant here:

> When I certify someone insane, I am not equivocating when I write that he is of unsound mind, may be dangerous to himself and others and requires care and

[346] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 143.

[347] Barbara Hill Rigney. "Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel." *Studies in Bronte, Woolf, Lessing and Atwood*, 1978, p. 74.

> attention in a mental hospital. However, at the same time, I am also aware that, in my opinion, there are people who are regarded as sane, whose minds are as radically unsound, who may be equally or more dangerous to themselves and others and whom society does not regard as psychotic and fit persons to be in a madhouse. I am aware that the man who is said to be deluded may be in his delusion telling me the truth, and this has no equivocal or metaphorical sense, but quite literally, and that the cracked mind of the schizophrenic may let in light which does not enter the intact minds of many people whose minds are closed.[348]

We can see that both Laing and Lessing believe that "insanity" and "sanity" are social categories. For them, a psychotic or mad mind can reveal profound wisdom and insight.

- Sinking deeper into madness

After this initial stage, Martha undertakes another step while charting into Lynda's "country" as she "prepare[s] herself for the task of being ill" (*FGC* 508). She decides to join the 'madwoman' in her "journey around the walls" *(FGC* 512) whose papers have "an irregularly smudged and rusty look, which turn […] out to be bloodstains from Lynda's bitten finger ends" (*FGC* 507). Gradually, Martha feels that she cannot step out of the madwoman's world as she becomes "part of Lynda" (*FGC* 512).

Martha is first astonished by the sight of Lynda coming from the wall to the carpet kneeling down and lapping milk "that lay in a half-broken saucer" (*FGC* 511) like an animal. But she feels "an extraordinary compulsion to do the same" (511). She exchanges roles with Lynda as "she got up, holding what felt like a potential explosion of energy, and, having cleared a space on the carpet still stained by spilled milk, slowly did physical exercises, taking no notice at all of Lynda" (*FGC* 512). The latter becomes the watcher, "leaning against the wall" (512) while Martha is "going deep into her inner self" (*FGC* 511). Laing refers to the experience of becoming an animal when he describes the "inner space journey" of the mad person as follows:

> The person who has entered this inner realm (if only he is allowed to experience this) will find himself going, or being conducting—one cannot clearly distinguish passive from active here−on a journey. 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. In this

[348] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 27.

> journey, there are many occasions to lose one's way, for confusion, partial failure, even final shipwreck: many terrors, spirits, demons to be encountered, that may or may not be overcome.[349]

Replicating Lynda's movements entails the regressive experience of becoming animal-like or behaving like a child. In this experience, Martha goes through an encounter with primary feelings and impulses which are the possibility for the rebirth of the "true" self. What has begun in Martha is the disintegration of the ego. At this stage, Lessing's protagonist "blast[s] her way through the solid wall of the normal ego to the realization of a 'new kind of ego functioning.'"[350] She enjoys the movement: "the use of one's muscles, after long sitting, long inactivity, what a joy! What a gift! What a blessing!" She goes on "slowly, enjoyably, stretching and bending and reaching, working out the restlessness from her body" (*FGC* 512).

c. Legitimizing the discourse of madness

The discourse of madness is generally supposed to be irrational and unscientific. The mad person's stammered, imperfect words and the lack of fixed syntax are discarded as worthless by Western culture that privileges reason over madness. In *The Four-Gated City*, however, Lessing seems to redress the balance between the two discourses and initiate a possible dialogue between sane and insane persons. She points out the issue of our culturally-conditioned ideological codes and notes the challenges inherent in breaking through them to come to a new way of seeing. We shall see that this transcendence of the dichotomy of rationality *versus* irrationality owes much to the esoteric sources of Lessing's eclectic, cross-fertilized Eastern and Western codes.

At the beginning of her journey, the discourse of madness frightens Martha: Lynda's "words thr[o]w her into a panic" (*FGC* 521). They "ke[ep] dropping into the listening space that was Martha's mind" (516). They are marked by excess, folly, incoherence, incomprehensible and uncontrollable extravagance. But the "madwoman's" language reverberates with inner messages, "each one precious, as if the words contained "little depth charges that went off in the mind" (*FGC* 516). Lynda's monologues are filled with clues or

[349] *Ibid*. p. 104.

[350] Annis Pratt and L. S. Dembo. Eds. *Doris Lessing: Critical Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974. Print. p. 155.

hints. “Mad was one. Doctor another. Scapegoat … frightened … alone … until it was like that game where one is given a dozen words and invited to make a story around them” (*FGC* 543). But after listening to these words and “wrestling with material,” Martha realizes that “all begins to click into place, to make sense” (*FGC* 542).

The consciousness of the wrecked or mad mind is reflected in monologues like “water suddenly lifting limp branch off sea bottom. Words proliferate so fast that you can’t catch them. A word: then an idea suggested by that word. […] Essential, be conscious the moment thought comes into mind otherwise it is lost thought” (*FGC* 572). The monologues that Martha writes in a journal which she keeps during her madness take the form of stream-of-consciousness-like passages:

> This is Dali landscape. I’m plugged into Dali mind. If I could draw, paint, then I'd paint this, Dali picture. Why does only Dali plug into Dali country? No Dali and me. Therefore Dali and—plenty of others. But nurse says, delusions. If ignorant, does not think: This is Dali country. Thinks: That’s a silly picture. If educated, knows, thinks: I am a copycat. Or, that must be a Dali picture I haven’t seen? (Perhaps it is.) (*FGC* 558)

Martha’s notes are even in praise of the stream-of consciousness technique, as she uses pictures to describe mental processes. “Works like this. Thought comes into mind. If conscious, thought in words. If not, if ordinary association-thought then it isn’t words. Words are when one stands back to look.” (*FGC* 565)

Martha’s closeness to Lynda prompts her to dive more into the language of the “mad” by learning through the “shelves full of books” of her “potted library” (*FGC* 530). Rather than relying on received knowledge, which encourages the pigeonholing of information, Martha opts for self-instruction. The basement is turned into a reading laboratory. There are “books on Rosicrucianism and the old alchemists; Buddhist books and the dozen or so varieties of yoga; there were Zoroastrianism and esoteric Christianity; tracts on the I Ching; Zen, witchcraft, magic, astrology and vampirism; scholarly treaties on Sufism; the works of the Christian mystics” (*FGC* 486). These code-transforming texts, gleaned mainly from Eastern and Western metaphysical works, are significant as they endow Martha with new perceptions and epistemologies. She realizes that there are many “different languages, or dialects, describing the same thing, the same psychological truths” (*FGC* 537). She also realizes that she, and her whole generation, have been “programmed” into thinking of these things as “dottiness, ‘eccentricity’, shadiness, unpleasantness” (*FGC* 537). She comes

to the conclusion that she has been indoctrinated throughout her life to consider certain terminologies as "more distasteful than others":

> Words like "prana," "aura," "astral" were particularly [distasteful]—yet they were easily translatable into others from different systems which did not produce distaste (a form of fear). These reactions were identical with those she had experienced in politics…hating and fearing the labels and attitudes "left-wing"; and then switching to "left," while the targets for what she hated and feared switched; so that ever since she had been able to put herself, at will, into these attitudes;… moving in and out of mental positions (but they were emotional, or emotionally reached). These mechanisms were exactly the same, whether political, religious, psychological, philosophic. Dragons guarded the entrances and exits of each layer in the spectrum of belief, or opinion, and the dragons were always the same dragon no matter what name they went under. The dragon was fear, fear of what other people might think; fear of being different; fear of being isolated; fear of the herd we belong to; fear of that section of the herd we belong to. (*FGC* 537)

Lessing refers to a whole spectrum of knowledge commonly obscured and rejected by socially determined attitudes of rejection and fear. She warns us about the power of words to 'program' us, to make us dismiss whole areas of investigation. What is noteworthy here is that, just as Martha Quest's "potted library" serves as a catalyst for the transformation of her perceptions, so too can a reader be potentially moved towards new perceptions by the texts he/she reads.

Living "cheek by jowl with Lynda for years, and in what she ha[s] imagined to be the closest sympathy," Martha decides to "challenge her mind" (*FGC* 557). Transcending the conventional fear and rejection of the discourse of madness, she slowly follows Lynda's communicative manner, ridding herself of those "controlling movement[s]" and "controlling words" that adhere to their ordinary life (*FGC* 538). She enters into a dialogue with Lynda in one of her lunatic spells, a dialogue in which Martha learns how to speak Lynda's language—not that of "sensible" talk but the language of symbolic, through largely non-verbal, behavior and of intuited feelings and thoughts. Breaking the conventional ways of thinking and discussion, Martha and Lynda merely let "talk flow, since in the spaces between words, sentences, something else might come in" by gathering every kind of material" they might "get glimpses of a new sort of understanding" (*FGC* 415).

Legitimizing the discourse of madness is an act of subversion on Doris Lessing's part. She debunks the "stagnant […] orthodox" scientific world of "rationalism," "a patterning

of habit-thoughts already outdated by what [is] happening on its own outposts" (*FGC* 533). Madness destabilizes the discourse of rationalism and turns the essence of thought into question. It serves as a means to liberate language, disrupting conventional logocentric thinking. Lessing's approval of the discourse of madness crystallizes in her second autobiographical volume, *Walking in the Shade*, in which she describes her parallel experience of awakening to "a world of ideas and belief that [she] had scarcely even heard of" (350) after reading a highly varied range of Eastern and Western metaphysical texts. Although she makes it clear that she had no interest in the phenomena sometimes associated with certain metaphysical systems—"that, I knew, was not what I was looking for—magic and mystery and bizarre behavior" (350)—she says that other texts clearly brought to light the beginning of a conscious evolutionary process:

> Men knew that there was this other world, the spiritual one— though using that word comes hard, for it is so debased—I had two strong reactions. First was scorn for my own culture, because it had so ignored this other world—The other reaction was a powerful grasping need, a secret exultation. (*WIS* 353-54)

Accordingly, opening up her readings to other Eastern literary sources, Lessing uses her texts as figurative catalysts for changes in our conceptual paradigms. We shall come back to it when we discuss the novelist's evolving aesthetic vision.

d. The healing power of madness: “Breakthrough” after breakdown

Like Laing, Lessing believes that the breakdown into madness is a preamble to psychic growth, for descent involves the dissolution of the “ego” and the rebirth of the true self. Shadia Fahim characterizes the recurrence of psychic breakdown in Lessing’s fiction, what she terms a “psychological descent” into the unconscious as a means to get reconciled with its “dark dimension,” as a “cathartic and therapeutic motif—a facing of responsibility rather than a withdrawal from it.”[351] In *The Four-Gated City,* delving into Lynda’s mad world leads to Martha’s enlightenment. This experience is an opportunity for her to examine her consciousness from completely new perspectives, unhampered by the limitations of “daytime” (*FGC* 212) consciousness. Madness becomes a healing or soothing balm in an insane world. Like Shakespeare’s King Lear, who finds the wisdom he never knew as king and which, in his own burlesque way, the fool has possessed all along, Martha Quest experiences psychic awakening. The madwoman Lynda Coldridge serves her as a guide in her journey into madness. The heroine of *Children of Violence* also develops certain psychic abilities mainly telepathy, as will be further demonstrated in this analysis. It is also significant that in Lessing’s fiction, the “therapeutic motif” should be conveyed by through the theme of female friendship. We will first see whether Lynda Coldridge conforms to the prototype of the “madwoman in the attic.”

- Lynda Coldridge: A madwoman in the attic?

In contrast to Jane Eyre, Martha embraces madness as a means to enlarge the boundaries of ego-consciousness. In this part, we are going to see how Martha Quest deepens her self-understanding by surrendering to Lynda’s mad world. We shall see that, in Lessing’s fiction, the madwoman does not conform to Gilbert and Gubar’s reading of her as the ferocious, dark and secret self that the female protagonist endeavors to repress. She is rather a healer and a guide to Martha. The “madwoman” in Lessing’s *The Four-Gated City* is, in Mona Knapp’s words, a “prototype which goes back to antiquity and the mad (or blind) seer, who alone speaks the truth but is scorned by the world as a lunatic.”[352]

[351] Shadia S. Fahim. *Doris Lessing and Sufi Equilibrium: The Evolving Form of The Novel.* New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994. p. 8-9.

[352] Mona Knapp. *Doris Lessing*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984. Print. p. 99.

It is Lynda Coldridge who guides Martha in the insane experience where the true self is to be discovered. Unlike Bronte's Bertha Mason, who can be seen as "Jane Eyre's mad, bad self, Lynda is perceived as Martha's mad but good self."[353] Martha identifies with her even before she meets her:

> […] She had not met Lynda, save through improbably beautiful photographs, but she knew her, oh yes, very well, though she and Martha were not alike, and could not be, since Martha was not "ill" and in the hands of the doctors. But for a large variety of reasons, Lynda Coldridge, who was in a very expensive mental hospital because she could not stand being Mark's wife, and Francis's mother came too close to Martha. (*FGC* 109)

The reader can discern a strange affinity between Martha and Lynda: the two women are unconventional personalities. Because Lynda "could not stand being Mark's wife, and Francis's mother, she came too close to Martha" (*FGC* 125) who, like her, has rejected the culturally-allotted roles of mother and wife. The two women abhor the conventional side of marriage. Knapp remarks that although Mark's wife wants to get well, she "equates sanity with the enfeebling and abhorrent rituals of a proper marriage, and chooses to remain mad rather than resume this role" (97).

Lynda Coldridge is depicted as a woman endowed, from her early childhood, with a paranormal perception or telepathic power: "Her antenna for atmospheres and tensions and what was behind words [were] her first-developed organ" (*FGC* 545). She can also hear others' thoughts and see future visions. But her "paranormal" insight is misunderstood as "abnormal," feared and hated. Conventional psychiatrists misinterpreted it as pathology. She is therefore forced to repress this power and is subjected to "shock treatments" and "drugs" (*FGC* 545) which partially damage her ability and leave her walled up in helpless irrationality and madness. Lessing alludes to the fact that Lynda's lunacy is a social fact closely related to the social and cultural context within which it surfaces. That is why many critics have pointed to the uniqueness of Lynda's madness. As Fand puts it, she is endowed with "the supersensitivity of geniuses, mystics, and psychics."[354]

In depicting the character of Lynda Coldridge, Lessing transcends the stereotype of the "madwoman in the attic" described in Gilbert and Gubar's critical work on nineteenth-

[353] Barbara Hill Rigney. "Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel." *Studies in Bronte, Woolf, Lessing and Atwood*, 1978, p. 77.

[354] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood.* London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 143.

century women's writing. As will be shown in the development, Mark's wife corresponds to what Lessing and Laing envisage as "the mad person [being the] symptom and victim of a sick society and finally a prophet of a possible new world."[355] Indeed, instead of the isolated mad wife in the attic, *The Four-Gated City* features a sensitive woman in the basement to whom the female protagonist is increasingly drawn, and in whom she looks for mental succor. Martha will later realize that her eyes are "full of depths of light into which one could lean, like pools or clouds or trees" and she is "invaded by great washes of understanding, insight, knowledge, ideas, com[ing] in one after another as fast as she could not keep up" (*FGC* 542).

Unlike Bertha Mason, Lynda is conscious of her own madness. She wonders, "if only Mark had not sent her to a doctor, if only Mark had trusted her and then earlier than that, if only her father had not made her see the doctor, and if only she, Lynda, had not said what she knew, if only she had known enough to keep quiet…" (*FGC* 520). It seems that considering Lynda as mentally ill is mostly a definition imposed on those who see the world differently by those who have a pre-conceived picture of it. If sanity is culturally defined, we can conclude that Lessing clearly sides with the "madwoman," thus releasing her from the Victorian attic.

Lynda has for a long time been the healing center, nurturing the family members at times of strain. Her madness connects each lame person in the Coldridge household in different but intersubjective ways. Even though she is dependent on the drugs she is given at the mental hospital, she tries to be a good mother to her son Francis when he comes back from his boarding school, "claiming his mother and his home" (*FGC* 330). When Dorothy has a mental breakdown, it is "Lynda who support[s] her" (*FGC* 330), treating her in a friendly way. She transforms the basement into a "defensive unit" against "a world hating friendship" (*FGC* 189). While the house becomes increasingly chaotic, she makes the basement grow into a place of possibilities: "Martha thought how strange it was […] a few weeks ago it was in the basement that people […] talked of death, of suicide, of killing. Now, with no outside circumstance changed, the basement was live again and futures were possible and talked about" (*FGC* 212-213).

Martha realizes that both Lynda and Dorothy, two women who are thought to be mentally unbalanced, have a keen insight into the psychologies of children, mainly Mark's orphaned nephew Paul: "No one was more intelligent about Paul than Dorothy" (*FGC* 331). Lynda also gets along with him: "Lynda and Paul together—it was charming, delightful; they

[355] Marion Vlastos. "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy." *Modern Language Association*, PMLA, Vol. 91, No. 2, March 1976, p. 246.

were like two children. Dorothy watched, indulgent: Lynda's mother, she now became Paul's as well" (*FGC* 210). The bitter child Paul becomes "a bright, exuberant vivid creature, all charm and peremptory emotional demand, who cuddled up to Dorothy […] and sat very quiet, by Lynda's side […] while he smiled and listened to her fantastic stories" (*FGC* 210).

Martha's sharing of Lynda Coldridge's mad world leads to a blissful experience of visionary power. Delving imaginatively into the "[mad woman's] country" (*FGC* 468) has brought about psychic rebirth and awakening. Vlastos proposes that "now Lynda's quest becomes Martha's: to relearn the awareness and the significance of the awareness of the child;" but the achievement "depends on the conscious psychic rebirth of the adult."[356] Indeed, by probing into Lynda's mental region, Martha regains her youthful visionary capacity, which had been destroyed by the "machinery of ordinary life" (*FGC* 541). The "madwoman" takes her back to regions already traveled, at the beginning of the novel and earlier, to the gift of receptivity and lightness she had experienced in her childhood "before the voyage to England." She remembers how "she had been a child looking at grown-up people […] talking and smiling to each other with put-on false smiles and looks" (*FGC* 515). She judges "these giants as cowards and liars, engaged […] in meaningless activities and rituals of dressing and undressing and eating and talking" (515). She realizes that she has become "a liar and coward like the rest" (515). These memories activate a cathartic process in which Martha starts "weep[ing] bitterly for the wasted years" (515).

- Confronting the dark side of the self

In addition, the journey into madness allows Martha to probe beneath surface thoughts into her own dark self. She has to confront the inner voices, of which she grows more and more aware, especially those from her memory: "The past enveloped, seeped through the present" (*FGC* 333). She imagines scenes that she experienced in the past cropping up in her present life. She then winds her way through the labyrinth of her unconscious, laying bare the repressed anger and pain accumulated since her childhood: She visits the regions of the "hatreds and resentments" from the past trauma and finds out that she can withstand their revisitation (*FGC* 533). In her wrestle with her dark past, she discovers "doors she had not known existed" and she "enter[s] places in herself she had not known were there" (*FGC* 534).

[356] *Ibid*. p. 132.

These doors are open upon the shadow side of the self—what Lessing calls the "self-hater" that Martha has always been repressing, allowing her to "see the underneath of [her]self" (*FGC* 575). She thus confronts the dark aspect of herself materialized by this "self-hater," which she encounters "head-on and violently"—"how powerful an enemy he was, how dreadfully compelling, how hard to fight" (*FGC* 557). It is referred to as a "devil" that keeps haunting her. During this phase, the full force of madness is unleashed, when the female protagonist "succumbs to the devil" (*FGC* 574): "Someone observing Martha would have seen a woman lying on the floor, beating her head on it, weeping, crying, complaining, calling to a large varieties of deities, official and unofficial; accusing an unknown assailant of cruelty and of callousness" (*FGC* 558).

Her descent into a hellish world of "monsters, twisted and deformed faces with greed and anger" (*FGC* 573) has Miltonic connotations. It is a world of extremes, where "all [is] dark or all [is] light" (*FGC* 575). It is also a place "of devils, Hate, Envy […] half-formed faces like embryos" (*FGC* 574). During this phase, Martha feels "the sub-human creatures are aspects of [her];" she is nothing but "the gallery of freaks and nature's rejects" (*FGC* 574). The devil turns out to be her own hating self. This "self-hater" is a reminder of Lynda's, for Mark's wife also "had an enemy who hated her in her head, who said she was wicked and bad and disobedient and cruel to her father" (*FGC* 572). The voice of the "self-hater" becomes a symbol that is devastatingly potent as it jeers, mocks and insinuates its hatred into Martha's inner ear:

> She is completely in the grip of this self-hating person or aspect of herself. Remorse? No, it was more that her life was being turned inside out, so that she looked at it in reverse and there was nothing anywhere in it that was good; it was all dark, all cruel, all callous, all 'bad.' Oh, she was bad, oh she was wicked, oh, how very evil and bad and wicked she was. (*FGC* 558)

Draine explains that the self-hater is "the inner voice that echoes and amplifies the criticisms that come from the outside of the self" (59). It reminds Martha of her helplessness, powerlessness and vulnerability. It tells her that she is uniquely responsible for her own pain. The "self-hater" becomes the hater of others, in contradiction with Martha's dearest values and conviction. She is inhabited by a racist, anti-Semite, and sadistic forces:

> She would discover herself uttering slogan-like phrases, or feeling emotions, which were the opposite of what she, the sane and rational Martha believed. For instance, she would find herself using the languages of anti-semitism […]. She would

> retrieve from her own depths a phrase or an idea which embodied what she thought, but it would at once be swallowed by its shadow. This plunged her into a violent state of fright and shame. […] she was switched off into a hatred against black people. Then, fast, she watched herself using the languages and emotions of hatred of black people and of white people for black; of Germans and of Jews, and of Arabs and of the English. (*FGC* 561)

In order to survive and recover sanity, Martha must confront this inner voice consciously, for she will otherwise be at its mercy. But she can only purge herself of these negative aspects through her transpersonal relationship with Lynda. She emerges sane again out of this experience: Because she is "very busy, very worried over Lynda, her own devil retreat[s]" (*FGC* 579). She is finally released from the "self-hater's" grip:

> Soon the devil once histrionic, flamboyant, accusing, violent, had become a silly little nagging voice, which became swallowed in the sea of sound—was just one little voice among many. And soon, the thing becomes all over—finished. Her mind was her own. She was as sane as the next one. (*FGC* 579)

- Freeing the body and mind

In addition, entering into Lynda's orbit of madness releases both body and mind, which the result of the positive energy Martha has received from Lynda: "It seemed as if Lynda's sitting there moving, made a force, an energy which got into Martha and prickled along her limbs and made her want to dance" (*FGC* 510). Lynda's energizing force endows Martha with deep knowledge: It "opens up a new area in [her]self;" she starts "doing something new, then it must be clumsy and raw […], the region of chaos, of conflict. There was no other way of doing it" (*FGC* 176). She understands that by allowing herself to experience chaos, she can achieve a new awareness.

Lynda's madness engulfs and contaminates Martha, who starts "sway[ing] like Lynda, back and forth, and around and around, instead of spilling or using, this energy in any way whatsoever, let[ting] it accumulate, […] build up" till her head "become[s] very clear, very light, receptive, so softly lit, bubble above the violence of a body whose limbs wanted to move, to jerk, even to dance" (*FGC* 519). She understands that "this business of charting the new territory mean[s] a continual painful effort of discovery, of trying to understand, to link, to make sense, and then falling back again, 'forgetting;' and then an effort forward again—a baby trying to walk, that was what she was" (*FGC* 520).

The experience of breaking down with Lynda enhances Martha's awareness and a capacity to "see things outside the frame of normal vision,"[357] for Martha then walks through the streets of London observing her fellow humans with a refreshed perception:

> The most frightening thing about them was this: that they walked and moved and went about their lives in a condition of sleepwalking […]. They stood with the masses of their pelt hanging around their faces and the slits in their faces stretched in the sounds they made to communicate […]. They were essentially isolated […] enclosed inside their hideously defective bodies, behind their dreaming drugged eyes. (*FGC* 524)

When Martha walks out of the basement, she is like a new-born baby. Seeing the city with fresh eyes, she finds that human beings have been transformed into creatures with "decayed organs," equipped with many artificial things. They live "in a condition of sleep-walking: they were not aware of themselves, of other people, of what went on around them" (*FGC* 524). Since their physical senses are numbed and "atrophied," they are unable to turn on "their antennas" to tune into other people's ideas. They are "essentially isolated, shut in, enclosed inside their hideously defective bodies, behind their dreaming drugged eyes, above all, inside a net of wants and needs that made it impossible for them to think of anything else" (*FGC* 556). Martha realizes that she used to be one of these weird creatures. Now she prefers to be mad instead of being "a lump of lethargy" like all the rest, unaware of the real world. She thus feels saner than those who have yielded to the horrors of the city and its desensitizing effect.

In his later works, Laing maintains that there is a positive function for what society terms madness, that which is not "what we need to be cured of, but is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality."[358] Normality, for Laing and Lessing, is the true insanity because it implies clinging to uncertain certainties and depending upon a reality that is in fact unreal. To go mad in a positive sense is to them to give up all certainty, to lose the distinction between the real and the not-real, between the self and the not-self.

The descent into madness, Laing says, is akin to a mythical journey from which one can return with a special knowledge and ability:

---

[357] Betsy Draine. *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Print. p. 61.

[358] R. D. Laing. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. p. 49.

> From the point of view a man alienated from its source, creation arises from despair and ends in failure. But such a man has not trodden the path to the end of time, the end of space, the end of darkness, and the end of light. He does not know that where it all ends, there it all begins.[359]

Martha acquires the ability to embrace regions of normality and insanity and remain "in control" (514) of everything. As Vlastos notes, "Those people who are schizophrenic or mad, like Martha are able to achieve […] insight without losing their sanity, are in both Laing's and Lessing's terms most capable of furthering the development of humanity" (253). She comes to realize that "living with the mentally 'upset' is a lesson in our own splits, discords, contradictions" (*FGC* 331).

Relating to Lynda thus opens Martha to inaccessible parts of regions in herself and puts her in touch with unrealized capacities. These new abilities reside in her acquired power of telepathy.

e. Martha's development of telepathic powers

Lynda Coldridge, who has the gift of telepathy, has taught Martha to communicate with her inter-psychically. The latter acquires this telepathic ability. Telepathy is a conversation which takes place outside the verbal register, which means transcending the conventional codes of language. It is an affective transfer allowing the person to read the thoughts of those around him/her. This mind-reading phenomenon entails a fundamental change taking place in modes of apprehending consciousness and a new experience beyond the control of Man's reason and sight and language.

As a child, Lynda has been able to be aware that her stepmother Rosemary "hate[s] her and wishe[s] her dead: She hear[s] her thinking so" (*FGC* 544). She has acquired "before she could talk, that sharpness, the acuteness of the child." When her parents meet, she "watche[s] them, all her senses alert for storm signals. She kn[ows] exactly what they [a]re thinking about each other" (*FGC* 543).

Martha's newly acquired ability to communicate telepathically with the other has blown up the boundaries of the self. Her consciousness becomes affected by the others'

[359] *Ibid.* p. 51.

perceptions, as evidenced by such a remark as Lynda's "stream [of consciousness] ran through [Martha's] mind, […] or sometimes displace[…] it" (*FGC* 520). Telepathically, Martha can "hear" "the great chaos of sounds" behind "the rivulets of words" (*FGC* 521) that Lynda mumbles so much so that the two streams become confounded. Martha can now easily "hear what Lynda was thinking. Being more sensitive now, she hears better: normally she could hear an odd phrase, or a key word, or a sentence or two, summarizing what was going on in somebody's head; now it was not far off being inside Lynda's head, […]" (*FGC* 521). She comes to "understand Lynda, what Lynda was at the moment, by everything, a whole, the sight, sound, smell, the feeling of Lynda: Lynda was inside herself" (*FGC* 539). She also starts hearing thoughts in everyone's minds, such as Mark's desire for Lynda as well as Paul's ideas. Cherry Clayton argues that

> Martha's ability to use telepathy is not exalting irrationality or celebrating women as telepathic goddesses, but is calling into question the whole Western enterprise of scientific rationality as a defining element in that feudal, patriarchal Eurocentric order which was transported to the colonies and which subordinates women by dividing them into separate functions that serve the male order: hostess, legal wife, sexual partner, biological mother.[360]

Martha's experience of extrasensory perception thus challenges and undermines the Western world view, which valorizes sanity. To Rigney, Martha realizes that "conscious madness, as opposed to the world's unconscious madness, is the way to truth itself" (74). It is because "Lynda had been mad, had not tested certain limits," that the two women are able to go beyond what might have previously seemed absurd or scary.

Telepathy also allows Martha to have a transpersonal experience. In the two women's case, "breaking down" means opening up, which is the opposite of the fragmentation experienced in her other relationships. Even when the relationship ends, they both realize that something special; something different has happened to them. Through her friendship with Lynda, she has succeeded in breaking through the barriers that keep people separate. The experience of telepathy has broken down the boundaries between the self and other, the inside and the outside. "It will be as if the walls […] have crumbled and gone" (*FGC* 509).
But it is also significant that Martha should achieve her breakthrough and the evolution of her telepathic power through a female character—Lynda Coldridge. We shall then analyze

[360] Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis. *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing. London*: Greenwood Press, 1999. p. 56.

f. The dynamics of the female community

The process of female identification shapes the emotional and philosophical core of Doris Lessing's novel *The Four-Gated City*, in which Lynda is the agent of Martha's enlightenment through a paradigm of relatedness derived from a specifically feminine mode of identification. Female bonding exemplifies a mode of relational self-definition whose increasing prominence is evident in the revival of the interest of psychoanalysis in object-relations theory and in the dynamics of transference and countertransference. The dynamics of the female community becomes a means of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through a relation to another female who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self. Recent feminist psychoanalytic theory provides a clue to the importance of same-sex friendship in female identity formation. In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender,* Nancy Chodorow explores the origins of enduring female bonds.[361] She believes that girls construct themselves through a process of relational self-definition, whereas boys' development depends on the denial of the relation with the other and thus of relatedness in general. She writes that

> one way that women fulfill these needs [for fusion] is through the creation and maintenance of important personal relationships with other women. […] Women tend to have closer personal ties with each other than men have. […] In our society there is some sociological evidence that women's friendships are affectively richer than men's.[362]

By discovering in Lynda an aspect of her own identity, Martha enters a relationship which differs from that of the novel's adult male characters, who react to Lynda with a mixture of compassion and detachment, clearly distinguishing her "madness" from their "sanity." The new form of understanding that Martha develops in conjunction with Lynda allows them to escape to some degree their confinement to roles allotted to them by social and scientific scripts. The ironically named Dr. Lamb provides the clearest example of the scientific, objective attitude which is put into question by the conclusion of the novel and exposed as self-serving in Lessing's description of his therapeutic practice. Although anguished, Mark's response to Lynda echoes Dr. Lamb's insistence on maintaining objectivity

---

[361] Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

[362] *Ibid*. p. 200.

and holding "reality" before the patient's eyes. Martha's relation to Lynda, in contrast, is fluid, open, and nonhierarchical. When she imitates Lynda by bending down to drink out of a saucer, Martha not only refrains from judging Lynda's action, but also takes the risk of throwing off her rational guard, therefore uncovering a portion of herself. Martha's understanding of Lynda depends on her understanding of their shared experience of madness. In striving to become acquainted with Lynda, Martha comes to know herself, and through this self-knowledge finally understands Lynda's past, which Lessing "withholds until it can be rendered through Martha's empathic imagination, the antithesis of Dr. Lamb's external clinical judgments."[363]

Lessing's juxtaposition of Martha's response to Lynda and Dr. Lamb's attitude toward his patients draws attention to a significant dimension of women's friendships, residing in their affinity with the analytic relationship. Both relationships foster understanding through intimacy and the collaborative construction of meaning from experience through the particular dynamics of female friendship. In "(E)Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary," Elizabeth Abel suggests that "women friends in fiction frequently adopt roles analogous to those of patient and analyst, one providing the raw data of experience and the other providing interpretation. These roles are interchangeable and ultimately indistinguishable."[364] Martha is alternately Lynda's "analyst" when constructing the story of Lynda's past and her "patient" when following her into madness. Martha Quest is like the analyst who may undergo a brief "regression in the service of the ego"[365] or identification with the patient in order to facilitate a sense of the patient's experience, but "must guard against developing a chronic identification that would damage objectivity and thus analytic competence."[366]

Felski explains that this female community opens up a space for "non-exploitative relationships" which "inspire activism" and "make it possible to project a visionary hope of future change."[367] Lessing's female protagonists develop a kind of female morality based on

---

[363] Elizabeth Abel. "(E) Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women." *Signs.* Vol. 6, No. 3. (Spring, 1981), p. 418.

[364] *Ibid*. pp. 419-420.

[365] The phrase "regression in the service of the ego" is Reni Spitz's adaptation of Ernest Kris in "Countertransference: Comments on Its Varying Role in the Analytic Situation," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. Vol 4, no. 2 (1956): 256-65.

[366] The idea is stated in Elizabeth Abel. "(E) Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women." *Signs.* Vol. 6, No. 3. (Spring, 1981), p. 422.

[367] Rita Felski. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change.* Cambridge: Harvard UP,

care and relational interaction with others, an attitude traditionally ascribed to women. This is also the case of Lynda-Dorothy, Martha-Lynda, Anna Wulf-Molly. Waugh suggests that the existence of the female qualities of "co-operativeness, nurturance, an awareness of self-in-relationship"[368] may be understood not in essentialist but social and cultural terms. By recognizing fields of knowledge and totalizing systems that "attempt to systematize individual and concrete human actions," women have had to develop their experience in what appear to be "'humanist' or 'personal' qualities."[369]

Psychic growth through the dynamics of female community is also a central concern in *The Golden Notebook*, which explores the self-reflexive enterprise in which each psyche gains definition through relation to the other, in terms of the mother-daughter paradigm rather than that of two equally maturing friends. The relationship of Anna-Molly and Anna-Mrs. Marks is an essential part of *The Golden Notebook*, especially of the frame story ironically called "Free Women." This irony is twofold: the friends are unfree not only in relation to men, but also in relation to each other. Anna's evolution in regard to Molly defines the progression of the "Free Women" sections, which form a coherent novel balancing the development depicted in the notebooks. *The Golden Notebook* reflects the form of feminine development described by Chodorow: The male-female (oedipal) concerns predominate in the notebooks and the female-female (pre-oedipal) in the progression of "Free Women."

1989. Print. p. 139.

[368] Patricia Waugh. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern.* London: Routledge, 1989. Print. p. 13.

[369] *Ibid*. p. 14-15.

There is some quality–a vitality, a yeast–in Sufi work that affects us in ways not easily explained.

D. Lessing, Preface to Idris Shah, *Seekers after Truth*

The treasury of Sufism contains pearls of great value for both the West and the Islamic world, and in fact for all human beings from whichever chime they happen to hail.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*

II. 3. Microcosm and macrocosm

II. 3. A. From the microcosm of the self to the macrocosm of the universe

After her descent into madness with Lynda Coldridge, through which Martha has investigated the hidden potentials of her own consciousness in a way that is a considerable extension of Anna's experiments in consciousness, Lessing elaborates on Martha's spiritual development and its correlation with the external cosmic powers. The pattern of descent is followed by a pattern of ascent. By "descent" I mean the psychological descent into the unconscious, which results in the reconciliation with its dark dimensions—that part of the potential unconscious that must be slowly admitted into awareness if the personality is to achieve integration and balance. The aim of this descent is to face and acknowledge the inner schism in the individual and collective unconscious as an initial step towards a healthy and balanced relationship with the community. The psychological descent into the unconscious is not the end of the process. It is the crucial step which precedes ascent to a realm of enlightenment. It is in exploring that realm that Lessing found mysticism and the Sufi philosophy illuminating.

Symmetrically, the microcosm becomes interconnected with the macrocosm or the cosmic realm. The last part of *The Four-Gated City* is thus significant as we shall discover of "Lessing's further exploration of the geography of consciousness in the direction of the transpersonal, the collective substratum of the psyche proposed by Jung,"[370] a study of the individual consciousness in its relation with the collective. We shall see that the inner and outer spaces become intertwined, reflecting Martha's journey in the light of the esoteric or Sufi tradition. The narrative shifts from the focus on microcosmic and inner consciousness to the protagonist's achievement of the total perception of the external, macrocosmic and phenomenal world. The female protagonist of *The Four-Gated City* ultimately learns that personal growth is dependent on collective life. The novelist suggests the necessity to strike a balance between the individual and society.

It is important to signal the steady growth of Lessing's aesthetic vision and the lines of connection between her early and later novels. We have already developed her interest in

[370] p. 137.

Marxism at a certain point in her life and her adherence to the psychology of Jung and Laing. But we should also consider her interest in mysticism and Sufi philosophy, to examine the rationale of this development and consider the unifying motifs which provide coherence to her artistic vision in her search for a balance between the individual and society. Indeed, at the core of these seemingly incompatible philosophies, there is a common denominator related to the question of finding "the right path for moral equilibrium"[371] within the individual and society. In her fiction, the female protagonists' search for selfhood leads to an integration into the collective and social spheres. At the level of characterization, we observe the evolution of the female consciousness from a microcosmic egotistical attitude to a mystical unity with the macrocosmic, global realm. This part of our analysis will first shed light on Doris Lessing's changing aesthetic vision.

a. Lessing's evolving aesthetic vision

Some critics like Ingrid Holmquist claim that "Lessing's thinking has passed into its opposite: from having been what she herself calls progressive, rational and atheistic, she has become what could be called regressive, irrational and religious."[372] They nevertheless fail to connect her idiosyncratic version of Marxism to her particular interest in the psycho-politics of Laing, and even more so to her interest in Jungian psychology and the Sufist philosophy and mysticism. In view of this diversity, these critics overlook the artistic coherence or a unified philosophy behind all these perspectives.

A closer study reveals that at the root of all these diverse trends is an interest in the individual's (the female protagonist's in particular) quest for selfhood and the means of fulfilling his/her potential in relation to his/her community. Indeed, as was shown in chapter I, Lessing's earliest interest in Marxism and communism was qualified from the start by her concern with the individual and his/her potential capacity for conscious development. She found, however, its exclusive dependence on collective organization and political institutions unviable as a solution. She therefore turned to the individual's inner realm of consciousness. It is here that the psychological studies expounded by Jung and Laing are helpful in better

[371] Nissa Torrents. "Testimony to Mysticism." [1980]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations.* Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. p. 69.

[372] Ingrid Holmquist. *From Society to Nature. A Study of Doris Lessing's Children of Violence.* Gothenburg Studies in English 47. Gothenburg, Sweden: Acta Universitatus Gothenburgensis, 1980. p. 33.

understanding the heroines' search for their selfhood and their relation to the collective, shedding light on the recurrence of the motif of descent throughout her fiction. Descent leads to an opening to the other (Anna Wulf to Saul Green in *The Golden Notebook* and Martha Quest to Lynda Coldridge in *The Children of Violence),* which imperative in order to attain a state of equilibrium rather than "engulfment."[373] The characters who achieve that descent, as in Anna's case, emerge with a more evenly balanced psyche; they face and combat their inner chaos and are able to overcome the contradictions that their own consciousness has generated in its perception of reality. The journey into the unconscious, madness and schizophrenia connects Lessing's heroines with other characters of the stories and links the protagonist of *The Children of Violence to* each member of the Coldridge household, mainly Lynda. It is here that we can see the connecting line and deduce the rationale underlying Lessing's partial allegiance to these ideologies.

In an interview in 1980, when the pattern of descent in her novels was described as "painful" by her interviewer, Lessing answered:

> This is the sign of our time—to avoid pain, to accept that which exists, to demand happiness—but we have forgotten that no one owes us anything and that pain and sacrifice are necessary […] to find the right path, for moral equilibrium.[374]

From the outset of her career, Lessing had always insisted that the quest for selfhood and individuation, though painful and strenuous, leads the quester to integration into the collective, to the main goal of "finding the right path for moral equilibrium." In her first essay, "A Small Personal Voice" (1957), the novelist acknowledges the balance between the private and social selves as her central concern:

> It is a balance which must be continuously tested and reaffirmed […]. 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 judgments before every act of submission. (*SPV* 23)

Lessing shows that in its furthest reaches, every body's psyche is essentially commensurate with all of existence, the social and the communal, and is ultimately identical with the cosmic

[373] Laing's term. Both Laing and Lessing share the view that states of psychic breakdown lead to awakening rather than engulfment.

[374] Nissa Torrents. "Testimony to Mysticism." [1980]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations.* Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. p. 69.

creative principal itself. It is especially after writing *The Golden Notebook* (1962) that the novelist realizes that the issue of subjectivity is inherent in the human condition; it is universal and ultimately meant to break through the barriers which it serves to erect:

> The way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity," that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvelous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience […] into something much larger: growing up is after all only the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares. (*SPV* 32)

The move from the personal to the general or universal is clarified by what she herself said in an interview with Jonah Raskin in 1969. Asked what she considered to be the relationship between her fiction and herself, Lessing replied, "since writing *The Golden Notebook* I've become less personal […]. I've stopped saying, "this is mine; this is my experience.'"[375] Lessing describes the artist as "a mirror of society;" (68) Her vocation is therefore to break out of the prison of the individual self and its dark and complex vicissitudes.

The belief in the importance of the individual's integration into the collective testifies to Lessing's social commitment. She also believes that the socially committed writer must, "as an architect of the soul," assist the reader in the crucial "effort of imagination" which embraces all of human experience. When asked whether the role of the novelist "is to show us the world as it is, or the world as it should be, or the world as it might be," she answers:

> Why do you make it 'or, or, or?' It could be 'and, and, and.' You don't have to have an either/or over this one… I don't think reality is either/or. It is always a question of interaction, and extremes often interact.[376]

Lessing's resistance to pigeonholing, to either/ or thought accounts for the natural inclination to Sufism and mysticism that she would develop later in life. The comprehensive dimension central to these philosophies makes it clear that the individual consciousness is part of a collectivity of human beings. The critic Betsy Draine explains that in this dialectic of the individual and the collective, "Lessing is fascinated with the dynamics of this relation and

[375] Doris Lessing. "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview by Jonah Raskin." In *A Small Personal Voice*. Ed. Schlueter, 1969. p. 68.

[376] Doris Lessing. "An Interview with Doris Lessing." With Susan Stamberg. *Doris Lessing Newsletter* 8. Vol. 2, 1984.

with the evolution of human consciousness through this dynamic."[377]

b. From psychoanalysis to mysticism and Sufism

Lessing's later interest in mysticism and Sufi teaching comes at a period when she acknowledged the failure of science and psychiatry to explain certain phenomena accounting for the evolution of human consciousness like telepathy or intuition. In her article "The Evolution of Doris Lessing's Art from Mystical Moments to Space Fiction," Nancy Topping Bazin suggests that while writing *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing's faith in rationalism shifted to a faith in Sufism, which values the "mystical and the non-rational."[378]

David Bohm, past Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of London, has also written and spoken of the implications of the tenets of Eastern philosophies, religious mysticism and the prevalence of metaphysical themes in Lessing's works. In a radio interview published in 1979, David Bohm spoke in terms bordering upon the mystical, and which are echoed in both Lessing's *oeuvre*, as well as her own statements to interviewers. Bohm insists that scientific progress heralds an imminent need for a shift in paradigm within humanity:

> There has to be a very big change in our way of thinking. I believe that quantum mechanics and relativity both point, to some extent, to what step is needed. Fundamentally, the step is to be free of this division between the self and the world, the observer and the observed. I think al1 our thinking tends to be based on the idea that thinking is carried out by an entity, who could be called a thinker, a self, or an 'I.' […] Once you have introduced this idea of separation and fragmentation, you must inevitably come to fragmenting the thinker from his thoughts, and from the world that he is thinking about.
>
> But that separation is false and illusory: and the notion that there is a thinker who is producing the thought is merely imagination. What would be closer to the point would be to say that there is nothing but thought, and no 'thinker' to produce it.[379]

---

[377] Betsy Draine. *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Print. p. xiii.

[378] Nancy Topping Bazin. "The Evolution of Doris Lessing's Art from Mystical Moments to Space Fiction." *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Reunion in Science Fiction/Fantasy*. Ed. Robert Reilly. West port, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. p. 161.

[379] Paul Buckley, and F. David Peat. *A Question of Physics: Conversations in Physics and Biology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. p. 144.

From the 1960s on, Lessing persistently and enthusiastically proclaimed her mystical inclinations; she made use of Sufi tenets—especially those drawn from the writings of the Sufi thinker Idries Shah, whom she regarded as her teacher—to enhance her own perception of human beings. As she once said: "I had an inclination towards mysticism (not religion) even when being political. It is not an uncommon combination."[380] Sufism refers to the core of Islamic mysticism. Doris Lessing became a student of Idries Shah who lived in England in the 1960s. Around the time she read his book, *The Sufis*, she wrote:

> I heard about Idries Shah during my inquiries, as a Sufi from Afghanistan with the sort of education that enabled him to be at home both in the East and in the West. I had found what I read about Sufism exotic […], but was told that our Western ideas about Sufis tended to be ill-informed and that the situation was being made worse by charlatans claiming to be Sufi teachers. Idries Shah was genuine, in the opinion of my informants, who had experience of cults, sects, and various kinds of teachers. They said he was writing a book. I felt this book might turn out to be what I was looking for. You could say I had a "hunch" about it. It was *The Sufis*. I read it feeling it was for me. I was also amazed at the robustness of its claims.[381]

Lessing's orientation to interest in Sufism is in line with her preoccupations with her heroines' quest their selfhood and their evolving consciousness. The central tenets of Sufism and mysticism met her concern with breaking through the conventional ways of thinking and being, the urge she felt to understand and extend the parameters of consciousness, the search for an "equilibrium between the rational and non-rational modes of consciousness,"[382] the mystical intimations expressed in her characters the desire to highlight a synthesizing vision of wholeness. In his book *The Sufis*,[383] Shah says that Sufis "believe themselves to be taking part in the higher evolution of humanity" (19). They know the importance of "we" attitude for people to realize their potential for personal and social wholeness.

Sufi writings also quenched her thirst for answers and inquiries into altered states of consciousness and the evolutionary potential of the human being, which she could find in other philosophies or ideologies or even in psychology. Lessing expresses her inclination for Sufi ideas in a letter to Roberta Rubenstein: "When I read *The Sufis*, I found that it answered

---

[380] Doris Lessing. Stated in the introduction to Idries Shah's *Learning How To Learn*. London: Octagon Studies, 1978.

[381] *Ibid*. p. 13.

[382] Shadia S. Fahim. *Doris Lessing and Sufi Equilibrium: The Evolving Form of The Novel*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. p. 13.

[383] Idris Shah. *The Sufis*. London: The Octagon Press, 1999.

many questions that I had learned—I feel too belatedly—to ask of life. Though that book was only the beginning of a different approach.[384] Referring to her experience in reading in Sufi philosophy, she repeats:

> [F]or people like myself, unable to admire organized religions of any kind, this philosophy shows where to look for answers to questions put by society and by experience - questions not answered by the official surveyors of knowledge, secular or sacred. (*SPV* 90)

The philosophy of Sufism impregnated Lessing with the idea that human beings are evolving towards "higher consciousness"[385] through the development of extrasensory perception, intuition, dreams, and journeys into "inner space." In *The Sufis*, Idries Shah writes:

> Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving to a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. […]. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic or prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. (61)

Inspired by Shah, Lessing reflected that "we all have extra-ordinary, non-rational capacities that we use to communicate in a very subtle way."[386] According to her, the knowledge of our potential leads to oneness through the most intense mystical experience.

c. Distancing oneself from psychiatry

The fact that psychiatry is a scientific field of study implies that the works of Laing and Jung had not dealt with the realm of higher consciousness. It is this realm of higher consciousness explored by Sufi philosophy which I am going to consider as the motif of ascent. By this term I therefore mean the ascent to higher levels of perception, to a

[384] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*, 1979. p. 121.

[385] Muge Galin refers to this higher consciousness as a "higher state of being—not higher as in "superior," but higher in the sense of becoming more than what one already is. Galin, Muge. *Between East and West, Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. p. 266.

[386] Nissa Torrents. "Testimony to Mysticism." [1980]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations.* Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. p. 42.

transcendental realm referred to by the Sufis as "tajalli"[387]—a state "indicating a breakthrough of the limitations of time and space."[388]

The move to the transcendental and mystical realms becomes clear if we understand why Lessing created a distance between herself and the psychoanalytic findings in the domain of inner consciousness and personal development. Robert E. Ornstein's study of the intrinsic differences between Western psychology and the esoteric traditions is useful here. The difference is that according to Ornstein,

> Both types of psychology begin from common ground and develop in complementary directions. Both characterize normal consciousness as selective and restrictive, as a personal construction. Modern psychology then proceeds to analyze the accomplishment of this construction […]. The traditional esoteric psychologists proceed in another direction, to practical techniques […] for suspending the normal, analytic, linear mode […] then tune the intuitive mode by working in its own tacit language.[389]

According to Ornstein, Western psychology seeks to analyze and control repressed elements buried in the unconscious. These elements, projected in dreams or brought out through therapy, are generally negative but have to be acknowledged and accepted as part of the total personality in order to restore the individual's balance. The esoteric traditions, on the other hand, based on the assumption that man's essence is spiritual, believe that there are modes of consciousness essentially "intuitive" and that man can transcend the limitation of his understanding by cultivating and developing these modes.

However, whereas the basic tenet of psychology is to restore the balance of the psyche, Sufism aims at evolution. Ornstein explains that according to Sufis, "ordinary consciousness" is a state of "deep sleep" or "blindness" which can be overcome by the process of meditation, which awakens "fresh perception."[390]

---

[387] The technical term "tajalli" means "luminizing and the word *nur* (light- plural: anwar) are both associated with the process of activating which is carried out on the way towards independent reality through the force contained in the power of activating special new organs of perception and communicative love." Idris Shah. *The Sufis.* London: The Octagon Press, 1999. p. 297.

[388] *Ibidi.* p. 298.

[389] Robert Ornstein. *The Psychology of Consciousness.* Oxford, England: Penguin, 1972. p. 110.

[390] *Ibid.* p. 113.

Shah reveals how the state of "*tajalli*" endows the Sufi with "a dynamic forward movement."[391] In this state, the individual transcends the limitations of normal perception. That process is achieved through stages of contemplation, referred to as "states and stations,"[392] in a conscious attempt to actualize the perceptions achieved—the aim being to obtain a vantage point outside the dominant structures of the mind.

It is precisely that aspect of Sufi philosophy—the faith in the individual's potential for further evolution, "to serve mankind"—which was of particular interest to Doris Lessing. Man has the possibility of conscious self-development, becoming able, with his own efforts and under a certain kind of expert guidance, to transcend ordinary limitations. Idries Shah revealed the different ends of psychiatry and Sufism:

> When Western psychologists use, say, catharsis to explode emotions or release it, they may apparently fail. If they seem to succeed, they cannot be said to have done more than make the patient more socially acceptable. As far as anyone can tell, he is less troublesome than he was before. This may suit the present phase of society well enough. It is not enough for the Sufi, who considers the human being as something which is 'going somewhere,' not something which is being kept at, or restored to, some sort of a norm assessed by purely logical or mainly expedient criteria.[393]

Thus, whereas psychiatry considers the descent into the unconscious as an end in itself, the Sufis consider it as an initial step:

> It is in this field more than any other that occultists and fragmented schools […] go astray and in the end peter out or merely become self-propagating systems for the self-struggle, without the benefit of the experience, the *tajalli*, which tells them that they are capable of the development which they seek.[394]

---

[391] Idris Shah. *The Sufis.* London: The Octagon Press, 1999. p. 121.

[392] Sufis envision seeking a way, a path of conduct towards God, which begins with engaging the self, morally. Seekers of this journey, or this way, progress through several stages defined by them as *maqamat* (spiritual station on the Sufi path) and *ahwal* (spiritual states which the mystic experiences on his way to God) and one concludes one's *maqamat* and *ahwal* with *ma'rifa* or gnosis in the Divine, or of God; and, this is the end of the path, the journey. Sufis mean by *maqam,* the station in the journey of ascension in which the believer, the adherent and servant of God stands before God and places himself in the hands of God and, in which the adherent and servant of God performs acts of worship, toils strenuously and maintains his spiritual exercises and practices. Al-Taftazani, "madkhal illa al-tasawwuf al-islami" (lit., "An Introduction to Islamic Sufism"). Cairo-Egypt: Dar Al-thakafa for Publishing and distribution, 1979. pp. 38-39.

[393] *Ibid*. p. 339.

[394] *Ibid*. p. 299.

As demonstrated in the afore-mentioned analysis, Lessing's interest in mysticism is not a retreat into a mode which is "regressive, irrational and religious" as claimed by Ingrid Holmquist, but indicates on the contrary the seriousness of her commitment, because it is a means to deepening her understanding of "the nature of the world we live in" and strengthening hope in the potential of the individual "to serve mankind." We can conclude that Lessing's move into Sufi studies, far from an abandonment of her earlier political, psychological or social stands, was a development of her interest in the human being as a seeker of truth, wholeness and unity within humanity at large.

Inspired by the concepts of Sufism, the following analysis will firstly deal with the evolution of the female consciousness towards a sublime plane—what Shah calls "higher consciousness—" after much struggling and suffering. It will then show how such an evolution, in the quest for selfhood, contributes to a universal growth. We shall examine the "careful attention to one's self" in the long process of Martha's quest, from South Africa to Post-war London, towards an emergent self connected to the life of the collective.

II. 3. B. The opening up of female consciousness to the cosmic

Critics have sometimes called Lessing the label of a "visionary" writer because her literature is marked by a sense of greater potential for human consciousness, mainly cosmic consciousness, however subjective the human being's experience. The ever-expanding consciousness of Lessing's female protagonists is to be correlated with their initial quest for selfhood. For instance, the heroine of *Children of Violence* follows the path of the mystics, whose development of their inner consciousness is the fruit of a long wrestle with themselves. As for many Sufis, consciousness is for Lessing the precondition of conscience; Hence the necessity of growth, particularly of consciousness, from a private and personal entity to a

communal and cosmic one. The epigraph to part four of *The Four-Gated City* illuminates Lessing's interest in treating her characters' evolution as part of a global and universal growth:

> The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the last ten thousand years or so we have been given the responsibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends on it. (*FGC* 461)

Such growth corresponds to the evolution of female consciousness which from being all-exclusive, self-centered and immanent, becomes all-inclusive, comprehensive and transcendental. In the first book of the *Children of Violence* series, Martha starts her quest for selfhood with what Catherine R. Stimpson calls "an act of negation"[395] or rejection, for Martha wants to exclude from the idyllic four-gated city her parents and all the people of the district because of their "pettiness of vision and small understanding" (*MQ* 11). The constant irony is that in her rejection of the family and their apartheid society, she reenacts the very disconnectedness she deplores around her, for every real city she knows—self, [mother,] family and society—"is not just walled against outer destructive nature and the void, but walled against itself by inner barriers of judgmental rejection that prevent communion and destroy it from within."[396] This lack of vision central to the first book of the series explains that Martha has had so far an attitude of rejection. Fand refers to this initial stage as "the embryonic form of nay-saying."[397] The denial of the m(other) extends to *A Proper Marriage* and *A Ripple from the Storm,* in which Martha rejects her own maternity, her own daughter and her lovers. The last book of the series, however, encapsulates the breakthrough achieved by Martha's inner consciousness, rekindled by mystical moments. It reveals the emotional involvement of the characters, the absorption of the female identity into "an increasing comprehensive state of mind that leaves individual personas behind as mere fictions. Or rather, as lesser fictions than a grand or sublime one."[398] The protagonist of the *Children of Violence* series finds her path to true selfhood through psychological (including paranormal) dialogues that are comprehensive enough to include the excluding Martha. Her spiritual

---

[395] Catherine R. Stimpson. "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland, Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1983, p. 204.

[396] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood.* London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 112.

[397] *Ibid*. p. 108.

[398] *Ibid*. p. 104.

healing, akin to that of Sufic and mystical experiences, lies in an attitude of openness and attunement to a greater universal mind, in which she surrenders her personal ego and embracing a universal whole. Martha finally shows a kind of self-maturation through her experience of living with others in a collective unity.

a. The mystical self and the transcendental consciousness

The influence of mysticism and Sufism palpable in the last book of the series suggests the novelist's ambition to transcend the limitations of an exclusively personal or ego consciousness and achieve a transcendental consciousness. But Lessing's mystical propensity is clear even before *The Four-Gated City*. The seeds of Sufi and mystical inclinations can be traced in the first book of the series, *Martha Quest,* in which the protagonist experiences a mystical moment akin to a Sufic experience of meditation in nature and oneness with the environment, and of "separate things interacting and finally becoming one, but greater:"

> During that space of time (which was timeless) she understood quite finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity. In her ears was inchoate grinding, the great wheels of movement, and it was human…and no part of that sound was Martha's voice. (*MQ* 22)

This mystical experience—the "slow integration," during which she and all her environment "became one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms" (*MQ* 52)—provides firsthand knowledge of the deepest sense of the dissolution into the collective. Kaplan makes the following comment "the evolution towards a universal consciousness in Doris Lessing's novels appears to begin with an approach to reality centered in the physical body and its relationship with nature."[399] Martha's openness to and integration into the natural world of the veld outside herself, her sense of being invaded by an external reality and the accompanying experience of ego-loss culminate in the portrait of the psychically sensitive Martha of *The Four-Gated City*. As Roberta Rubenstein observes, this experience "anticipates the sensitivity that will […] enable her to enter other people's consciousness empathetically and even telepathically."[400]

[399] Sydney J. Kaplan. "The Limits of Consciousness in the Novels of Doris Lessing." *Contemporary Literature*. 14 Autumn 1973. p. 546.

[400] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*, 1979. p. 39.

Besides, a number of scholars like Barnouw, DuPlessis and Labovitz argue that Martha's relationship with Thomas Stern, in *Landlocked*, plays a major role in the process of her developing consciousness.[401] Martha's love affair with the peasant gardener occurs in the immediate proximity of nature, reenacting one of the mystical and spiritual moments, as their union enables her to develop new intuitive powers. At this moment, "the conscious marries the unconscious, the dark mates with the light, the animus joins the anima in complete psychological unity."[402] Martha transforms her sexual experience with Thomas from a kind of physical entrapment into a wellspring for a stage in her selfhood that emerging out of a collective energy. In this context, Fand points out that "sexual union is only one form of nature's process of merging, dissolving the old, to reformulate the new."[403] It takes her to the new dimension she had been seeking, a dimension that recalls her visionary moment in the veld when she was an adolescent. Thomas endows her with the spiritual knowledge and the energizing force that will become the instrument of change, in part through madness, in *The Four-Gated City*, and which is seen for the first time through this relationship:

> But she did not know what had taken place between her and Thomas. Some force, some power, had taken hold of them both, and had made such changes in her—what, soul? (but she did not even know what words she must use) psyche? being?—that now she was changed and did not understand herself. (*LL* 222)

Martha's ego started falling apart in *Landlocked*. She has now learnt to expose herself to this man and to break down with him. She realizes that "even the long process of breaking-down—as they both learned to put it—for the other; of learning to expose oneself, was something they did together, acknowledging they had to do it" (*LL* 223).

These mystical moments of perception prepare the Martha of the first book for moments of "disintegration" and dissolution into the collective as well as her psychic and spiritual breakthrough. Such growth cannot be achieved without undertaking a necessarily complex and lengthy processes because, according to the Sufis, "true knowledge cannot be attained through books" but comes from "experience."[404] This idea is enhanced by Catherine

---

[401] This idea is developed at length and expressed in chapter 2.

[402] Evelyn J. Hinz. "Hierogamy versus Wedlock: Types of Marriage, Plots and their Relationship to Genres of Prose Fiction." *PMLA*. Vol. 91. N° 5. October, 1976. p. 906.

[403] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood.* London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 114.

[404] Muge Galin. *Between East and West, Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. p. 40.

R. Stimpson when she mentions that Lessing used Sufism because it is a kind of "evolutionary theory" whose "tropes and theory reinforce[…] the sense that growth has the force of natural law. It transcends individual choice."[405] Though at "a loose end," Martha knows that she must "take one step after another: this process in itself held the keys" (*FGC* 642). Martha's experience in London has unexpectedly displaced the initial goal of the quester, which lies in her search for autonomous selfhood. Draine suggests that "the condition of her growth has been a willingness to move in response to the rhythms of life, a fluid sort of patience."[406] Lessing comments in chapter four of *The Four-Gated City* that

> elsewhere was the sense of sharp change, of old thought breaking up, of flow and of movement; in life that is—in what one experienced, in where one learned. There was a prickling challenging liveliness, a vitality at work. (*FGC* 533)

In chapter four of *The Four-Gated City*, Martha walks along the river and is reminded of the young Martha wandering alone in the city at the beginning, along the Thames. At this contemplative moment, however, the images of nature and the flowing river accompany the progression of psychological development from ruins to new growth:

> 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 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, emerges then submerged in dark. (*FGC* 614)

The fact, indicated by the "tiny three-dimensional path," that Martha is now only able to look forwards seems to reflect the questions she asks herself, "But where? How? Who?" (*FGC* 615). Even in the darkness, the aroma of the flowers implies hope. Draine concludes that Martha learns that "it is possible for her to live with dignity in harmony with the will of evolution."[407]

It is through experience and various "states and stations" that Martha reaches higher consciousness or what Shah refers to as a state of "tajalli"—light and awakening. The

---

[405] Catherine R. Stimpson. "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland, Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1983. p. 190-191.

[406] Betsy Draine. *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Print. p. 65.

[407] *Ibid*. p.65.

Andalusian Sufi Muhyi'd-Din Ibn Arabi defines the word *tajalli*, in a chapter entitled "The Definitions of Sufism," as "the secret illuminations that are revealed to the hearts [of the believers.]"[408] Both the heroines of *Children of Violence* and *The Golden Notebook* have reached this state of spiritual awakening, which the artist Anna Wulf fails to translate into words. It is what she refers to as "illumination" or "knowing" but which actually resists any kind of verbalization:

> During the last weeks of craziness and timelessness, I've had these moments of "knowing" one after the other, yet there is no way of putting this sort of knowledge into words. Yet, these moments have been so powerful, like the rapid illuminations of a dream that remain with one waking, that what I have learned will be part of how I experience life until I die […]. The people, who have been there, in the place in themselves where words, patterns, order, dissolve, will know what I mean and the others won't. (*GN* 633-634)

In *The Four-Gated City*, after periods of "fasting, lack of sleep and walking in a world full of the drugged cripples who were one's fellow human being" (*FGC* 531), Martha, in a state of supremely heightened awareness (*tajalli* or illumination), goes out into the world and voices this monologue:

> Let me keep this, let me not lose it, oh how could I have borne it all these years, all this life, being dead and asleep and not seeing, seeing nothing; for now everything was so much there, present, existing in an effulgence of delight, offering themselves to her, till she felt they were extensions of her and she of them, or at least, their joy and hers sang together. (*FGC* 554)

Martha's monologue evokes one of the basic tenets of Sufi philosophy related to the idea that man can be physically alive but perceptively dead. Through this moment of wakeful insight ("effulgence of delight"), the female protagonist comes to understand that she has been throughout her life in a state of spiritual death and sleep. After the stay at the Coldridge household, Martha tastes the bliss of being with others: They are "extensions of her and she of them." This interconnectedness which was rejected by Martha in the first books of the series is now fully admitted and embraced. The sharpened perception achieved by the heroine, like that of the Sufi, enables her to experience things which are imperceptible to others. This idea is confirmed by the epigraph to part four of *Landlocked* in which Lessing inserted an intertext consisting in a teaching story by Idries Shah in his book *The Sufis*, a motif central to Sufi

[408] Stated in William C. Chittick. *Sufism: A Short Introduction.* London: One world Press, 2007. p. 12

writings:

> The Mulla was thinking aloud. 'How do I know whether I am dead or alive?
>
> 'Don't be such a fool,' his wife said. 'If you were dead, your limbs would be cold.'
>
> Shortly afterwards Nasrudin was in the forest cutting wood. It was midwinter. Suddenly he realized that his hands and feet were cold.
>
> 'I am undoubtedly dead,' he thought; 'so I must stop working, because corpses do not work.'
>
> And because corpses do not walk about, he lay down on the grass. Soon a pack of wolves appeared and attacked Nasrudin's donkey, which was tethered to a tree.
>
> 'Yes, carry on, take advantage of a dead man,' said Nasrudin from his abject position; 'but if I had been alive I would not have allowed you to take liberties with my donkey.' (68)

Mulla (master) Nasrudin is the classical figure devised by Idris Shah for the purpose of highlighting certain states of mind in the gradual building of inner consciousness and intuitive illumination. By analogy with the previous quote, Nasrudin, like Martha Quest, realizes that he has been blind to truth because being alive does not entail perception. His wife's logic does not help him in attaining perception. But experience has taught Mulla Nasrudin about the truth of life and death. The Sufi intertext illustrates the new visionary perception acquired by the female protagonist through her journey for selfhood. These wakeful insights reflect her transcendental consciousness. We can understand with this example that Lessing sought to strike a balance between the detached transcendent self and the immanent self of material experience.

b. The comprehensive self and the universal consciousness

After joining the Coldridge household, Martha gives up self-absorption, youthful rebellion and idealism—all of which seemed her defining traits—extending herself outward to mingle with the writer Mark Coldridge, his mad wife Lynda Coldridge, and the two emotionally battered children Francis and Paul. Thus, *The Four-Gated City* is the apotheosis of Martha's spiritual growth. The novel unfolds on two simultaneous levels: While the literal or phenomenal plane traces the development of events in the macrocosm, the world of other people, the symbolic plane connects those events to the microcosm of Martha Quest's own

consciousness. Martha has been transformed from a self-centered girl to a generous woman nurturing a family of sad children and emotionally disturbed adults. Her consciousness is part of a universal state of interconnectedness.

In her concern with developing her consciousness, Martha expands it to a broader world when working with Lynda. Her description of the "planet" (*FGC* 614) points to the universal consciousness she finally acquires. Her individual ego and self-centered consciousness, which had been the focus of the first three books began to expand, by the time Lessing wrote *Landlocked* and were further developed in *The Four-Gated City* through the overlap of the characters' consciousness. This pattern mirrors Lessing's belief that humanity is actually on an evolutionary continuum of ever-expanding consciousness. Bohm best explains this idea:

> The universe is an unending transformation in flow. Out of this appear these forms which have subsistence. The hardest thing of all is to see that we ourselves are only a form in this. The major reason, I think why people find it difficult to accept this view is that it implies that we ourselves are only transient forms. …I think that our views of matter and our views of ourselves are implicitly related. If a person is reluctant to believe that he is not a substance, he will be reluctant to believe that matter is not a substance.[409]

Like Lessing, Bohn believes that we are part of a global evolutionary world. In "Passionate Portrayal of Things to Come: Doris Lessing's recent fiction," Sydney Janet Kaplan argues in *Twentieth-Century Women Novelists* (1982) that, since

> the evolution of consciousness in Lessing's fiction is towards the universal, it necessitates a change in her methods of characterization as well, if she is to express the immediate relationship between the illusion of a self–contained ego and the reality of universal forces, powers, currents, and cosmic energies. (5)

Lessing's shift in focus from the individual toward a more global or universal perspective is materialized by the manner in which her protagonist, Martha, becomes increasingly linked to two other characters, Mark and Lynda. The Aldermaston March[410] is crucial as a collective expression, embodying people's fear of nuclear weapons. The march gathered people from different political standpoints. Some were survivors of the war and had

[409] Paul Buckley, and F. David Peat. *A Question of Physics: Conversations in Physics and Biology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. p. 141.

[410] The Aldermaston march was first held in 1958 as an anti-nuclear weapon demonstration. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament organised marches from 1959-1965.

been "stripped" by the outer world (*FGC* 457). Others were the members of the young generation, eager to change the world. This is the first time Martha, Mark and Lynda appear in public, looking like any other marcher. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis says in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, "the collective protagonist is announced at the Aldermaston March against nuclear weapons in 1961, when Martha, Lynda, and Mark watch themselves in various other triplets as 'variations on a theme' (*FGC* 397)."[411] Martha feels the fluidity in their relationship during one of the peace marches as she "sees variations of Lynda-Mark-Martha, Mark-Martha-Lynda pass by in the long line of Marchers" (*FGC* 545). The narrator comments that during this march, Lynda's, Mark's, and Martha's eyes "[are] enmeshed: this contact [is] a comfort to them" (*FGC* 569). DuPlessis contends that Lessing's protagonist is more like "the collective protagonist in speculative fiction."[412] In these fictions, the individual heroes or sealed couples are replaced by "groups," and there is "a sense of purpose and identity, whose growth occurs in mutual collaboration."[413]

The collective protagonist, "Mar/k/tha explores exterior time, political choices, historical action and utopian possibilities."[414] The trio Martha-Lynda-Mark illustrates the inevitable interconnectedness of human life—a Sufi principle—implying that one is linked with others and that one's actions open up infinite new possibilities and have unlimited consequences and repercussions. The union achieved by Martha and Lynda becomes an emblem of the breakthrough essential to human survival, the transformation of the brain from a "machine which works in division" to the unified and unifying organism invoked by the Sufi tale that serves as an inscription to the novel. Pickering suggests that it is after her years in London that the heroine of *Children of Violence* learns how to transform her talent of observation into a kind of egoless receptivity, "a tuning like a radio to different attitudes and emotions."[415]

Claire Sprague argues that "Mark and Lynda are more permanent pieces of [Martha]. Mark could be called the 'public' side of Martha while Lynda is her innermost self."[416] One of the rhythms of the novel is the movement from individuals to groups. Sometimes Martha, the

---

[411] Rachel Blau DuPlessis. *Writing Beyond the Ending Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-century Women*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. Print. p. 197.

[412] *Ibid*. p. 179.

[413] *Ibid*. p. 179.

[414] *Ibid*. p. 194.

[415] Jean Pickering. Martha Quest and "the Anguish of Feminine Fragmentation" in Sprague, Claire and Tiger, Virgina. (ed) *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*. Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co, 1986. p. 96.

[416] Claire Sprague. "'Without Contraries Is No Progression/' Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 26 Spring, 1980, p. 100.

protagonist, is eclipsed; sometimes she is the sole actor in a chapter. This is mainly visible in the fifth and final volume of *The Four-Gated City*, which gradually departs from the fiction of Martha Quest as the focal *bildungsroman* character. The story ultimately ends with an appendix into a futuristic fantasy where the omniscient narrator disappears into documents of an apocalyptic era containing the last evidence of Martha as person. The female protagonist becomes merged with other characters throughout most of *The Four-Gated City*, ceasing to be a single entity.

The shift to a universal consciousness is expressed through images of vibration, wires, dynamos, volts and currents as well as the vocabulary of telecommunications in the second and third sections of *The Four-Gated City*. "It was as if a million radio sets ran simultaneously, and her mind plugged itself in fast to one after another" (*FGC* 513). The brain is likened to a radio and the various pools of universal emotion are called stations, bands, or wavelengths. Martha becomes aware that it is possible for individual minds to share the same "wavelength" or to tap into each other's stream of thought:

> There is something in the human mind which makes it possible for one compartment to hold Fact A which matches Fact B in another compartment; but the two facts can exist side by side for years, decades, centuries, without coming together. It is a least possible that the most fruitful way of describing the human brain is this: "It is a machine which works in division; it is composed of parts which function in compartments locked off from each other," or "your right hand does not know what your left hand is doing" (*FGC* 523).

The heroine begins to realize her connectedness to the whole. She can "function as antennae picking up information that consciousness (possibly future consciousness) somehow sends through channels beyond what we 'know.'"[417] She "thought, or wondered: it is in Lynda's head or in mine? Well, of course, it is not a question of 'Lynda's mind' or 'Martha's mind;' it is the human mind, or part of it, and Lynda, Martha, can choose to plug in or not" (*FGC* 513). Michael L. Magie mentions that Martha finds herself "in communication with other individual minds, and then moving mentally toward a universal human mind which contains all human impulses."[418] In the Coldridge household, she thus begins to perceive more holistically, as if a different set of senses operated in her to enable her to feel, even if briefly, the connection between them all" (*FGC* 221).

---

[417] *Ibid.* p. 195.

[418] Michael L. Magie, "Doris Lessing and Romanticism." *College English* 38. 6 (1977): 531-52. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 April 2008. p. 544.

It is clear that despite the apparent separateness of things at the explicate level, everything is a seamless extension of everything else, and ultimately even the visible and invisible orders blend into each other. Karl Pribram, the eminent neurophysiologist from Stanford University gives scientific support to Lessing's original view of the human mind when he declared that "the power of this peculiar biological organ, the brain, especially in man, is only beginning to be fathomed."[419] Although only time will tell if the perceptual abilities at which Lessing glimpsed will serve to assist humanity in its next stage of development, she has certainly mapped the possibilities in her literature.

> And it was precisely this quality at work everywhere, the lively yeast, which made Martha hold on to that prime thing she had learned in her life, had been made to learn over and over again, so that she knew it as one does know things that have become part of one's substance, to be acted from because the knowledge is oneself: it was that if she was feeling something, in this particular way, with the authenticity, the irresistibility, of the growing-point, then she was not alone, others were feeling the same, since the growing-point was never, could never be, just Martha's; could not be only the property or territory of one individual. No, if she experienced and was asking questions, then others like her were experiencing and asking questions, others looked for her as she looked for them. (*FGC* 534)

The movement towards the personal leads Martha to the universal. As Jouve puts it, "Martha is meant to grow into a being who achieves a universal, absolute wisdom through access to the universal, not through development of the particular."[420] The protagonist's quest for identity ends in the formation of a universal consciousness which opens the horizon of the self to embrace difference and change.

Martha's process of expanding consciousness is epitomized by Anna Wulf's childhood game, which she recalls in *The Golden Notebook:*

> First I created the room I sat in, object by object, 'naming everything…till it was whole in my mind, then move out of the room, creating the house, then out of the house, slowly creating the street, then rise into the air, looking down on London, at the enormous sprawling wastes of London, but holding at the same time the room and the house and the street in my mind, and then England, the shape of England in Britain, then the little group of islands lying against the continent, then slowly, it would create the world, continent by continent, ocean by ocean, (but the point of

[419] Karl H. Pribram. *Languages of the Brain: Experimental Paradoxes and Principles in Neurophysiology.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971. p. 384-385.

[420] Nicole Ward Jouve. "Doris Lessing: of Mud and Other Matter: The *Children of Violence*." *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue*. London & New York: Routledge, 1991. p. 136.

> the game was to create vastness while holding the bedroom, the house, the street in their littleness in my mind at the same time), until the point was reached where I moved out into space, and watched the world […]. Then … with stars around me and the little earth 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. (*GN* 548)

Anna's game reflects her expanding consciousness. She has reached a transcendental state alternating between the microcosm, the individual and the macrocosm through the integrating function of the mind. She could not establish a final control on the planet through her game but it is through the dialectic of the local and the transcendental that all becomes meaningful and coherent.

At the heart of Sufi thought is the necessity for individual and cosmic evolution and the idea that men and women should develop their potentials in the process of self-discovery. This is in keeping with Lessing's natural inclinations, so that Idries Shah's representation of Sufism reinforces Lessing's own belief in the evolution of a harmonious holistic society.

Sufis see human beings as incomplete and expect them to transcend their human condition through work in the Sufi Way. This is intentionally emphasized in the lives of her characters. In *The Four-Gated City,* the movement of the characters is described "like a caravan almost certainly accumulating items of humanity as they went. In short, they, like Paul [provide] places, heavens and homes for the sad, forlorn, sick, rejected" (*FGC* 587). Stimpson points out that "the development in the novel has become "an encyclopedic life, as if the relations between conscience and its collective were part of a complex, lengthy process."[421] Rather than enhancing individual unity, Lessing puts a premium on the capacity to connect with other characters. Fand comments that Lessing no longer defends the old unitary autonomous subject, but "a collective self of the imagination that is a hologram of the whole universe, which is what makes every individual precious and authentic in this new sense."[422]

---

[421] Catherine R. Stimpson. "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland, Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1983. p. 192.

[422] Roxanne J. Fand. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood.* London: Associated University Presses, 1999. p. 139.

II. 3. C. The synthetic vision and the orientation towards space fiction/speculative fiction

Lessing's eclectic fusion of rational and more transcendental or metaphysical dimensions in her fiction and her intermingling of the macrocosmic and the microcosmic spheres account for her synthetic and comprehensive vision. This fusion is especially visible in her speculative works or what critics would call "space-fiction" genre, as in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), *Shikasta* (1979), *Canopus in Argos* (1979-1983), or *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980):

> The reason for this is Lessing's unwavering commitment to a holistic vision, where the person, the globe, and the very universe are all pieces in a cosmic puzzle or connected nodes on a network […] one must consider her work as a whole—the individual texts as progressive nodes on an increasingly complex network: through this interconnected perspective of the universe and its inhabitants, Lessing reconstructs the directions of human culture, human existence. [423]

In the last volume of *Children of Violence*, Lessing invites us to give free rein to our 'cosmic' imaginations to flourish, which enables us to conceive the fusion of rational and transcendental themes in her later narratives and consider events, circumstances or characters from a new 'alien' perspective beyond the limited viewpoint offered by the reader's own position in time and space. As Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis puts it, the energy of Lessing's vision of "cosmic consciousness" stems from her "insistence that what is known or accepted should never be allowed to obliterate what may be possible."[424]

This orientation towards speculative fiction or space fiction clearly characterizes her science fictional 'Appendix' to the fifth and final book in the *Children of Violence* series, *The Four-Gated City*, which comes unexpectedly after a seemingly 'realistic' representation of the inner and outer life of the central figure, Martha Quest. Readers find themselves wading through a final fifty-page array of dispassionate archival documents presenting post-apocalyptic events and projecting the reader three decades ahead to a future history of the world after a man-made nuclear disaster. "The human race had driven itself mad, and these sudden outbreaks of senseless violence in individuals and communities were the early

[423] Melanie Hunter, and Duby McIntosh. "A Question of Wholes': Spiritual Intersection, Apocalyptic Vision in the Work of Doris Lessing." *Doris Lessing Newsletter.* 18. 2 (Winter 1997). p. 1.

[424] Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis. "The Marriage of Inner and Outer Space in Doris Lessing's *Shikasta*." *SF-TH Inc: Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, *Science Fiction by Women*, July 1990, p. 235.

symptoms" (*FGC* 628). The other documents are reports written by two characters who represent the bureaucracy of a dystopian, authoritative world order.

Martha's letter to Francis Coldridge from the contaminated island of Faris, off the North-West Coast, in which she announces that "she shall die soon," highlights the seriousness of catastrophe that is about to happen:

> There were as many rumours about the inundation of New York and New Jersey, the partial inundation of Virginia—surprisingly accurate. […], the general effect was of a thousand voices crying woe! Ours among them! […] People were saying that gas from the North Sea supplies were escaping due to vandalism and lying over a large area of the north-east England […]. Others said that radioactive missiles carried by the Russian submarine which had been missing, for some weeks had sunk, releasing its poisons in the North Sea. (*FGC* 650-651).

After the radioactive disaster, Martha appears in a boat in the midst of a storm in the Atlantic, finally crashing onto the coast of an island, off the west coast of Ireland. "Several people died: from cold, from the insane rolling and pitching, and from sea-sickness" (*FGC* 653). While some become petrified as result of "undiagnosed diseases" (*FGC* 654), others are curiously transformed after experiencing in some cases extra-sensory perceptions which hints at utopian possibilities: "Many people who had potentiality and who had never developed it were 'picking up' fragments of the future" (*FGC* 650). Some children born on the island "grow more and more diverse. […] There are some who 'hear' as none of us or any of those we worked with— even Lynda—could." Another group of children, "when they were tiny, used to shut their eyes tight and laugh, and did not want to open them again. They were watching the pictures on their lids" (*FGC* 658). These "extrasensory powers" enable "a significant portion of population" (*FGC* 658) to see things beyond what is visible to the eye.

In other words, *The Four-Gated* City's dystopian scenario is combined with a presentation of the evolving inner potentialities of humanity, suggesting a utopian vision of possibilities. Martha tells Francis in her letter to him,

> During that year we hit the depths of our fears, a lowering depression which made it hard for us not simply to walk into that deadly sea and let ourselves drown there. But it was also during that year when we became aware of a sweet high loveliness somewhere, like a flue played only just within hearing. We all felt it. We talked about it, thinking it was a sign that we must be dying. It was as if all the air was washed with a bright promise. Of what, love? Joy? It was as if the face of the world's horror could be turned around to show the smile of an angel. […] It was

> from that time […] that we took heart and held on to our belief in a future of our race. (*FGC* 656)

Lessing does not resolve the tension created by these polarized views of humanity's possible futures; the reader is left to ponder whether the ultimate outcome of the social and political patterns highlighted in the novel will be a nightmare of dictatorship, or a utopian dream of the golden age. Lessing could easily wound up *The Four-Gated City* without venturing beyond the reader's 'present,' the vantage point which Martha Quest's life had been following over the course of the five *Children of Violence* volumes. By providing muted hints suggesting that the fictional 'future' of Martha Quest and the other characters would fit with the 'consensus reality' which had dominated the narrative, Lessing could have allowed the reader the dubious 'luxury' of complacency. However, she abruptly forces both social and character development past the reader's 'present' into a fictional reality where contrary probability lines are kept open.

Critics such as Roberta Rubenstein calls Lessing a "visionary" writer because her literature is marked by a sense of greater potential for human consciousness, mainly a cosmic consciousness: She argues that Lessing's efforts to break through "the intellectual blinders to perception and knowledge, and conventional assumptions concerning the nature of reality itself, […], should assure her stature as one of the major, unique and visionary writers of our time."[425] As a visionary writer, Lessing explodes our conventional conceptual knowledge and aesthetic form. She opens up a vision of new possibilities, inviting us to take off the "blinders" that keep us entrenched in old paradigms which perhaps no longer serve us as they once may have. Buckley and Peat explain:

> The universe is an unending transformation in flow. Out of this appear these forms which have subsistence. The hardest thing of al1 is to see that we ourselves are only a form in this. The major reason, I think why people find it difficult to accept this view is that it implies that we ourselves are only transient forms. […] I think that our views of matter and our views of ourselves are implicitly related. If a person is reluctant to believe that he is not a substance, he will be reluctant to believe that matter is not a substance.[426]

[425] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

[426] Paul Buckley, and F. David Peat. *A Question of Physics: Conversations in Physics and Biology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. p. 141.

Lessing firmly believed in the evolutionary potential for human consciousness to move towards more multi-dimensional perceptual paradigms that might allow us to transcend our presently more linear or rational, and consensus view(s) of reality. Idries Shah expressed a similar view:

> Human faculties, although perceptive, are limited: like a radio set which can receive only certain electro-magnetic waves and not other parts of this band. The perceived world, again according to this assertion, is therefore a distortion. The inability to transcend the barrier of limited senses explains human subjectivity and secondary effects are usually perceived as primary ones. (qtd. in Fahim 13)

Lessing's text is an attempt to transform the reader's cognitive or philosophical preconceptions. The overturning of fixed categories of time and space, has led numerous critics to endorse Marchino's description of the author's multi-dimensional narrative models in her essay "Maps of New Worlds:"

> Lessing's fictional maps are multiple, multi-dimensional, and overlapping, suggesting no one map is adequate or complete. She constantly reminds her readers that the map is not the territory. Her encompassing and overriding theme is the urgency of expanding individual consciousness and seeing ourselves in relation to others in new ways, the imperative of creating new maps. […] The novels map the worlds, mixing realism and fantasy as they chart contemporary life. Their territory covers detailed views of the individual consciousness and expands to the outer space of the cosmos. [427]

Lessing's interest in microcosmic individual consciousness should thus be situated within her imaginative, macrocosmic speculations about the evolutionary laws of equilibrium which may order our universe.

[427] Lois A. Marchino. "Maps of New Worlds." *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*. Ed. Robert L. Ross. New York: Garland 1991. p. 394.

"Every man's work, whether it be literature or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself."

Samuel Butler

I'm always curious about people who are fascinated by writers' lives. It seems to me that we're always in our books, quite nakedly. I wonder, too, does the private life really matter? Who cares what is known about you and what isn't? Even when you make public something that's been private, most people don't get it—not unless they're the same generation and have gone through more or less the same experiences.

Doris Lessing, *The Progressive*

CHAPTER III:

THE FIGURE OF THE WOMAN-ARTIST

III. 1. A. Looking in the mirror of autobiography

After dealing with the female characters' quest for selfhood in Lessing's major fictions, we will discuss her self-representational writing, which is also a quest for, and construction of, selfhood. We shall consider self-representational works with specific references to the *Children of Violence* series and *The Golden Notebook*. We shall also attempt to look into the mirror of Lessing's autobiographical essays and books, *Under My Skin, Volume One* of her autobiography (1994) and *Walking in the Shade*, the second volume of her autobiography (1997), in search of some reflection of the autobiographer's concept of selfhood. This chapter will also analyze how the process of identity formation through autobiography is realized through the prisms of memory, history, relationality and narrativization.

The chapter will draw upon Eakin's book, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*, a key work in the study of self-narration and life writing. The critic does not only see autobiography as a literary genre but rather as "an integral part of a life-long process of identity formation" (34). He analyzes at length memory, identity formation, selfhood, narrative practices and the impulse to share life stories, which will illuminate our investigations of Lessing's sense of selfhood in her autobiographical and fictional works.

If the autobiographical task involves the self-conscious and deliberate textualisation of the self and the creation of a "fictive" construct, Lessing posits fiction and truth as two sides of the same coin. The result is somehow a mixture of genres, where fiction and autobiography intermingle. We will therefore highlight the autobiographical nature of much of Lessing's fiction and paradoxically the fictionality and constructed nature of her autobiography, especially *Under My Skin*, which is an example of what postmodern critics such as Linda Hutcheon consider as a "historiographic metafiction," a concept which will be defined later. Lessing, in the manner of postmodernist writers, constantly crosses the borderlines between the factual and fictional representations of her personal experiences. We will therefore study the crossover between genres as part of the features of the postmodernity of the first volume of her autobiography.

We will also see in this chapter how the process of autobiographical writing can work experientially towards self-knowledge, as autobiography is the realm where life and experience are taken up into language for examination and re-examination. The autobiographical text is also a product that can be interrogated in terms of identity and representation. If autobiographical writing assists the reader in making sense of the narrator's/ autobiographer's experience, self and memory, autobiographical fiction helps the writer to reflect upon his/her perception of self and identity. In this chapter, we will also deal with the difference between the classical form of life writing and Lessing's fictionalized one.

We shall discuss various issues: What can Lessing's autobiographical writing teach us about the ways she experienced her being "I"? How much of Lessing's autobiography is true to what she really experiences? Is there a demonstrable difference between the psychological reality of selfhood and the linguistic articulation of that reality? Is autobiography a transparent mirror of the writer's self? Or is it refractive, like the Lacanian mirror? What is the rationale behind the incorporation of autobiographical elements in Lessing's fiction?

We shall first see how problematic the definition of autobiography is, for attempts to define it have never proved final. They are nonetheless instructive, for they reflect characteristic assumptions about what may be the most slippery of literary genres. We shall then read Lessing's first volume of *Under My Skin* as a postmodern text deconstructing the conventional aesthetics of the autobiographical genre and dissecting the complex issues of memory, truth-telling and the writing process. Finally, in the part entitled "Autobiographical projections: meta-mirrors," we shall draw on Lucien Dallenbach's notion of *mise en abyme* (or meta-mirrors) to study the internal mirrors that reflect or refract the woman writer's sense of selfhood in Lessing's fiction. We will also see how Lessing's sense of selfhood changes its dimensions in the texts in which her identity is continually written and re-written.

- Autobiography: A problematic definition

The experience of reading and writing autobiography provides the reader and writer with the reflective space necessary to mirror his/her self and life. Starting from Philippe Lejeune's definition of the term "autobiography" as "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on the individual life, in particular on the development of his personality,"[428] we can assume that autobiographical writings are mirrors in which the individual writer reflects his own image. This definition also brings to light characteristics central to the category of autobiography as explained by Lejeune: The author and the narrator should be identical; the linguistic form should be prose writing; the subject treated must primarily be the genesis of a personality, and the perspective ought to be mainly retrospective. Lejeune thus sought to map the boundaries of autobiography as a distinct genre, anchoring it in a world of reference beyond the text.

Yet, Lejeune's concise and restricted definition of "autobiography" was criticized by Michael Sprinker in *Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography* (1981), in which the latter views autobiography as fundamentally unstable, and hence unclassifiable, a "shifting, borderless local where concepts of subject, self and author collapse in the act of producing a text."[429] Against Lejeune's assumption regarding the existence of identically named protagonist-narrator-author figures as real persons, he contends that, however historically "real" the name shared by the text's protagonist, narrator and author, the "I" figure still remains a creature of fiction. In other words, Sprinker's commitment to the fictiveness of the subject of autobiography questions Lejeune's assumption of the referentiality of the autobiographical self.

Lejeune's definition also raises many problems of ontology, psychology and gender which have been discussed by many linguists, post-structuralists as well as feminist critics and writers, who showed that terms such as "real person," "own existence," "development of […] personality" could no longer be so innocently employed. Nor would it be legitimate to imply, if only grammatically, that an interest in autobiography is specifically masculine. In her book, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Autobiography,* Liz Stanley contends that the text or discourse does not necessarily refer to the person. She questions the correspondence between the written product of biographical research and the lives it investigates and deconstructs the idea of a coherent, essentially unchanging and unitary self.

---

[428] Philippe Lejeune. "The Autobiographical Contract." *French Literary Theory Today*. Tzetvan Todorov, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. p. 193.

[429] Michael Sprinker. "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. p. 342.

What arises from autobiographical writing, she concludes, is a series of different autobiographical selves. This in turn questions the nature of authorship itself. Influenced by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault's works about the death of the author, she decenters the authorial subject.

Post-structuralist critic and feminist Leigh Gilmore, in her book *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*, contends that in traditional studies of autobiography, both the self and history are over-determined as "male."[430] She suggests that if for poststructuralists, the individual is a discursive formation, then autobiography is one of the major discourses through which identity is produced and maintained. Thus, the relationship between truth telling and referentiality upon which traditional autobiographical studies depend can be seen as a discursive process rather than an essential mirroring. This in turn entails that the process of autobiography is "no simple mimesis shaped by the internal coherence of life and text."[431] It is rather a process characterized by a particular act of representation or interpretation where the lived experience is shaped, revised, constrained and transformed by its telling, and in which "the very subject of autobiography is not impassive but mutable."[432] Gilmore puts forward a challenging conception of autobiography as a stage where women writers, born again in the act of writing, may experiment with reconstructing the various discourses of ideological representation in which their subjectivity has been formed.

Stanley's ideas reflect a modern understanding of identity. In *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in Late Modern Age* (1991), the famous British sociologist Anthony Giddens emphasizes that self-identity is not a set of characteristics that we possess, but a conscious process we engage in: "Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (53). This means that a person who is capable of developing a sense of self and at the same time can communicate it to others in a narrative form—that person has "a reasonably stable sense of self identity" (54). The word "stable" does not mean that there is only one identity that is continuous "across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent" (53).

---

[430] Leigh Gilmore. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1994. p. 85.

[431] *Ibid.*

[432] *Ibid*. p. 84.

Lejeune himself has acknowledged the limitations of his definition, noting for instance that fictional narratives can be autobiographic as well as factual. He and other critics consider that the narrator and the principal character are identical in the case of narration in "the third person." Lejeune asks "What would prevent me from writing my life's story calling myself 'you'?"[433] He concludes that autobiography can include a personal narrator as well as "impersonal" narratives (protagonists designated in the third person).

Paul de Man has redefined autobiography as "de-facement."[434] When an author places him or herself in the text, he/she produces a *persona* that substitutes for, and displaces, the living writer. The autobiographical "I" is a mask donned by the author to relate his/her experience by fictionalizing it. Roland Barthes further destabilized the subject of autobiography when he wrote a self-reflexive and parodic autobiography of his own, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*[435] in first, second and third person forms of address which are deliberately confused to break up any sense of coherent subjectivity or consistent identity between writer, narrator and protagonist. Barthes compares the relationship between author and represented "self" to that between a Brechtian actor and his/her character. The actor "shows," without pretending to "be," the character he/she plays.

Lejeune's initial attempts at defining the genre of autobiography have also been challenged by such critics as Domna Stanton and Jeanne Perrault, who prefer the term "autography" to autobiography to insist on the writing of the self as the main focus. Stanton explains in her preface to her book of essays that "the excision of bio from autobiography is designed to bracket the traditional emphasis on the narration of a 'life,' and that notion's facile presumption of referentiality."[436] She justifies this deletion by suggesting that she is ideally attempting to "create a more generous and dynamic space for the exploration of women's texts that graph the auto." [437]

This new understanding and definition of autobiography suggests that the mirrors of autobiography function, like the Lacanian mirrors, as paradoxically reflective and refractive tools. The mirror of women writers' autobiographical texts, among which Doris Lessing's, is both a mirror and anti-mirror. In other words, autobiography is not just a mirror in which the

---

[433] *Ibid*. p. 194.

[434] Paul De Man. "Autobiography as De-facement." *Modern Language Notes* 94, 1979, p. 919.

[435] Roland Barthes. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes.* Trans. Richard Howard. London: Macmillan, 1977.

[436] Domna Stanton. "Autobiography: Is the Subject Different?" *The Female Autograph*. Ed. Domna C. Stanton. New York: New York Literary Forum V, 1984. p. vii.

[437] *Ibid*. viii.

writer reflects his/her own image; it is much more than the image he/she thinks he/she sees at the moment he/she gazes into it.

Doris Lessing wrote apparently "classical" autobiographies like *Under My Skin, Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949,* the second volume of *Under My Skin* covering the year 1949 until 1962, *and Going Home* in 1957, using the first person and past tense. They are seemingly what Gérard Genette calls "auto-diegetic" narratives, as the identity of the narrator and the principal character is marked by the use of the personal pronoun "I." But she also opted for a more fictional version using the third person and the present tense, especially in her *Children of Violence* series, which is considered by many critics as semi-autobiographical. Thus, both her fiction and autobiography reflect and refract the self.

These different approaches offer a unique opportunity to look into the manner in which fiction and facts can be combined and used to create works of art which permanently reflect and refract a similar or different sense of selfhood.

In the coming section, we shall study the postmodernism of Lessing's first autobiographical volume *Under My Skin*, analyse how it transcends conventional aesthetics of autobiographies and deconstructs traditional claims to referentiality and truth-telling. We shall also discuss Lessing's use of photographs as symptomatic of the text's self-examination and its "meta-autobiographical quality."[438]

III. 1. B. The postmodernity of *Under My Skin*

In 1994, Doris Lessing published the first volume of her autobiography, *Under My Skin*, which covers her first thirty years, from her birth in Persia in 1919 through her childhood and young adulthood in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), to her departure, in 1949, for London, where she would start her career as a writer with the typescript of her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*. The second volume, *Walking in the Shade*, published in 1997, deals with the next thirteen years or so of her life in London.

Although the first volume, *Under My Skin*, may appear as a traditional and transparent autobiographical text in which the writer faithfully records past memories and factual events, it turns out to be a postmodern text in which Lessing questions the

[438] Linda Haverty Rugg. *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography*. USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1997. p. 232.

autobiographical genre itself and challenges its key concepts of "truth," "history" and "memory." Rather than simply presenting a retrospective factual account of her past life and experience, Doris Lessing raises questions about the nature of "reality," showing how complex this issue is in relation to autobiographical writing.

Starting from Linda Hutcheon's primary argument that "postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (3), we shall see that *Under My Skin* conforms to this initial definition, for as Marjorie Perloff observes, "postmodern texts are regularly seen as problematizing prior forms, as installing one mode only to contest it."[439] The postmodernity of *Under My Skin* is manifest in its characteristic self-reflexivity and metafictionality; the constructive nature of its account; the discursive quality of self-representation; and the fragmented, sometimes incoherent identities it displays, baffling the reader because of the blurring of Lessing's sense of selfhood. Another trait of postmodernity that will be discussed later is the questioning of the past and the re-examination of history.

We shall show that the mirroring process of autobiography gives a limited version of the self. In the words of J. M. Coetzee, autobiography (an account of the self) is also "*autre*-biography" (the account of another self). The mirror turns out to be more constructive than reflective of the self. It foregrounds the interaction between self and other, among genres, between fact and fiction, and between the writer and the reader of autobiography.

[439] Marjorie Perloff. "Introduction." *Postmodern Genres*. Ed. Marjorie Perloff. London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988. p. 4.

1. *Under My Skin*: Historiographic metafiction

Under My Skin is specifically an autobiographical metafictional text—a new form of novel combining biography and metafiction. It embodies the features of "historiographic metafiction" which Linda Hutcheon conceives of as a narrative "offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality". The critic also argues that "both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the post-modern novel." This part will probe the double features of the historiographic metafiction of the text—its metafictional and historiographical characteristics, which is presented in an autobiographical context burdened with story-tellings and makings, shuttling between fiction and truth.

The "historiographical and metafictional" quality of *Under My Skin* stems from its writer's "self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs,"[440] as well as the deliberate transgression of borders and genres, as is going to be demonstrated. We shall also show that the fictional aspect of the autobiographical text is related to the problematic issue of memory and writing. *Under My Skin* fits well into this category since Lessing questions certain key aspects related to the autobiographical text, such as the genre's pretensions to truth, reality and authenticity, mainly on account of the slipperiness of memory. In this first part, I shall examine the role of memory and how it marks out one of the borderlines between fiction and autobiography.

a. Memory and the autobiographical process

Writing an autobiography involves a dialogue with the voice of memory since, as critics such as Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir[441] have stressed, autobiography is inherently the genre of memory. In writing an autobiography, writers embark on some kind of investigation, tracking down memories and attempting to give them form and coherence. But what is a memory? Is it a recollection of actual events, filtered through our perceptions and consciousness? Is it a series of sharp or hazy incidents and images which we occasionally

[440] Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Post-modernism, History, Theory, Fiction.* New York and London: Routledge, 1988. p. 5.

[441] Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir. *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing.* New York: Rodopi B. V., 2003.

pluck out of the past for our own purpose? Is it yet another story out of the stories of our lives, a story which can change in the way we tell it, the way it is received, the context within which it is framed? What kind of process does remembering entail? In studying the close connection between writing and memory, David F. Krell explains that

> Remembering instigates a peculiar kind of presence. It 'has' an object of perception or knowledge without activating perception or knowledge as such and without confusing past and present. For while remembering, a man tells himself that he is now present to something that was earlier.[442]

Accordingly, autobiographers often venture to capture in their writings this peculiar kind of presence of the past in an attempt to capture or represent their lives in a faithful or truthful manner. Thus, autobiography conventionally involves a retrieval of lived experience, privileges presence and assumes accessibility to the so-called essence of truth. But autobiographers have noticed that although this presence does not confuse the past and the present, it still blurs the edges of the present.

In *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*, Eakin suggests that it is not only the memories that are the autobiographer's subject but also memory itself and the process of remembering. He insists that remembering past life and experiences is not an act of retrieving the memories already existent in the brain, but has more to do with "construct[ing] the material."[443] This means that the autobiographer "constructs" or creates the past in different ways, and its interpretation depends upon how present he/she is at a particular moment. Eakin argues that this testifies to the fallibility of memory, which accounts for the constructive nature of all autobiographical writings. Life writing becomes a construction of one's experience, which is the only way to capture and present one's identity to one's self and to others. Memory blurs the borderline between fiction and autobiography.

At the beginning of *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing tackles such issues as those of truth, memory and identity, which she believes are important to life writing: "You cannot sit down to write about yourself without rhetorical questions of the most tedious kind demanding attention. Our old friend, the Truth, is first. The truth […] how much of it to tell, how little?" (*UMS* 11). She points out that memory is a "careless and lazy organ, not only a self-flattering

[442] David Farrell Krell. *Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing: On the Verge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. p. 15.

[443] Jean Paul Eakin. *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Retrieved from Ebrary database, Cornell University Press, 2008. p. 106.

one, and not always self-flattering. More than once I have said, "No, I wasn't as bad as I've been thinking," as well as discovering that I was worse" (13). Thus, she, from the start, acknowledges that memory is unreliable, and therefore does not guarantee truthfulness because sometimes one remembers details about certain episodes and nothing about others. In "Writing Autobiography," she points out that

> memory isn't fixed: it slips and slides about. It's hard to match one's memories of one's life with the solid fixed account of it that is written down […]. Our own views of our lives change all the time, different at different times. Once I read autobiography as what the writer thought about his or her life. Now, I think, 'that's what they thought at that time.' An interim report—that is what an autobiography is.[444]

While writing her autobiography Lessing changed her view of the genre. She no longer saw it as something fixed but as an "interim report." In the same line of thought as Eakin, she admitted that individuals (especially creative ones) can often spin out entire stories from small occurrences: "This is the worst deceiver of all—we make up our pasts. You can actually watch your mind doing it, taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it" (*UMS* 13). She seems to tell us that in the writing process, memory sometimes takes precedence over events. The writer "can [therefore] spin a tale" out of a "small fragment of the past."

Thus, even though writing an autobiography involves remembering events and sensations in one's life, the autobiographical process does not always involve a smooth flow of memories. There are stumbles, hesitations, doubts. They manifest themselves in texts as gaps in the narrative, or moments when the text moves from one specific childhood memory to a more general picture of childhood, or when the autobiographer includes evidence that contradicts his/her own memory of the events. In an interview with M. J. Daymond, Lessing confessed that she "was amazed at the big gaps in [her] memory. [She] did have a good memory for short, intense periods, but [she] hadn't realized that you make a kind of picture of the past, like scenes, but in between, there are long dark spaces."[445]

---

[444] Doris Lessing. "Writing Autobiography." *Time Bites: Views and Reviews.* USA: Fourth Estate, LTD, 2004. p. 92.

[445] M. J. Daymond. "Writing Autobiography and Writing Fiction." *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. p. 230.

Under My Skin reveals the autobiographer's anxiety at remembering. She wrote it at a time when she was trying to make sense of her life through the use of memory:

> I come to the difficulty of reconciling child time and adult time. […]. There was a stage in my life […] when I understood that a whole tract of time had disappeared. There was a gulf, a black hole. Years and Years of it—so it seemed. […] In January 1925, I was at Mrs. Scott's. Yet, I had already been at school for a whole term at Rumbavu Park. All these hazy, interminable memories had to be fitted into one year and nine months. Impossible. I simply gave up. But later had to come back, and back […]. (*UMS* 60)

Lessing also evokes the example of a man she sat next to at a dinner who said he could never write an autobiography because he "didn't remember anything. […] Only a little scene here and there. […] Like those small washes and blobs of color that stained-glass windows lay on the dark of a stone floor in a cathedral" (*UMS* 12-13). She also quotes another example to explain the fleeting nature of memory in life writing by comparing her writer's tracking down of her memories to the child's imaginative creation of stories out of photographs:

> A parent says, 'we took you to the seaside, and you built a sandcastle, don't you remember? Look here is the photo.' And at once the child builds from the words and the photograph a memory, which becomes hers. (*UMS* 13)

On a symbolic level, "buildings" and "sandcastles" are metaphors for the life writing process. Indeed, the work involved in giving shape to memories is akin to molding grains of sand on a beach into turrets and bridges. It also symbolizes the impermanence of memories themselves, just like the sandcastles' shape and substance are easily washed away by a strong wave on the rising tide.

The autobiographical process thus involves forgetting, as the writer chooses one memory and discards another, writes one version of that memory at the cost of another as a probably equally valid version. Lessing confirms it at the beginning of *Under My Skin*: "As you start to write at once the question begins to insist: Why do you remember this and not that? Why do you remember in every detail a whole week, month, more, of a long ago year, but then complete dark, a blank?" (*UMS* 12). What is clear in autobiography is that memory speaks in multifarious voices, including ones that distort, change, silence, embellish, obscure, and even invent lives.

Thus, acknowledging the fallibility, frailty, and unreliability of memory, Lessing seems to tell us that the self is not entirely revealed in autobiography. She emphasizes that while she used to think that "memory [was] Self, Identity […], now [she is] sure that it isn't so" (13), for even with the loss of memory, the self will survive by "creat[ing] our lives, creat[ing] memory" (*UMS* 13). In this sense, the self can never be conceived of in terms of fixity. It is also subject to shifting perspectives and takes on different shapes when viewed from different stages in life. Indeed, Lessing observes that people see their lives differently at different stages. It is thus as if the autobiographer were "climbing a mountain while the landscape changes with every turn" (*UMS* 12) in the path,

> Had I written this when I was thirty, it would have been a pretty combative document. In my forties, a wail of despair and guilt: oh my God, how could I have done this or that? Now I look back at that child, that girl, that young woman, with a more and more detached curiosity. Old people may be observed peering into their pasts; Why? They are asking themselves. How did that happen? I try to see my past selves as someone else might, and then put myself back inside one of them, and am at once submerged in a hot struggle of emotion, justified by thoughts and ideas I now judge wrong. Besides, the landscape itself is a tricky thing. As you start to write at once the question begins to insist: Why do you remember this and not that? Why do you remember in every detail a whole week, month, more, of a long ago year, but then complete dark, a blank? How do you know that what you remember is more important than what you don't? (*UMS* 12)

Lessing is clearly aware of the selective process of memory, which reveals the fictionality of *Under My Skin*. At the same time, she insists that she believes that there are certain "real memor[ies]," especially since she "spent a good part of [her] childhood 'fixing' moments in [her] mind" (*UMS* 13). There "are moments, incidents, real memory, I do trust" (*UMS* 13). These are luminous points, the powerful memory experiences inviting the author to write on them and to attempt to make sense of them. They are like sparks of creativity that open up new insights into the past.

b. The fictionality of *Under My Skin*

Admitting the fallibility of memory suggests that ultimate truth in autobiography is a sheer illusion; it is as evasive as memory; Hence, the constructed quality of autobiographical writings. To Eakin, "autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation" (3). By the same token, the idea of autobiography's claim to referentiality is debunked. Because of the close connection between memory and writing, it becomes hard to distinguish between fiction and autobiography as two distinct and opposing modes of discourse. It is also difficult to trace moments of truth and non-truth.

At the beginning of *Under My Skin*, the reader is confronted with a concocted story of birth which challenges the autobiographical claim of truthfulness. Indeed, Lessing recreates the event of her birth as an alternative story to the painful and traumatic version that her mother told her when she was a child: "I was giving myself a 'good birth' […]. The actual birth was not only a bad one, but made worse by how it was reported to me, so the storyteller invented a birth as the sun rose with light and warmth coming fast into the enormous lamp lit room" (*UMS* 21). The adult Lessing thus attempts to overcome the grief of being rejected by her mother, who would have preferred a baby boy, by imagining a better version in which she is wanted and welcomed into the world. Creating herself anew through autobiography, she "invented a chorus of pleasure that [she was] a girl [...]. In this 'game,' [her] girl's name had been planned for years" (21).

This recreation of reality points to the postmodernity and metafictional dimension of *Under My Skin*. Even with the best intentions to tell the story of one's life without embellishment or distortion, "we make up our pasts, [...] taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it" (*UMS* 13)," she says. The past turns out to be a 'fiction' or an imaginative recreation that is constructed not only once, but several times over. Then, one's life story becomes a narrative or a fictional construction. Far from being a mere representational discourse, *Under My Skin* proves rather to be a postmodern meta-fictional and performative text.

Furthermore, it nullifies any definite truth and "[c]asts doubt on the very possibility of any guaranteed meaning, however studied in discourse" (Hutcheon, 56). Lessing remarks in *Under My Skin* that she

> had to fight to establish a reality of [her] own, against an insistence from the adults that [she] should accept theirs [...]. [She] [is] deducing this. Why else my preoccupation that went on for years: this is the truth, this is what happened, hold on to it, and don't let them talk you out of it. (13-14)

Lessing's construction of her own reality is achieved through narrative and discursive means. For her, the autobiographical mode becomes an act of "claiming one's own life" (*UMS* 14) from the public realm. But she also seems to tell us that there is no one "true" way to connect the object world and spoken or written wor(l)ds. But there are instead many interpretations which are all equally possible. Truths are mutable when we acknowledge multiple perspectives and infinite possibilities of re-framing and re-writing. Lessing raised the problem of "truthfulness" when she decides to write her own autobiography:

> Telling the truth about yourself is one thing, if you can, but what about the other people? I may easily write about my life until the year I left Southern Rhodesia in 1949, because there are few people left who can be hurt by what I say; I have had to leave out, or change—mostly a name or two- very little. [...]. But Volume Two, that is from the time I reached London, will be different matter, even if I follow the example of Simone de Beauvoir who said that about some things she had no intention of telling the truth. (Then why bother?—the reader must be expected to ask). I have known not a few of the famous, and even one or two of the great, but I do not believe it is the duty of friends, lovers, comrades, to tell all. The older I get the more secrets I have, never to be revealed and this, I know, is a common condition of people of my age. (*UMS* 11)

If Lessing tells her readers that there are "secrets" that she hides from them, it means that one may doubt the authenticity of her narratives.

The act of narrativizing the self in autobiography is thus continuously rendered problematic by questions concerning which truths are recovered from memory and which ones are omitted. What is recovered from past memories are in actual fact desired selves whose hue and color keep on changing, depending on the aspect from which the autobiographer chooses to observe his/her past. We can see that Lessing records past experiences about which she does not know how they will be put on paper until the writing process begins:

> When you write about anything—in a novel, an article—you learn a lot you did not know before. I learned a good deal writing this. Again and again I have had to say, "That was the reason, was it? Why didn't I think of that before?" Or even, "Wait […] it wasn't like that." (*UMS* 13)

The afore-mentioned reflections testify to the inevitable fictionality and discursive aspect of *Under My Skin*. Lessing herself acknowledges that even the most ostensibly true version of life writing is not entirely transparent. Since it depends on aesthetic shaping, it inevitably introduces discrepancies and distortions. In her essay "Writing Autobiography," she elaborates:

> When you are shaping an autobiography, just as when you shape a novel, you have to decide what to leave out [...]. Yet it should be like life, sprawling, big baggy, full of false starts, loose ends, people you met once and never think of again… And as you write your autobiography, it has to have a good deal in common with a novel … In short, we have a story. What doesn't fit into the story, the theme, gets cut out.[446]

Interviewed by M. J. Daymond, Lessing confessed that she sometimes used novelistic techniques in her autobiography, which is evidence of its fictional nature:

> M. J. D: There is a scene, a very sympathetic scene, when your mother is writing a letter home, and you move into her mind and bring it to life from her point of view.
>
> D. L: That's a novelist's technique. The thing is also when you use dialogue; it's a novelist's technique because you don't remember the exact words, or very seldom, but you do remember none or less what was said, so you invent the dialogue.[447]

We have demonstrated so far that the relationship between truth telling and the referentiality upon which traditional autobiographical studies depended can be seen as a discursive process rather than essential mirroring. This is an indication of the discursivity of the autobiographical process itself. Emile Benveniste's essay on the nature of pronouns clarifies this point:

> What then is the reality to which *I* or *you* refers? It is solely a "reality of discourse," and this is a very strange thing. *I* cannot be defined except in terms of "locution," not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. *I* signifies "the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*." This instance is unique by definition and has validity only in its uniqueness.[448]

---

[446] Doris Lessing. "Writing Autobiography." *Times Bites: Views and Reviews*. USA: Fourth Estate, LTD, 2004, p. 98-99.

[447] M. J. Daymond. "Writing Autobiography and Writing Fiction." *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. p. 231.

[448] Emile Benveniste. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Coral Gable: University of Miami Press, 1971. p. 218.

Benveniste's argument is the same as Leigh Gilmore's contention that "being" in the text requires "the ontological differentiation that would break the tautological hold of referentiality, for the autobiographical I 'becomes' a self, spins out the poetics of its identity, in a way that may thematize the chronology of birth, life and death, but which enacts it textually."[449] We can infer that if autobiography breaks with the autobiographical code of referentiality, then the notion of a single "narrated I" conforming to "the narrating I" is a mere illusion. Despite the attempts at being "honest" in life writing, a writer can merely build his/her narrative of the past in the present. The "narrated I" that Lessing writes about is created by the "narrating I," who is Lessing poised on the verge of writing: "The child is not doing the remembering or the narrating of the story. Nor is the 'narrated I' directly experiencing that past at the time of writing the narrative or its telling."[450] Eakin also contends that "the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (3).

c. Dialectical selves

Starting from the post-structuralist perspective that the truth of the autobiographical "I" is necessarily discursive, and therefore fictitious, we can infer that the auto/biographical narrative constructs multiple selves that are deployed in different contexts and for different purposes. Pressed by textuality, the autobiographical self owes its existence to the system of representation in which it evolves and finds expression. Within the same paradigm, Gilmore suggests that "the subject of autobiography is distributed across the historical self and the textual self, both of which are versions of the self who writes (86). This is echoed by Doris Lessing, who does not harbor delusions about the continuity and stability of her identity. On the contrary, she emphasizes in both volumes of her autobiography the problems related to reconciling the contradictions within herself.

Chapter 2 of *Under My Skin* mirrors Lessing's own reflections about the significance of writing about herself and other people. She stresses that the shifting prisms from which the autobiographer sees and interprets his/her life entail the emergence of different, changing and

---

[449] Leigh Gilmore. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1994. p. 86.

[450] S. Smith, & Watson J. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives.* (2nd ed.). USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. p. 73.

convergent identities in writing. She also contends that *Under My Skin* would have been a different book had she written it when she was thirty or forty. This points out once again that our ideas and interpretations of ourselves change with the passing of time; "some experiences gain more focus when we are twenty, others when we are thirty or forty," (*UMS* 109) she says. Therefore, as the interpretation of one's life changes, identities change as well; they are not stable, organic entities remaining unaffected by changes in the external environment.

Yet, what emerges in Lessing's autobiography is an evolving, 'authentic' inner self—the unique self uncontaminated by falsehood—interacting with multiple other selves that are critically important for the social conformity of the individual to different circumstances and relational dictates. The latter social selves are materialized by the names "Tigger" and "Hostess," that Lessing uses in her autobiography to refer to herself. But the inner self remains a separate entity, though often enjoying protection from its other selves. The inner self stands up to time-honored structures of authority, such as the family, the church, the masculine world and the ideology of the Empire. In Lessing's autobiography, constructing one's identity in an oppositional paradigm constitutes the epistemic conditions for the possibility of re-constructing her selfhood. In this part, we are going to analyze these dialectical selves in Lessing's life writing, which are indicative of an inner split or alienation.

What is remarkable in *Under My Skin* is that Lessing developed, as a girl and young woman, a dual consciousness—the self as "culturally defined," materialized by "Tigger" and "Hostess," and the self as "different from cultural prescriptions," residing in the "observer." She thus recognizes the "different personalities at work in [her]" (*UMS* 23) while writing her autobiography. In her article "Women's Autobiographical Selves," Friedman suggests,

> Not recognizing themselves in the reflections of cultural representation, women develop a dual consciousness—the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription. But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation, came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue- tied paralysis about our own identity. We were never all together in one place, were always in transit, immigrants into alien territory […] the manner in which we knew ourselves at variance with ourselves as an historical being-woman.[451]

[451] Susan Stanford Friedman. "Women's Autobiographical Selves." *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. p. 39.

There are identities which are embraced but later discarded by the autobiographer. In the process of her long search for real selfhood, Lessing seems to stumble upon a number of "Tiggers" or personas who have impeded her quest for true selfhood. Looking back, the autobiographer has "little mercy for these traitors" (*UMS* 92-93).

We can first see in *Under My Skin* the signs of an inner split which are reminiscent of what happened in the two initial volumes of *Children of Violence*. In this autobiographical essay, Lessing's identity is divided into two outer personalities, "Tigger" and "Hostess," referred to in the third person, as if they were someone else. They are two versions necessary to create the socialized public fronts that are "receptive to what is accepted" (*UMS* 20) by society. The "Hostess" personality that Lessing evokes in her autobiography is "bright, helpful, attentive, receptive to what is expected, very strong indeed." It is a protection, "a shield, for the private self. How useful it had been when being interviewed, photographed, a public person for public use" (*UMS* 20). It harbors behind it the cherished self which Lessing calls "the observer," who must be protected from the oppressive demands of society—a view which is shared by Eakin, who points out that our different identities can be divided: "The selves we have may seem to us as discrete and separate as the other persons with whom we live our relational lives." This experiential truth points to the fact that our sense of a continuous identity is a fiction, "the primary fiction of all self-narration."[452]

As Lessing remarks, the "Hostess" personality is very useful when she has to meet the press or do book tours, which she always describes as a waste of a writer's time. But facing the "Hostess" is the "observer," her private identity, the one she tries to keep secret from the rest of the world, for "behind all that friendly helpfulness was something else, the observer, never to be touched, tasted, seen, by anyone else" (*UMS* 20).

Another version of the "Hostess" personality is Lessing's social *persona* "Tigger,"[453] who was always eager to please other people. Lessing explains that at age seven, she adopted the name of the A. A. Milne character, "Tigger," for one aspect of her hostess personality:

> I was the fat and bouncy Tigger. I remained Tigger until I left Rhodesia, for nothing

---

[452] J. P. Eakin. *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008. p. 93.

[453] Tigger is a fictional tiger character originally introduced in A. A. Milne's book *The House at Pooh Corner.* Like other Pooh characters, Tigger is based on one of Christopher Robin Milne's stuffed animals. Nowadays he is most widely recognized as reinterpreted by the Disney studios, with distinctive orange and black stripes, large eyes, a long chin, a springy tail, and (the one detail originating from A. A. Milne) his love of bouncing. As he says himself, "Bouncing is what Tiggers do best."

> would stop friends and comrades using it. Nicknames are potent ways of cutting people down to size. I was Tigger Taylor, Tigger Wisdom, then Tigger Lessing, the last fitting me even less than the others. Also comrade Tigger. This personality was expected to be brash, jokey, clumsy, and always ready to be a good sport, that is, to laugh at herself, apologize, clown, confess inability. An extrovert. In that it was a protection for the person I really was, 'Tigger' was an aspect of the 'Hostess.' (*UMS* 89)

The "Tigger" *persona* is a self-defense mechanism adopted by Lessing to poke fun at the rituals of the convent which she was compelled to observe during her childhood. This episode of her life was so horrific that she devotes much of *Under My Skin* to relating the effects it had on her personality: She "was learning the skills of the survivor, of loneliness, of exile" (111). But despite the weary life of the convent, she tried to go through this period of her childhood through jest and irony, with the aid of her "Tigger" personality:

> The atmosphere in the convent, in short, can only be described as unwholesome, a favorite word of mother's. How much does she know about all this? If it was within the code to 'tell' the lack of baths, why not about the viciously slashing rulers, why not about those hellfire sermons? When 'Tigger' reported on them, she made a joke about it all. And certainly, my mother knew about the sadistic pictures in the room we slept in, for she inspected the convent thoroughly. But after all, she herself had had a strict, punishing upbringing. (*UMS* 93)

Lessing also insists that "Tigger, the joker, the zany fat and clumsy animal," joked "that the nuns would only eat a sweet if they whirled around on their heels to pop it into their mouths, or wouldn't let you change a gymslip that had soup spilled on it, and were so silly about hellfire" (*UMS* 106). But behind the mask of mockery lie the "intermittent rages of hatred" (*UMS* 107) against the convent to which she was forcibly sent by her mother.

Lessing's "Tigger" personality is the social mask which is also related to her marital status. On her first wedding day, she remembers that what she was feeling inside was completely different from what is captured in the pictures of that event: "There was a graceless wedding, which I hated. I remember exactly how I felt: it is not a question of inventive memory. In the wedding photographs I look a jolly young matron. It was "Tigger" who was getting married" (*UMS* 207). As many critics have pointed out, it seems that very "Tigger" often took over Lessing's life: The "Tigger" personality is linked to the school girl ("at school, I was clever, that was my attribute, clever little Tigger Taylor" (*UMS* 95)), to the "nanny" who worked in a telephone exchange ("Tigger […] was certainly the person who

dealt with social life [in the exchange]" (*UMS* 199)), to the woman got married, had babies and joined the Communist party.

The "Tigger" and "Hostess" *personas* are mired in public life. These contingent characters are adopted to protect the invaluable space reserved for the existence of the "I", the "me" that constitutes the core of the autobiographer's individuality. The "I" strategically retreats into this "ultimate and inviolable privacy," whenever [Lessing] feels that her "life will be under public scrutiny and there is nothing [she] can do about it" (*UMS* 20). This retreat to the inner abode of the self is clearly related to the "observer" personality, who relishes in the distantiation or isolation that Erikson calls "the readiness to isolate and, if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own, and whose 'territory' seems to encroach on the extent of one's intimate relations."[454] Lessing confesses that during her childhood, she "was a defended observation post" (*UMS* 149) against the perplexing adult social world. She always stood back and challenged the rigid methods of the convent, "the government" and its "venal motives" or in general the "establishment, the ruling class, the local town council, the headmaster or mistress" (*UMS* 16). The "observation post" allowed the young girl the self-positioning necessary to seek recognition for her existence in a patriarchal and colonial society. She was therefore in constant rebellion against her parents, mainly her domineering mother, the hegemonic power of the Empire and male authorship, as we are going to see later.

2. The rebellious inner self

The autobiographical mode provides Lessing with the self-positioning necessary to find recognition for her existence in a patriarchal society and its male dominated and oriented structure. It recounts the emergence of her rebellious thrust towards liberation from the family in an attempt to construct a self-identity responding to society's demands on the individual. In *Under My Skin*, Lessing also questions and debunks the hegemony of the British Empire and its oppressive power—which shows the postmodernity of Lessing's account, insofar as postmodernism challenges all systems and most frequently re-examines the past in a fundamentally critical non nostalgic fashion. In the postmodern world, everything is

[454] E. H. Erikson. *Childhood and Society*. (2nd ed.). New York: W.W. Norton, 1963. p. 264.

questioned, yielding no stable answers, because they are conditioned by the context. Postmodernity abolishes stable values, calling for a revision of historical truth.

a. The self against family

Lessing's birth in 1919, at the end of World War One, bred in her a powerful feeling of disgust and refusal of the Rhodesian society, which offered no guarantees for the protection of the individual. Her autobiography shows that her parents' personality exacerbated this sense of anger and her revolt. They were the source of the 'raging emotions of [her] childhood, [her] protest, [and] anguish" (*UMS* 9). The autobiographer recalls one "of the most powerful" moment that "influenced all [her] life:"

> I walk up out of the bush where I have been myself, and stop when I see my parents sitting side by side, in two chairs, in front of the house. For some reason, perhaps because of my thoughts in the bush, I see them very clearly, but from a child's view, two old people grey and tired. They are not yet fifty. Both of these old faces are anxious, tense, full of worry, almost certainly about money. They sit in clouds of cigarette smoke, and they draw in smoke and let it out slowly as if every breath is narcotic. There they are, together, *stuck* together, held there by poverty [...]. They seem to me intolerable, pathetic, unbearable; it is their helplessness that I can't bear. I stand there, a fierce unforgiving adamant child, saying to myself: "I won't. I will not. I will not be like that. I am never going to be like them. (*UMS* 120)

The dominant parent within her family is her mother, who is viewed by her daughter as a major conservative force, which is why she is the central tension in *Under My Skin*. Describing her rage against Emily Maude, Lessing writes in *Under My Skin* that "no hatred on earth is as violent as the helpless rage of a little child" (37) against her mother. She confessed in an interview:

> I don't remember how early I began to fight with my mother […]. I can't remember a time when I wasn't fighting with my mother […]. My mother was an extremely talented, very energetic, and very frustrated woman. She had nothing to put all her energies into except her own children. It was very classical in those days and I think perhaps it's changed. Also she was a nurse, and she liked it when we were ill […] she had all this energy going, you see, which you had to get out from, you had

to get out from under it.[455]

In addition, Lessing's sense of anger towards her mother is the result of the latter's feelings of victimization in the institution of motherhood. As a matter of fact, Emily Maude Taylor would always complain to her neighbors that her children "brought her low and sapped her, how all her own talents were withering unused, how the little girl in particular […] made her life a total misery […] And [Lessing] was a cold flame of hatred for her" (*UMS* 30). Disillusioned with her life in Southern Rhodesia, she would seek her children's sympathy, summoning her daughter and son "several times a day […] to the bedside where she said dramatically, "Poor mummy, poor sick mummy […]." As for young Doris, she "was consumed with flames of rage" (*UMS* 65). The autobiographer still pitied her because she could not possibly stop being a victim—she felt trapped in Africa and could not return to Britain. What young Lessing looked for was a powerful mother who would not succumb to victimization for, as Rich puts it, "a daughter can feel rage at her mother's powerlessness or lack of struggle."[456]

To the best of her memory, Lessing was always, from the age of fourteen, "in nervous flight" (*UMS* 15) from her mother embarked from then on in a "kind of inner emigration from everything she represented" (*ibid.*). Her "fourteenth was a make or break year, a sink or swim year, a do or die year, for [she] was fighting [her] life against [her] mother" (*UMS* 155).

It is clear then that Lessing's sense of self was greatly influenced by her antagonistic relationship with her mother. She furthermore situates herself in the literary tradition as a woman autobiographer opposed to male authorship.

b. The self against male authorship

We shall now analyze Lessing's autobiography as a practice contesting the "masculine autobiography" genre which, according to Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schneck, "assumes the conflation of masculinity and humanity, canonizing the masculine representative

[455] From the original recorded interview. A full transcript of the interview was published in E. J. Bertelsen ed., Doris Lessing. Johannesburg: McGraw Hill, 1984.

[456] Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1986. p. 244.

self of both writer and reader."[457] Autobiographical male writers ranging from Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, Goethe, Henry Adams and Henry Miller convey patriarchal discourses constituting socio-sexual scripts for women, reinforcing normative representations of them. Against this background, Lessing's autobiography works to delegitimate and undo such scripts and reconceptualize history and literature in terms that recognize women's contributions. The autobiographer's confession in *Under My Skin* that she had written her autobiography against five American male biographers who attempted to record her life is a proof of her challenging endeavor.[458] From the outset, we can see that her self-revelation is produced against the masculine canon, mainly the male autobiographical tradition.

But Lessing's autobiography should also be read and assessed in the context of female autobiographers. We shall see how this subversive writer deviates from the tradition of female autobiography as delineated by Estelle C. Jelinek's *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography* (1986), Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987) and Caroline G. Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988). Their critical studies on women's autobiographical writings highlight how the narratives of self were for a time strictly bound by convention and patriarchy, limited to the private realm and therefore unable to transcend the domestic sphere, emphasizing "personal and domestic details."[459] They were consequently devalued because they could not speak profound universal truths. In contrast with this tradition, Lessing does not limit her autobiography to "the personal" but wants to achieve a universal vision. Writing the self is not to her separable from the general, for hers is an autobiography that questions the history of the time.

In writing by female autobiographers, gender is the hermeneutic key to authorial intention and textual production as best articulated by Sidonie Smith in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*:

> Since the ideology of gender makes a woman's life script a nonstory, a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture, the ideal woman of self-erasing rather than self-promoting, and her natural story shapes itself not around the public, heroic life, but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others that according

[457] B. Brodzki and C. Schenck. "Introduction." *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. p. 2.

[458] When asked in an interview why she had chosen to write within the confines of the autobiographical genre, she responded, "Only because somebody else is writing a biography of me" (quoted in Field, 47).

[459] Estelle C. Jelinek. *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. p. 10.

> to patriarchal ideology, characterizes the life of woman but not autobiography. From that point of view, woman has no "autobiographical self" in the same sense that a man does. From that point of view she has no "public" story to tell.[460]

Lessing advanced the autobiographical mode as a powerful and emotive tool for the expression of the experiences of women writers, who occupied the peripheral or marginal spaces of society. In writing her life, she challenged gender ideologies and aligned herself with De Beauvoir's multivolume autobiography *Memoirs of the Dutiful Daughter* (1959), which interrogated the category "woman." For Lessing, narrativizing her life was a way to distance herself both emotionally and physically from a male-dominated culture and authorship. This is what she writes in *Under My Skin*:

> I was able to be freer than most because I am a writer, with the psychological make-up of a writer that sets you at a distance from what you are writing about. The whole process of writing is a setting at a distance. That is the value of it- to the writer, and to the people who read the results of this process, which takes the raw, the individual, the uncriticized, the unexamined, into the realm of the general. (397)

In writing her life, Lessing the autobiographer constructed her identity as a woman writer against the reality of an era in which "women often [got] dropped from memory, and then from history" (*UMS* 12). The autobiographer of *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade* knew that she was writing/speaking within an androcentric culture and literary tradition. That was why "writing [her] self shattered the cultural hall of mirrors and broke the silence imposed by male speech."[461] Her subversive intention was then to unsettle the dominant male discourse and the ideology of gender, entrenched in the conventional autobiographies written by male writers.

We can say that Lessing's autobiography belongs to what Domna Stanton calls "autogynography—"a term that she coined in *The Female Autograph* (1987) to highlight (and counter) the canonical identification of autobiography with men's writing. In the phallocentric system which defines her as an object and the other to the dominant male subject, autobiography becomes for her an act of self-assertion.

---

[460] Sidonie Smith. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. p. 34.

[461] Friedman in Shari Benstock. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. p. 41.

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams claims that corporate culture has a set of regulations and implicitly accepted conventions that penetrate every aspect of our way of living. Yet, there are always dissenting forces that will try to overthrow, renew or question this set of dominant values, which is subsequently translated into both social and narrative texts. Women writers especially face these hegemonic processes, which are a site for both sociocultural reproduction and sociocultural dissent. The dilemma that women writers experience between the situation of the outsider or the privileged, the oppositional and the dominant, is a major example of a hegemonic process whose results are manifest in both social and narrative texts. Constantly reaffirmed as outsiders by others and sometimes by themselves, women's loyalties to dominance remain ambiguous, for they are not themselves in control of the processes by which they are defined. In writing her autobiography, Lessing sought to interrogate the conventional narrative, which DuPlessis designates as "a version or a special expression of ideology" (x).

In *A Literature of their Own*, Elaine Showalter develops Williams's argument when she states that women take up a subcultural position from which they form a unity and respond with fictional and biographical strategies. A woman writer must balance between marginality and inclusion, but with one overriding goal, "rewriting gender in dominant fiction." It is not therefore surprising at all that "one of the major aspects of twentieth-century women writers should be the critique of a story, [which] is not only a thematic fact but an indication of the moral, ideological, and political desire to rescript the novel."[462]

But, even when they are in apparent positions of authority, women have their identity and roles determined by men in a way that does not threaten male dominancy and interests. The autobiographical text is used as a tool to refuse to being dropped from male-authored history and memory, and the expression of an independent alternative selfhood. It offers a challenge to the dominant narratives that seek to define history as only steeped in the remembering processes of the male members of society. Indeed, Lessing admitted that the reason she decided to write her autobiography was due to the fact that there were at least five male biographers who were interested in writing about her. She decided to beat them to it by writing it herself as a way to gain agency over her life even if her admission that "writers may protest as much as they like: but our lives do not belong to us" (*UMS* 14), sounds as if she had accepted the defeat. She gives however another additional reason why she wrote the two volumes of her autobiography:

[462] *Ibid*. p. 43.

> One reason for writing this autobiography is that more and more I realize I was part of an extraordinary time, the end of the British Empire in Africa, and the bit I was involved with that time was like, even those who live in Southern Africa (*UMS* 160).

The individual self is thus negotiated and sketched in the context of broader social expectations. The conscious recognition of the existence of a conflict between individual interests and society's demands is a requisite condition for the exploration of the self and the final resolution of its dilemma within the structure of that society. If Lessing the autobiographer awakens to this need and declares that "clearly I had to establish a reality of my own, against the insistence from the adults that I should accept theirs" (*UMS* 13), then she clearly establishes herself against the collective, be it the masculine-gendered society, but also the oppressive dictate of the British Empire, as the next part is going to show.

c. The self against the British Empire

Under My Skin records Doris Lessing's birth in Persia and her subsequent moving, at a young age, to the frontiers of settlered Rhodesia. These years constitute the formative period of her consciousness as an oppositional figure to the colonial institutions. The daughter of settlers who travelled to Rhodesia through the Empire settlement scheme, she was at the time of writing her autobiography a mature woman who tried to resist an era tainted by colonialism. She reflected upon what it meant to be formed in and through this particular colonial context: "Oh yes, easy enough to say I was a child of the end of the Raj—but that phrase had not yet come into use. The end of the British Empire, then. Yes, I was one of a generation brought up on World War I and then as much formed by World War II" (*WIS* 15).

From the outset, we feel that Lessing sought to develop a sense of selfhood by extricating herself from the established and orthodox colonial institutions of the Rhodesian society. Lessing the autobiographer engaged in a self-defining battle against the values of Empire. She was committed to a postcolonial critique of the British Empire's world order.

The British Empire is constantly apprehended as a tyrannical and senseless regime that has been thriving on depersonalizing the individual. What Lessing privileges as the memories of her childhood are consciously chosen events and societal practices that are an indictment of colonial society: "Did we talk about the Africans?—the blacks—the munts—'the kaffirs'? Not much. […] No white child learned Shona—considered to be a kaffir

language" (*UMS* 113). "Everything was in the imperative. Do this; Bring this; Go there" (*UMS* 114).

Lessing on the other hand gives the lie to "the dogma that white writers cannot write about blacks" (*UMS* 113). She emphasizes this idea in *Under My Skin* when she expands on her African stories and describes "the District—Southern Rhodesian farms—at that time." She cites *The Old Chief Mshlanga*, a short story that she wrote in 1919, dealing with prejudice and oppression against blacks. The story, in Lessing's words, "prove[s] [to be] 'politically correct.'" *Little Tembi* is another tale written to convey the message that all that blacks wanted "was a warm-hearted, generous, open sharing of the benefits of 'white' civilization, instead of doors shut in their faces, coldness, stinginess of the heart" (*UMS* 113).

Lessing's autobiographical text holds the promise of emancipation and autonomy. When told by her interviewer that it "seems that what she is doing in many different ways in her fiction is questioning received assumptions, all that complacency, all those comfortable ideas" and asked if she feels "anything like the same process going on" while "writing her autobiography," she did confirm that she "was definitely interested in questioning all that even in her autobiography."[463]

3. The use of photography in *Under My Skin*

Photographs in Lessing's *Under My Skin* are "genuine" family snapshots, black and white images reproduced with creases, wrinkles and written dates. They are printed in a chronological order, interspersed with captions and short texts. The reader may then wonder whether Lessing opted for the insertion of photographs for the sake of referentiality. Our purpose then is to assess the presence of photographs in *Under My Skin* and see what they mean in the context of autobiography. Are they intended to guarantee autobiographical referentiality through the presentation of the author's body in the world, or do they undermine the integrity of referentiality through multiple or posed presentations? Do these photographs contribute to the ideological debate around the construction and survival of the self?

[463] M. J. Daymond. "Writing Autobiography and Writing Fiction." *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. p. 233.

It is too simplistic to say that autobiographers who display a conventional method of inserting snapshots in their texts produce conventional narratives of life-writing. On the contrary, as is the case in *Under My Skin*, the use of photographs sometimes confirms the text's postmodernity. Indeed, just as with autobiography, photography turns out to be problematic in terms of referentiality; The old notion that photographs never lie and that photography is an objective "naturally mechanical" process of reproducing reality are much more complicated than they appear to be. Challenging the apparent transparency of photographs in autobiographies, Linda Haverty Rugg explains that

> The autobiographer must come to terms with the existence of photography in creating a textual self-image, for the mere presence of photography challenged traditional forms of autobiographical narrative by calling into question essential assumptions about the nature of referentiality, time, history and selfhood.[464]

Drawing upon semiotics, debates in cultural theory and the works of Foucault and Althusser, John Tagg, associate professor of art history at the State University of New York, rejects the idea of photography as a record of reality. The introduction to his book *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* is very informative regarding the relationship between photographs and reference to truth. It also casts doubt on the claim that photographs hold out an overwhelming truth, "that the thing has been there, and that every photograph is co-natural with its referent."[465] Tagg stresses that every photograph must be seen as the result of "specific and in every sense significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place."[466]

Pondering over the dialectical relation of power/knowledge which defines what Foucault calls a "régime of truth," Tagg concludes that truth is bound in a circular relation to systems of power which produce and sustain it, for

> each society has its régime of truth, its 'general' politics of truth, that is, the types of discourse it harbors and causes to function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorized for obtaining truth

[464] Linda Haverty Rugg. *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography.* USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1997. p. 231.

[465] John Tagg. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Great Britain: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. p. 1.

[466] *Ibid*. p. 2.

[…].[467]

The "truth" of photographs may thus be said to be a function of several intersecting discourses. Thus, just as autobiographies are obviously artificial representations of lives, so photographs are clearly "manufactured images:" Photographed people are artificially posed and lighted, made to conform to the laws of perspective and the ideology of the photographic culture, "reduced in size, reproduced on a flat plane often without color"[468] Techniques like collage, montage, retouching, filters, camera positions and enlarging have rendered the ultimate belief in the truthfulness of photographs almost impossible.

At the beginning of *Under My Skin*, Lessing evokes a photograph in which she posed with her mother when she was a child and ironically comments on the artificiality of the pose: "It was as if my mother had tied, but too fast and awkwardly, a large clumsy parcel—me—and I didn't fit in anywhere, and might suddenly come untied and fall apart and let her down" (39). The autobiographer then explains the discrepancy between what is apparent in the photography and what she really feels inside:

> There survives a photograph of a thoughtful little girl, a credit to everyone concerned, but as it happens I remember what I was feeling. There had been a long nag and fuss, and trouble about the dress, of brown velvet, and it was hot and itchy. My stockings had been hard to get on, were twisted and wrinkled, and had to be hitched up with elastic. My new shoes were uncomfortable. My hair had been brushed, and done again and again. There was a padded stool I was supposed to sit on but it was hard to climb on to and then stay on, for it was slippery. […] My mother and the photographer, a professional, whose studio was full of Japanese screens showing sunsets and lake scenes and flying storks, of chairs and tables and cushions and stuffed animals to set the scene for children. (*UMS* 38-39).

This memory draws attention to the snapshot's elaborately posed artificiality because Lessing's inert image on page 327 in *Under My Skin* is inconsistent with the discomfort she feels inside. Indeed, as explained by the afore-mentioned quote, young Doris was actually feeling "low and nervous and guilty, because [she] was causing so much trouble" (*UMS* 39), as she has failed to fit into the photographer's artificial rules of perfect looking. If the adult

[467] Michel Foucault. "The Political Function of the Intellectual" in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Great Britain: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. p. 172.

[468] Linda Haverty Rugg. *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography.* USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1997. p. 233.

Lessing unmasks the artificiality of posing, she also undermines the photograph's referential significance.

4. Looking beyond the photograph

Photographs are not simply the objects they represent, but must be read through the culture that creates and consumes them. This is what Roland Barthes describes as "the photographic paradox:" "the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the "art," or the "treatment," or the "writing," or the "rhetoric" of the photograph).[469] He defines two poles of this paradox as "denotative" (codeless) and "connotative" (encoded). In "Image-Music-Text," Barthes claims that the ideological power of the image depends on the reader's knowledge just as though it were a matter of real language, intelligible only if one has learnt the signs."[470] The photograph's meaning exists within a world of significance which has already framed and fixed the individual. The photograph thus reflects the terms by which the culture itself confers status and meaning upon the subject, while the subject as image hovers between interior and exterior identities.

Alan Sekula outlines a similar interpretation when he writes of the "informative" and "affective" functions of photography. Readers of photographs as informative signs ascribe a power of documentary evidence to the image, while the affective function of photography inspires symbolic or spiritual readings:

> The photograph, like that of any other entity is inevitably subject to cultural definition. The task here is to define and engage critically something we might call the photographic discourse. […] A photographic discourse is a system within which the culture harnesses photographs to various representational tasks.[471]

---

[469] Roland Barthes. "Image-Music-Text." London: Fontana Press, 1977. p. 19.

[470] *Ibid*. p. 28.

[471] Allan Sekula. "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning." *Thinking Photography.* Ed. Victor Burgin. Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1982. p. 84-87.

As both Barthes and Sekula also write, the affective or connotative perception of photographs, which gives them a symbolic or connotative meaning is determined by the initial belief in their denotative or informative power.

In journalism, for instance, a photograph can change its meaning and message depending on the newspaper it is printed in and on the "title, caption or article—accompanying every press photograph."[472] Likewise, the distinction in autobiography between truth and reality remains uncertain and, even more significantly, open to contestation. The insertion of photographs into autobiographical texts continuously displaces meaning and raises the issue of the correlation between representation and communication. This dispersal of meaning complicates reading and interpretation.

The study of the relationship between photographs and the quest for self in Lessing's autobiography shows that photographs in *Under My Skin* express an awareness of the problem of referring to the self in language and in image. In more accurate terms, photographs, which can display many views and various versions of the same person, supply a visual metaphor of the divided and multiple selves of the autobiographer. To Barthes, "the photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity."[473] The self is objectified in the fixed and framed picture and the subject views a photograph in which he/she becomes an object of the lens.

In *Under My Skin*, the first family frames are meant to communicate stories of family unity and integration; Lessing's verbal and visual texts challenge, however, such an interpretation and reflect her efforts to liberate herself from her family ties. Two photographs display Lessing's parents Emily Maude McVeagh and Alfred Cook Tayler, just before their wedding. Just underneath it, we find the picture of the father with his leg cut off being nursed by her mother in his room at the old Royal Free Hospital. At a connotative level, the juxtaposition of the three photographs is significant as insofar as it foreshadows the doom and tragedy that will befall the family. Another series of photographs seems to be an attempt at consolidating the image of family cohesion but it reveals in actual fact the sterile lives of British colonialists and the plight of the indigenous inhabitants in a claustrophobic farm setting.

Following a postmodern tradition, Lessing renders the relationship between the photograph and its referent problematic by inscribing a caption that belies the apparent image

[472] *Ibid*. p. 16.

[473] Roland Barthes. *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977. p. 12.

of happiness, fixed and framed in a photograph showing young Lessing with her mother with a heavy make-up, posing together. The caption, however, says: "about nine year old, with my mother who is looking ill and unhappy. She had put a lot of powder and rouge on the photograph" (*UMS* 30). Here the photograph takes on another meaning as the reader is informed of Emily Maude's intentionally covered sorrow. Lessing thus not only points to the artificiality of photographs but also breaks the fixed rules of referentiality. The reader would not necessarily see the same thing if there were no caption. At another level, the photograph establishes a strained mother/child relationship.

In other photographs, Lessing appears with her two babies John and Jean after her first marriage in 1939 with Frank Wisdom, and with her son Peter after her divorce and her second marriage with Gottfried Lessing in 1943. The last picture shows her without them, with a caption "in 1949, just before I left for London," which is exactly where we leave her at the end of the first volume. The photograph denotes the significance of the event in Lessing's life—her divorce in 1949 after which she decided to move to London with her youngest son Peter, aged two, to pursue her writing career and serve her communist beliefs but left her two older children with their father in Southern Rhodesia. Such a decision was certainly brave as she opted for political activism and a professional life at the expense of her motherly role.

The presence of photographs in Lessing's autobiography creates an interactive space for the autobiographer that allows her to ponder upon the different representations of the self, even though she confesses in *Walking in the Shade* that "there are very few photographs in this volume. I hated being photographed and also we thought that being photographed was really rather *petit bourgeois* and self-indulgent" (68). It explains that the latter volume features very few photographs—most of which display Lessing's life and career in London after 1950, her political involvement and her participation in the Aldermaston rally in Trafalgar Square in 1957 with John Deakin, Michael Hastings, Kenneth Tynan and Clancy Cigal. This selective choice reveals that Lessing becomes less personal in her second autobiographical book, focusing rather on intellectual and political issues. The photographs in *Under My Skin* and those of the second volume of Lessing's autobiography *Walking in the Shade* are strikingly different. While the earlier photographs center upon Lessing's life in Southern Rhodesia and frame her family relations, the later ones convey her involvement in complex political and intellectual movements in London.

III. 1. C. Autobiographical projections: meta-mirrors

When she writes her fictional works, Lessing, who disperses pieces of herself into numerous characters such as Martha Quest, Anna Wulf and Ella, is in a state of constant self-revision. It reveals not only the intimate relationship between author, narrator and character but also between self and the others created in her writings. By multiplying the selves in her works, Lessing builds up an accurate vision of her various identities. The experimental dispersal of selves in the two genres reflects the difficulties of drawing strict demarcations between autobiography and fiction. Lessing thus transcends the frontiers of genres and the idea that autobiographical writings are unique gestures of self-disclosure, for there are always others in the mirror of fiction.

Metaphorically, Martha in *Children of Violence*, as well as Anna and Ella in *The Golden Notebook* become mirrors allowing her to get a better look at herself, to circumvent the blind spots that prevent her from answering the question,, "who am I?" The redoubling of the self in fiction proves to be essential to self-knowledge because it mediates sight and refocuses attention on the way the writer sees herself.

But these female characters are also meta-mirrors which sometimes operate as simple duplicates or, at other times, as parodic reflections. These mirrors function, to take up Lucien Dällenbach's image, as a *mise-en-abyme*. This term was originally coined by André Gide in reference to the heraldic image of a shield containing a miniature in its center. The whole contains a reflection of itself, and the reflection incorporates the whole. Inspired by Gide, Dällenbach defines *a 'mise en abyme'* as any internal mirror that reflects the narrative as a whole by simple, repeated or 'specious' or paradoxical *duplication*."[474] He also defines any simple duplication as "a sequence which is connected by similarity to the work that encloses it."[475] In this respect, *The Golden Notebook* is the kind of work that encapsulates duplications and meta-mirrors functioning like a *mise en abyme*.

Another rationale behind Lessing's use of meta-mirrors is that she derives some comfort in seeing herself in other women like Martha, Anna and Ella although she was at first reluctant to divulge her personal life to readers. She therefore breaks up the boundaries of the fictional and autobiographical genres and challenges perceptions of truth through multiple perspectives. Studying the very thin line between autobiography and fiction, Sidonie Smith

[474] Lucien Dallenbach. *The Mirror in the Text.* Trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. p. 36.

[475] *Ibid*. p. 35.

explains why the female autobiographer is engaged in a "double subjectivity" as both the protagonist and the narrator of her story:

> Trying to tell the story she wants to tell about herself, she is seduced into tantalizing and yet elusive adventure that makes her both creator and creation, writer and that which is written about…[W]ords cannot capture the full sense of being and narratives explode in multiple directions on their own […]. Because the autobiographer can never capture the fullness of her subjectivity or understand the entire range of her experience, the narrative 'I' becomes a fictive persona… [The autobiographer] may even create several, sometimes competing stories about or versions of herself as her subjectivity is displaced by one or multiple textual representations.[476]

Smith's observations are remarkably applicable to Lessing's fictitious creation of several narrators and multiple narrative representations of her complex artistic, political and emotional life as we shall see in the coming section. The displacement of subjectivity by textual representations, as is the case in Lessing's autobiographies and novels, has also resulted in blurring the boundaries of genres.

[476] Sidonie Smith. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. pp. 46-47.

III. 1. C. 1. Autobiographical fiction

1. The frontier between fiction and reality in *Children of Violence*

a. Martha Quest: Lessing's other self

In many of her interviews and essays, Lessing conceded that her fictional writing contains many autobiographical elements, especially as reflected in the experiences of her first alter-ego, Martha Quest in *Children of Violence*. Meshing biography and fiction, Lessing conflates literature and life so that the reader can hardly makes out any clearly defined genre. When an interviewer observed that the first volume *Martha Quest* had "the shape and feel of autobiography" and asked her pointedly, "is there much of you there?" Lessing replied, "Yes, this pugnacious intolerant character, yes absolutely, of course, that's me. But this series gets less autobiographical as it goes on […]. Half way through the series, I wrote *The Golden Notebook*, which completely changed me."[477]

In "Writing as Time Runs Out," Lessing clearly points to the blurring of boundaries between fiction and autobiography in the series. She also highlights this point in *Under My Skin*:

> Readers like to think that this story [*Martha Quest*] is 'true.' 'Is it autobiographical?' is the demand. Partly it is, and partly it is not, comes the author's reply. […] 'If I had wanted to write an autobiography then I would have done it, I wouldn't have written a novel' (*UMS* 160).

We can say that *Children of Violence* is only semi-autobiographical and remains fictional in various respects. Lessing confirmed it when she stressed that while writing *Martha Quest*, she "was being a novelist and not a chronicler" (*UMS* 162) and expressed this idea in *Walking in the Shade*, emphasizing that her literary characters were not copies of real people she had known:

> How often have I not seen a face fall into disappointment when I say no, such and such a character was imagined, or composed from half a dozen of similar people, or transposed from another setting into this one (*WIS* 336).

[477] Michael Dean. "Writing as Time Runs Out." *Putting the Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing 1964-1994. Ed.* Earl G. Ingersoll. London: Fontana, 1996. p. 89.

Yet, if the novel is not the literal truth, then it is "true in atmosphere, feeling, more 'true' than this record, which is trying to be factual" (*UMS* 162) Lessing added. It is indeed, 'truer' than autobiography, which further challenges the supposed lines between the two genres and the intrinsic characteristics of each. She comments in an interview with Field:

> I think autobiographical novels are truer than autobiography, even if half the novel is untrue [...]. Martha Quest, which is full of made-up characters and invented situations, in fact gives the flavor of that time [Southern Rhodesia from 1919 to 1949] much more than *Under My Skin*. I am too old now to put all that violent emotion in it.[478]

She makes the same point not only in this interview, but also in *Under My Skin*, stating that all one needs to do to know her life is to read the Martha Quest books. When she wrote *Under My Skin*, she reread *The Golden Notebook*, published in 1962, and commented on its correspondence with a passage she had just written: "This period […] a time with its own flavor and taste, went to make up the Mashopi parts of *The Golden Notebook* [...]. There is no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth" (*UMS* 314).
This blurring of autobiography and fiction points to her subversive "border crossing"[479] of genre boundaries, which can be seen at the narrative level, at the level of characterization and at the level of plot and atmosphere as we are going to see in the coming analysis.

One can easily trace an autobiographical narrative voice in the *Children of Violence* novels representing ages through which Lessing has already passed. But when Martha approaches Lessing's own age at the time of writing, there is a change in narrative technique to include the inner perception of the character. We can say that the entire series, which shifts from an autobiography of events to an autobiography of consciousness in *The Four-Gated City*, is autobiographical in the first four books, and that finally, in the Appendix, when Martha fuses with the narrator in the first-person epistolary section, Lessing is speaking directly to her readers.

Concerning characterization, the protagonist of *Children of Violence* is clearly one with its creator. Martha Quest shares young Doris's "fantasy about night clubs and clothes and

---

[478] Doris Lessing. "Doris Lessing: Why Do We Remember: An Interview with Michèle Field." Publishers Weekly, 1994. Retrieved from http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-15843056/Doris-Lessing-why-do.html.

[479] I am referring to Alice Ridout, and Susan Watkins' *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings*, London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009, in which they study the centrality of the metaphor of border crossings to Lessing's life and art.

amorous adventures" (*UMS* 160). She also partakes in her revolt against authority and her vehement opposition to the conventional and racist attitudes of the British colonists. Just like Lessing herself, Martha has always been a rebellious teenager who scorns her parents' Victorian principles. The rage that bottled up in her childhood and adolescence is a replica of Lessing's. More importantly, like her creator, she is fond of freedom in the bush—she told us in *Under My Skin* that she relished in "being alone for long dreaming hours in the bush" (215). Both the fictional character Martha Quest and Lessing are in addition devoted to the world of books. Martha, who is described as "of that generation who […] had formed themselves by literature" (*PM* 73) grows into a pensive woman and a left-wing intellectual. In *Under My Skin*, Lessing likewise confesses that she "spent [her] childhood, girlhood and youth in the world of books" (185). The two young women have in addition two unsuccessful marriages, become involved in Communism, and throughout their lives strive to become free women and live actively rather than passively. The novels of the series, *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, *A Ripple from the Storm*, *Landlocked* and *The Four-Gated City* show Martha Quest developing from one volume to another from a self-confident adolescent girl into a relatively liberated woman. These narratives can be seen from parallel perspectives as representative of Lessing's autobiographical past, in which the emotions and thought-processes of the maturing autobiographical woman are portrayed with verisimilitude.

Regarding characterization, it is also noticeable that Lessing's British parents, settlers in Southern Rhodesia who "believed for years that a change of luck would bring them success" but "would never make the fortunes promised by the Exhibition" (*UMS* 59) are like the Quests who represent the failed degenerated English couple, feeding on dreams and memories. The journey of the two couples to the British colony of Southern Rhodesia turns out to be a trap that condemns them to self-delusion and passive resignation, as demonstrated by this passage:

> The house had been built as temporary and was still temporary. Next year they would go back to England, or go into town; the crops might be good; they would have a stroke of luck and win the sweepstake; they would find a gold mine. For years Mr. and Mrs. Quest had been discussing these things; and to such conversation Martha no longer listened. […] She had seen clearly […] that her parents were deluding themselves. (*MQ* 27)

One can find a similar description in *Under My skin* when Lessing writes that her parents "were lost in daydreams and imaginings […]. Farming was something that went on routinely,

to produce enough money to keep [them] going, but was no longer expected to produce a windfall" (157).

There are also many analogies between Martha's brother in the Martha Quest books and Lessing's real brother. In an interview with M. J. Daymond, Lessing confessed that "he remained all his life intensely respectful of all authority. [...] It never occurred to him to criticize anything."[480] The reader of *Martha Quest* can feel the same tone and read the same remarks as Lessing's when the narrative voice comments that "Jonathan took up the orthodox British attitude" (*MQ* 34). Lessing's grief over leaving two of her three children behind her in Africa is replicated by Martha who leaves her fictional child. Each Martha Quest book becomes a kind of golden notebook of her life and operates as a narrative collage superimposed with Lessing's autobiography.

Besides, at the narrative level, the plot of *Children of Violence* is to a great extent similar to the real life story of its creator. The circumstances of Lessing's birth are indeed akin to Martha's. The autobiographer wrote in *Under My Skin* that it was a disappointment to her parents, and that the doctor who delivered her had to come up with a name because her parents had denied the possibility that they might have a girl: "I was born on the 22nd October 1919. My mother had a bad time. It was a forceps birth. My face was scarred purple for days, […] my mother had been sure I was a boy and had a boy's name ready" (*UMS* 8). Emily Maude "had not wanted a girl, she wanted a boy" (*UMS* 25). A similar passage is to be found in the first book of *Children of Violence*: "It was during the long night of terror, the night of the difficult birth, when the womb of Mrs. Quest convulsed and fought to expel its burden through the unwilling gates of bone […]" (*MQ* 15). Mrs. Quest "preferred a baby boy" to a girl. This similarity reveals Lessing's intention to focus on gender bias in her autobiography and fiction.

Martha's intellectual development and self-exile from her homeland parallels in many ways the events in which Lessing herself was part. Indeed, in 1925, Lessing moved with her father Alfred Taylor from Persia, where she was born in 1919, to the British colony of Southern Rhodesia to farm maize. The farming was not successful and failed to deliver the wealth the Taylors had expected. Doris was educated in a Roman Catholic convent in Salisbury. She left school at 14, and was self-educated thereafter. She then worked as a nursemaid; and it was about this time that she started reading the material about politics and

[480] M. J. Daymond. "Writing Autobiography and Writing Fiction." *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. p. 234.

sociology that her employer gave her to read. This was also when she began writing *Martha Quest*, who suffers from an eye illness at sixteen and is obliged to quit school, goes through a similar experience.

Being raised in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Doris Lessing had an unusual childhood. Her father, Alfred Cook Taylor, had bought a farm from the colonial government and moved away from London with his wife Emily McVeagh, five-year old Doris and her brother Harry. She had an unhappy childhood, leading a solitary existence on the deserted farmland and having to submit to the strict regime of hygiene and rules imposed by her mother. Lessing attended the Girl's High School, a convent school in Salisbury, where she left at the age of fourteen and subsequently the end of her formal education. She became a self-educated intellectual, which, although at the time she wished she had had a formal education, she would later consider as one of her biggest advantages:

> So I did an immense amount of reading and I came up with certain basic facts. One basic fact was that our education was extremely lacking information wise. You could be brought up in this culture and not know anything at all about the ideas of other cultures. We are brought up with this appalling Western arrogance, all of us. This is the reason I am glad I haven't been educated because it seems to me almost impossible not to have this arrogance if you are brought up inside the Western education system.[481]

b. The mother-daughter relationship

While portraying the fictional mother-daughter relationship in *Children of Violence*, Lessing recounts her own real-life conflictual relation with her mother Emily Maude. Her descriptions of growing up are colored by contradictory feelings of identification with and resentment toward the mother. This paradoxical relationship is also echoed in the Martha Quest books. The heroine of the series and young Doris consider their domineering and conventional mothers as the primary obstacle in their individuation process. This is why, in *Martha Quest* and *Under My Skin*, both daughters regard their allegiance to their mothers as lethal. This is why they endeavor to resist the compulsion to become like them and lead narrow and domesticated lives. While Mrs. Quest and Emily Maude seek to mold their

[481] Christine Denewet. *A Woman, fighting her way up and out: A Study of Doris Lessing's Novel: The Golden Notebook*. Catholic University of Leuven, 1984. p. 84-89.

daughters in their own images, the latter look for independence and freedom. Throughout their lives, they strive to forge identities and social roles which will be different from the life patterns set for them by their mothers.

The fictional character Mrs. Quest and Lessing's mother Emily Maude Taylor become indistinguishable when they attempt to repress their daughters back to childhood, refusing to admit their flourishing sexuality. Like Mrs. Quest, who would "smooth the childish dresses over Martha's body, so that the girl stood hunched with resentment […]" (*MQ* 17), Lessing's mother sews "dresses for a little girl" (*UMS* 174) that no longer suit her daughter's maturing body. The latter often "switch[es] into the fighting mode" whenever she confront[s] the "antagonistic newly breasted young woman" (*UMS* 171) who is eager to assume her sexuality.

Both mothers are typical representatives of the Victorian sense of morals. Like Emily Maude Taylor, Martha's mother is a pitiful victim of the imperial system that lands her in Africa. Their conservative perspective on the "appropriate" behavior of women and their prudish nature on matters of sexuality create in the two girls the desire to shock them at all costs. This antagonism is vividly demonstrated when the daughters use their bodies and clothes as weapons against their mothers, forcibly suggesting that are grown-up sexual women. In the battle of clothes, both girls defeat their mothers by sewing a new dress for a dance party, a dress which their mothers do not approve of (*MQ* 36/*UMS* 185).

When she rebels against her mother, the autobiographer typically escapes into the bush where she can find refuge from maternal authority. She constantly threatens her mother that she will "run away from home" (*UMS* 158). In the first volume of her autobiography, she escapes her family and the stifling conditions in which she has been living:

> That's all over I was thinking that's done with, meaning the tentacles of family. I was born out of my own self, so felt I. I was not going home. I was fleeing from it. The door was shut and that was that. (*UMS* 419)

Martha Quest behaves in a similar way when she decides by the end of *Martha Quest* that "she must leave her parents who destroyed her." (97) What becomes clear is that both Lessing and Martha have developed the identity of a determined fighter who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals. But as Lessing grew older and lived through two divorces, gave birth to three children, moved to London and began her career as a writer, she realized that most of her personality was rooted in the relationship with her mother, which may indeed explain why

she wrote about herself if we assume Mary G. Mason's view, in her study of women's autobiographies, that projecting themselves into an Other enables women to write about themselves:

> The self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness and I emphasize recognition rather than deference—this grounding of identity through the relation to the chosen other, seems to enable women to write openly about themselves. (210)

But the evolution of Martha's thoughts and activities suggests something of greater significance. It is not merely an author's creation that is meant to be autobiographical but is, like Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook*, deliberately conceived as the prototype of the sensitive modern woman who strives to decipher and understand complex issues related to gender, politics, psychology, and so forth. The only recourse for such a woman is to rebel, first in overt ways against the mores and values of her society, and later in more dramatic, immutable ways, such as deliberate social action designed to better the conditions of those abused by established society.

Martha Quest finally shares in Doris Lessing's idealism. The prototypical heroine seems to be representative of many characters in modern fiction: combining the idealistic, romantic fervor of a heroine from the Victorian era with the sophisticated and self-consciously emancipated quality of a modern woman, this heroine individually fights against opposing forces that confront her in her quest for selfhood in an attempt to fulfill her ideals.

2. The frontier between fiction and reality in *The Golden Notebook*

Many critics like Roberta Rubenstein and Suzette Henke think that *The Golden Notebook* is a "multi-dimensional palimpsestic narrative [that] generates a metafictional text [and] systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[482]

It is first important to mention that *The Golden Notebook* is like *Children of Violence* a blend of autobiography and fiction. As a fiction, it includes both disguised autobiography and fictional autobiography. As we shall see later, the borderlines between reality and fiction

[482] Patricia Waugh. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1984.

often become obscured and the fictitious universe more real than the real one. This constant exploration of the fiction/reality borderline creates a permanent merging of different worlds. Elements of the real world intermingle with the fictitious ones as we shall see in the coming analysis in which we are going to see how Lessing's fiction overlaps with her autobiography.

The narrative levels show an infinite regression: narratives within narratives create a stratification of levels in which each inner narrative is subordinate to the narrative within which it is embedded. This multi-layered narrative[483] is marked by the abundance of writer-figures. Its hierarchical structure can be schematized in four frames in terms of Genette's diegetic levels. The highest level is the one immediately superior to the first narrative, called by Genette in 1972 the extra-diegetic level, is concerned with its narration. This is where we find the real writer Doris Lessing. Immediately subordinate to the extradiegetic level is the diegetic level narrated by the fictitious character Anna Wolf, who writes her four notebooks. Adding further degrees of slippage among the narrative layers, the yellow notebook encloses a novel called *The Shadow of the Third*, written by Anna, in which the life of the protagonist, Ella, very much mirrors aspects of Anna's own life. The novel-within-the novel is about the love affair of Ella and a married man Paul. It re-enacts Anna and Michael's relationship. The hypodiegetic level is narrated by an intradiegetic character, Ella. The latter is the narrator of the novel *The Shadow of the Third*—a creation of Anna, consisting in a set of stories that prefigure Anna's break-up with Saul, making us wonder, as Greene suggests, "[…] if Ella is 'writing' Anna, is she 'authoring' her author?"[484] The diegetic levels overlap in subject matter, merging and parting, resisting any separation of the fictional Anna from the fictional Ella. In *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, Lisa Rado comments that *The Golden Notebook* is "disturbingly fractured and decentred, as it bounces among various incompatible narrative worlds and subtly slips from one diegetic level to another without ever revealing the repressed god-games that divert and dislocate its simulacrum of realist exposition."

Modern French critics often call making the hypodiegetic level a mirror and reduplication of the diegetic as *mise en abyme*. The term does not only refer to the doubling of

[483] Lessing's formal innovations make the novel a multi-layered text which mirrors Anna Wulf's own consciousness. She "uses a first person voice in some notebooks, third person fictional narrative in others and the Russian doll-like framing technique of novels-within-the novel." Ellen Morgan. "Alienation of the Woman Writer in *The Golden Notebook*." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973. p.109.

[484] Gayle Greene. Feminist Fiction, Feminist Form, Frontiers." *A Journal of Women Studies*. Vol. 11, No. 2/3, Spirituality, Values, and Ethics, 1990, p. 85.

characters or meta-mirrors, as was earlier explained, but also designates a duplication at the diegetic level. We find a broad definition of this term in McHale's explanation in Postmodernist *Fiction*:

> A true *mise-en-abyme* is determined by three criteria: first, it is a nested or embedded representation, occupying a narrative level inferior to that of the primary, diegetic narrative world; secondly, this nested representation resembles [...] something at the level of the primary, diegetic world; and thirdly, this 'something' that it resembles must constitute some salient and continuous aspect of the primary world, salient and continuous enough that we are willing to say the nested representation reproduces or duplicates the primary representation as a whole [...]. *Mise-en-abyme* is one of the most potent devices in the postmodernist repertoire for foregrounding the ontological dimension of recursive structures.[485]

Another image of the *mise en abyme* of diegetic levels in *The Golden Notebook* is Deborah Martinson's metaphor of "the Chinese box of texts within texts and thematic mirrors and deflections capturing the prismatic quality of diaries [in *The Golden Notebook*]."[486] This metaphor materializes the meta-narratives that characterize the book. This *mise en abyme* of narrative levels serves to question the borderline between reality and fiction. In *The Golden Notebook*, the levels of reality are deliberately confused, the reader is invited to enter the text (as if she/he were a character), as is the author. Likewise, the narrator moves in and out of narrative levels.

a. Anna Wulf/Ella and Doris Lessing

As with Children of Violence, the internal duplication at the narrative level is also noticeable at the level of characterization: we can say that *The Golden Notebook* is the kind of palimpsest that includes what Suzette Henke calls "autobiographical projections" where we repeatedly witness the superimpositions of the 'moi' of the author with her character Anna Wulf. Rubenstein points out that "we must assume that Anna Wulf is in fact the editor of the entire narrative, interposed between the fragmented Anna of the notebooks and fictions, and

[485] Brian McHale. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Great Britain: Routledge, 1991, p. 124.

[486] Deborah Martinson. *In The Pressure of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1992. p. 123.

Doris Lessing herself."[487] Indeed, the narrator of *The Golden Notebook* narrative is the invented character Anna Wulf, the narrator of four colored notebooks, behind whom the implicit narrator Doris Lessing stands. The fictitious Anna Wulf not only writes from first and third person perspectives but she also fictionalizes her autobiography by creating her alter ego Ella. The names and the two double letters in the middle plainly suggest the connection between the two women. More importantly, in the yellow notebook, Ella is an artist like Anna Wulf or Doris Lessing. The fictitious character Ella writes a story in which a man is about to commit suicide. We can conclude that like the author of *The Golden Notebook*, both the fictitious Anna and the doubly fictitious Ella are women writers. Doris/Anna/Ella mirror each other in several respects. Many critics like Gayle Greene suggest that the title of the novel-within-a novel *The Shadow of the Third* is emblematic of their multiple/doubled individualities. Anna only separates from Ella only occasionally:

> I see Ella, walking slowly about a big room, thinking, waiting. I, Anna, see Ella. Who is, of course, Anna. But that is the point, for she is not. The moment I, Anna, write: Ella rings up Julia to announce, etc.; then, Ella floats away from me and becomes someone else. I don't understand what happens at the moment Ella separates herself from me and becomes Ella. No one does. It's enough to call her Ella, instead of Anna. (*GN* 404)

Anna Wulf shares a number of similar traits with her creator: Each grew up in southern Africa, moved to London as the divorced mother of a toddler, and published a first novel set in southern Africa during the Second World War. (Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* was published in 1950, shortly after she immigrated to England; Anna Wulf repudiates her first and only novel, *Frontiers of War*, published during the same decade, as nostalgic and naïve.) Yet unlike Doris Lessing—who published nearly three-dozen novels in both realistic and speculative modes, and nearly a dozen volumes of short stories, a graphic novel, several plays, two volumes of autobiography, London sketches, and two collections of pieces devoted solely to the subject of cats—her fictional protagonist is unable to write another novel because she is emotionally and aesthetically blocked. She feels incapable of writing the only kind of novel that is of interest to her—one "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life," as she says. But while Anna fails in that endeavor, Doris Lessing succeeds in it with *The Golden Notebook*.

---

[487] Roberta Rubenstein. "The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing." *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979. p. 107.

The figure of the woman artist incarnated by Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook* also replicates Doris Lessing's because both writers were first concerned with the importance of morality in their writings, but later relinquished this goal. At first, Lessing "firmly believed" that being a writer meant "changing the world. I saw it as my duty to be politically active, to take the field against injustice, and wherever I went, standing or sitting, to discuss political subjects."[488] She told Joyce Carol Oates that "one begins with the idea of transforming society […] through literature and then, when nothing happens, one feels a sense of failure."[489] She later realized that the writer is nothing but an isolated voice in the wilderness.

> Many hear it; most pass by. It has taken a long time for me to recognize that in their books writers should distance themselves from the political questions of the day. They only waste their energy senselessly and bar their vision from the universal themes of humanity which know neither time nor space […]. All ideologies are deceptive and serve only a few, not people in general.[490]

The Lessing/Anna relationship is akin to Anna/Ella's, for whatever her resemblances and differences from Doris Lessing, Anna repeatedly "floated away" from Lessing to become a fictitious character. But more often we perceive the pressure of authorial identification with the character, and the fictional becomes indistinguishable from the real. In *The Shadow of the Third*, Anna examines her painfully concluded five-year love affair with the married psychiatrist Michael from the perspective of Ella. What is remarkable is that the Ella/Paul relationship fictionalizes key aspects of Anna's relationship with Michael. Indeed, Michael's fictional counterpart Paul Tanner is also married and is a "witch doctor" (*GN* 171). In a way, Anna fictionalizes her autobiographical experience by creating the story of Ella and Paul. This disregard of the genre, her fictionalizing what may be autobiographical, parallels Lessing's techniques. The mixture of autobiography and fiction illuminates what Lessing's Anna calls "one's self direct […] one's self projected" (*GN* 571). Lessing's/Anna's/Ella's texts exhibit many layered narratives inciting the reader to abandon his/her search for the authentic woman and exhorting him/her to view the performance.

---

[488] Margarete Von Schwarzkopf. "Placing their Fingers on the Wounds of our Times," [1981]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. p. 105.

[489] Joyce Carol Oates. "One Keeps Going," [1972]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. p. 38.

[490] Margarete Von Schwarzkopf. "Placing their Fingers on the Wounds of our Times," [1981]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. p. 105.

b. Clancy Sigal and Saul Green

There are also several parallels between the fictitious character Saul Green and Clancy Sigal, the man Lessing loved and talked about in the second volume of her autobiography *Walking in the Shade.* In this second autobiography, Lessing's relationship with Sigal serves as a model for Anna Wulf and Saul Green. What results is a hall of mirrors where life and art reflect each other constantly and infinitely. Lessing's description of Sigal's entrance into her life duplicates Anna's first meeting with Saul Green in *The Golden Notebook*: "as if off a film set; he was in the style of young Americans then, jeans, sweet-shirt, a low-slung belt where you could not help but see a ghostly gun. The lonely outlaw" (*WIS* 167, *GN* 517).

Like Saul Green, Clancy Sigal, Lessing writes, had an "immediate, intelligent understanding of women, not as females, but of our situations, our difficulties […]. In *The Golden Notebook*, I call it 'naming. He named us" (*WIS* 171, *GN* 515). The fictional male character who instigates Anna's breakdown is a replica of Clancy Sigal who caused Lessing severe dislocations of [the] picture of herself" (*WIS* 173).
Saul Green and Anna's involvement in politics is similar to Lessing and Sigal's. We find this idea in *Walking in the Shade*, when Doris Lessing states that she, Gerald Kersch, Jhon Berger, Keith Waterhouse and Clancy Sigal were representative of a particular radical tendency in 1950s' writing related to left-wing politics and models such as communism, socialism or Marxism. Lessing adhered to the Communist Party at the age of 23, driven by ambitions and dreams for better conditions of living and equal chances for all.

Reproducing the same relationship as that of Saul and Anna, who are both politically committed writers in the British communist Party, Doris Lessing and Clancy Sigal produced articles for the New Left in the 1950s.[491] They also shared the same disillusionment about the communist party/the radical Left in Britain in 1950s. Indeed, they both witnessed the crisis within British socialism that undermined any active challenge by the radical Left to respond to Britain's hegemonic power structure. As Clancy Sigal wrote in 1958:

[491] Voir Peter Lang. *Radical Fictions: The English Novel in the 1950*. Ed. Nick Bentley. Bern: International Academic Publishers, 2007. p. 52; and Clancy Sigal. "Nihilism's Organizational Man, Stuart Hall, Absolute Beginnings," in *Universities and Left Review*, N° 7, Autumn 1959, pp. 17-25.

> The Communist Party generally assisted in digging its own grave. It only needed Korea and the twentieth-century Congress to finish the job. The organized movement of men of good will […] crumbled […]. And when the moral failure of the Soviet Union became markedly apparent, a very great number of people […] had had it.[492]

Lessing herself realized that her political engagement with communism was a mere illusion: "I feel I have been part of some mass illusion or delusion" (*UMS* 16). She decided therefore to leave it and stopped believing in the veracity of political discourses. She explained in interview:

> Capitalism was dead. It was done and finished. And the future was socialist or communist. We were going to have justice, equality, fair pay for women, cripples, blacks—everything, in a very short time. This nonsense was believed by extremely intelligent people. That's what interests me.[493]

Eventually, like Anna Wulf and Saul Green, she and Clancy Sigal came to be convinced of the fallacy of political ideologies. She realized that being involved in a political group could engender exclusion or even persecution for one's disagreement with its ideas and decision-making policies. She concludes:

> All political movements are like this—we are in the right, everyone else is in the wrong. The people on our own side who disagree with us are heretics, and they start becoming enemies. With it comes an absolute conviction of your own moral superiority. There's oversimplification in everything, and a terror of flexibility. This characterizes political correctness.[494]

c. The blue notebook: a fictionalized autobiography

There are many similarities between Doris Lessing and Anna Wulf. Like the author herself, the fictitious woman writer Anna ventures to write her own autobiography in a

[492] *Ibid*. p. 22.

[493] Dwight Garner. "A Notorious Life." (Interview with Doris Lessing). Salon Media Group. TUESDAY, NOV 11, 1997. HTTP://WWW.SALON.COM/BOOKS/FEATURE/1997/11/11/LESSING.

[494] *Ibid.*

transparent manner in the form of diaries or notebooks. This is obvious at the narrative level mainly at the beginning of *The Golden Notebook*, where narrative authority seems to lie in the first-person focalisation of Anna Wulf's voice, as the journal-editor shows and rearranges the fragments of her various notebooks in an autobiographical attempt to construct a historical self. Anna Wulf shares Doris Lessing's anxiety as regards questions of truth-telling and objectivity. This wrestling crystallizes in the blue notebook, which is an attempt at autobiography. The blue notebook presents itself as a journal and an attempt at a "factual" and "objective" account of her life, exploring her ideas regarding art and writing, and their relationship to concepts such as "truth" and "reality." Anna intends to write the black notebook as a "transparent autobiography." Yet, she ends up fictionalizing her own life and experience. The book therefore depends centrally on fictionalized and doubly fictionalized autobiography. Just as Lessing fictionally transforms her autobiographical experiences, so does Anna Wulf.

The blue notebook challenges any claim for truth. The text particularly underlines the notion that concepts such as "truth," "memory" and "history" can be viewed as in no way objective. An example of this questioning can be found in the blue notebook, when Anna decides that the only way she can really capture the "truth" of her life is by describing a single day in detail, as a list of objectively recorded events. After this experiment she notes that

> The blue notebook, which I had expected to be the most truthful of the notebooks, is worse than any of them. I expected a terse record of facts to present some sort of a pattern when I read over it, but this sort of record is as false as the account of what happened on 15th September, 1954, which I read now embarrassed because of its emotionalism […]; this would be more real if I wrote what I thought. (*GN* 455)

She quickly realizes that "her desire for truth is frustrated by the unreliability of memory and language."[495] Earlier, Anna comments while looking back on her time in Africa in her early twenties (the subject matter for her novel, *Frontiers of War*) that she is, "appalled at how much I didn't notice, living inside the subjective highly-colored mist. How do I know what I 'remember' was important? What I remember was chosen by Anna of twenty years ago. I don't know what this Anna of now would choose" (*GN* 148). One of her earlier lovers, Michael, says that "this is a time when it is impossible to know the truth about anything." (*GN* 301) When describing her history Anna says, "[…] the material of [my] past has been ordered

[495] Betsy Draine. *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Print. p. 73.

by me to fit what I know, and that was why it was false […]" (*GN* 620). Thus, the record of the personal is not free from the distortions of private thoughts and emotions. Martinson remarks that we

> simply cannot locate Lessing's truth or Anna's or any autobiographer's unless we, readers willingly see fiction as autobiography and vice versa, and willingly acknowledge difference and impossibility as all true or all fiction or neither. Our vision must expand to take in multiple readings that break through realist, autobiographical considerations.[496]

In writing the blue notebook, Anna Wulf exposes the difficulty of making strict demarcations between autobiography and fiction. The notebook therefore exemplifies a fictionalized autobiography in which Lessing sublimates her voice in favor of Anna Wulf's, dispersing her authorship into various narrators. In her essay "Writing Autobiography," she elaborates,

> When you are shaping an autobiography, just as when you shape a novel, you have to decide what to leave out […]. Yet, it should be like life, sprawling big, boggy, full of false starts, loose ends, people you met once and never think of again… And as you write your autobiography it has to have a good deal in common with a novel […]. In short, we have a story. What doesn't fit into the story, the theme gets cut out. (Time Bites 98-9)

If Lessing or Anna blurs the frontiers between fiction and autobiography, then the self that emerges in these works is fragmentary, multiple and dispersed.

But does this dispersal mean that it is impossible to articulate any definitive sense of selfhood?

[496] Deborah Martinson. *In The Pressure of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1992. p. 126.

Women come to writing […] simultaneously with self-creation.

Carolyn Heilburn, *Writing a Woman's Life*

Writing has been the constancy through which I have invented myself after every up-rooting.

Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

That's all over; I was thinking, that's done with, meaning the tentacles of family. I was born out of my own self—so felt I. I was not going home, I was fleeing from it. The door had shut and that was that.

Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin*

III. 1. C. 2. The paradox of self-revelation and self-knowledge

Lessing's autobiographies record her search for self-knowledge. In her second volume, *Walking in the Shade*, the quest for self-knowledge is the central purpose behind the writing of her life: "This business of 'finding out who I am' has always left me wondering. What can it be like, to live without that feeling of me, in here, of what I am? What I did not know was how to define myself" (*WIS* 15). We can then wonder whether self-revelation, disclosure and the unmasking of the self through autobiography may lead to a genuine understanding of the self or whether it is a tool of self-creation? This raises several questions: Is autobiography a confessional mode as with Saint Augustine or Rousseau? Does self-revelation ultimately lead to self-knowledge? Is the autobiographical act a revelation of the innermost being of the person or does it ultimately question the very possibility of any definitive statement about the self? Is there a danger that, in becoming the author of one's own life, in constructing one's self through textuality, one may lose a sense of self-knowledge in becoming an intrinsic part of one's own aesthetic creation?

Writing autobiography was up until the 1980s equated with "realizing the self," which was perceived in a Romantic[497] sense as ultimately unique, unified and essential, and autobiography as an unmediated representation of that self. This notion of the autobiographical self assumed an ontological relationship to the text and the sameness of the autobiographical "I" and the textual or discursive "I." It implied that life-writing was viewed as a mirror of the self and might, in this case, function as a tool of self-reflection and self-discovery. In the same line of thought, Simon Gikandi aptly remarks that:

> To write is to claim a text of one's own; textuality is an instrument of territorial repossession because the other confers on us as identity that alienates us from ourselves, narrative is crucial to the discovery of selfhood. The text is the mirror in which the subject will see itself reflected.[498]

Lessing decided to write her own life to "claim a text of [her] own." But to what extent is

[497] In both Wordsworth and Rousseau self-expression through autobiography means a celebration of the powers of the individual soul to expand and reach out to the external world so that it is in tune with the cosmic harmony.

[498] Simon Gikandi. "The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing." *Conference Paper. ACLALS Conference*. Canterbury, England (August 24-31, 1989):1-20.

Gikandi's claim true? Should we necessarily assume that core identities can be recuperated from and through textuality? Are Lessing's *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade* mirrors through which the subject self is unproblematically "reflected"? Can we finally see in autobiography a transparent space in which writing functions as an ontological site of revelation, a birthplace of uniqueness, a locus of self-presence?

Lessing's volumes of autobiography are anything but simple and transparent. They are not only processes of self-recording, self-exploration and self-expression but are above all the channels of a dynamic process of ongoing self-creation. I will firstly show that the performativity of the autobiographical act undercuts the notion that autobiography recounts an authentic or pre-discursive identity. I shall then discuss the idea that spatiality as informed by the location of the subject questions the existence of a universal and transcendent autobiographical subject, autonomous and history-free. My final concern will be to show that the relationality of the autobiographical subject—its interconnectedness with the other—contests the notion that self-writing is the monologic utterance of a solitary and introspective subject knowable to itself. What then emerges in Lessing's autobiographical texts is a subject constantly caught up in an evolutionary process, whose self-knowledge is necessarily achieved, discursively and dialogically, in and through the other, so that the autobiographical self ultimately relinquishes the lure of "egoic mastery"[499] and opens itself to the other.

1-Autobiographical self-creation through performativity

Autobiography is not a reproduction of one's life but a creation and re-creation of the self at the time of writing. Paul de Man wrote that the autobiographer can "think him/herself into being" and create a self as he/she creates a text—out of all previous systems of creation, most especially language:

> We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces consequences, but can we not suggest with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that

[499] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. p 217.

> whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus undermined, in all its respects, by the resources of the medium?[500]

The theory of performativity of life-writing has brought into light the autobiographical fallacy of self-revelation. The theory is, according to Eakin, located in what he terms "a shift from a documentary view of autobiography as a record of referential facts to a performative view of autobiography centered on the act of composition."[501] This view is derived from Judith Butler's theory of performativity, as when she writes that "expressions of interiority are effects produced through discourses, among them the culturally pervasive discourses of identity and truthtelling that inform historically specific modes, contexts and receptions of autobiographical narrating."[502] The Self, as a consequence, is not a unified psychological representation whose "essence" or "identity" is prior to the language which expresses it; its essence and identity are rather constituted by the language that produces it.

Besides, the process of self-revelation involved in autobiographical writing is questioned by the distance between the narrating self and the experiencing self. Lessing expresses her skepticism about the first-person narrator, in her essay "Writing Autobiography": "first person, autobiography, the 'I,' in fact, holds the reader at a distance, and this is strange, since on the face of it 'I' should be … an invitation to the reader. But really it is much harder to identify with an 'I' than with 'he,' or she.'"[503]

The instable relationship between the narrating "I" and the experiencing "I" is to be accounted for by the detachment of the autobiographer. In her first anthology of essays, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980), Estelle Jelinek observes that "the autobiographical fallacy of self-revelation is demonstrated not only by the similar subjects usually avoided in life studies by both sexes but also by the different means of detachment with which they treat material they do include" (39). Such angles of detachment are prominent in *Walking in the Shade*: "Now looking back, I am quite amazed; I am impressed at how I balanced many ways between demands—the child being, of course being the main one. Intense concentrated work, when I could, with always an eye for the energy-eaters" (124).

---

[500] Paul De Man. "Autobiography as De-facement." *Modern Language Notes* 94, 1979. p. 220.

[501] Paul Jean Eakin. *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography*. UK: Princeton University Press, 1992. p. 143.

[502] Leigh Gilmore. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-representation.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1994. p. 1-15.

[503] Doris Lessing. "Writing Autobiography." *Times Bites: Views and Reviews*. USA: Fourth Estate, LTD, 2004, p. 161.

Later in the book, commenting on her life journey, Lessing says, "it is a common experience of people following a 'Path' that they look back at their first steps with shame and regret that they can have been so very wrong" (323).

Lessing the autobiographer creates herself or the idea of herself in and through the text and develops a dual consciousness as she grows into a mature woman:

> Now I look back at that child, that girl, that young woman, with a more and more detached curiosity. Old people may be observed peering into their pasts, Why?—they are asking themselves. How did that happen? I try to see my past selves as someone else might, and then put myself back inside one of them, and am at once submerged in a hot struggle of emotion, justified by thoughts and ideas I now judge wrong. (UMS 12)

The gift of observation—of being "detached"—which Lessing acquired as a child evolved as she grew up. It is this gift that allowed her to ponder upon her different selves at an older age and to look back at her past from a critical stance. It is what she tells Tom Sperlinger in an interview when she says, "this is the great gift of being old, you're very detached, all that *sturm und drang* or whatever disappears."[504]

While *Under My Skin* is marked by a strong personal voice of the first person, Lessing repeatedly retreats in *Walking in the Shade* "to the shade," as if she were a ghost writer. She informs the reader in her second autobiographical volume that the act of writing about one's self and the construction of a self-image are like a form of dreaming" (*WIS* 119).

2-The spatiality of the autobiographical self

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have identified spatialization as a prospect for autobiographical studies in their collection *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (1998), and advanced the idea that autobiography's spatialization of time made the genre suited to a place-centred approach: Like drama, which unfolds through acts and scenes, autobiography "eschews temporal sequence and presents development in terms of clearly demarcated

[504] Tom Sperlinger. "An Interview with Doris Lessing." *The Reader.* Issue 17, Spring, 2005.

phases—frequently [...] using places of residence as a structuring principle."[505] Place is believed to be the ground for mapping subjectivity. We are going to see that Lessing's autobiographical writing becomes a means of recognizing that identity is historically constructed and contingent. Two main places—Southern Rhodesia and Britain—impact the very sense of her perception of self. Lessing writes from and to a *fin de siècle* in which identity is characterized in terms of transits and deterritorialisation rather than roots and origins. She thus grows as a woman-artist with a double-consciousness and writes from a double perspective.

The centrality of place in human experience was captured by the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein* (Being-there), which confers place a fundamental, irreducible essence by defining human existence as "Being-in-the-world." The "world," in this is context, is understood as a web of relationships between self and "other," including the physical environment. "*Dasein* is never 'proximally' an entity," Heidegger writes, "which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes" tends to strike a "relationship" toward the world. This is possible only because *Dasein*, as *Being-in-the-world*, is as it is"[506] (original italics).

According to the social geographer Edward Relph, who bases his study on Heidegger's concept as the phenomenological basis of his study on *Place and Placelessness*[507] (1976), the significance of place does not therefore derive from location. Instead, it comes from

> the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence. There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particular moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world. (43).

Relph's observation emphasizes the role of place and attachment to place in the process of personal orientation—an idea which is taken up by Gilmore, who suggests that "both space and time are constructive dimensions of self-representation and not only the

[505] Evelyn J. Hinz,. "Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography." *Kadar, Life Writing*. p. 203.

[506] Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962. p. 84.

[507] Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976.

neutral organization of life to which an autobiographer may simply refer."[508]

Doris Lessing's *Under My Skin* is, the first volume of her autobiography covers, as the subtitle indicates, her life up until her departure from Cape Town for London in 1949. *Walking in the Shade*, the second volume, records events taking place in London. The decision to organize her autobiography in this way is exemplary of the importance of place in Lessing's life and conception of her own self.

Doris Lessing's concept of selfhood is profoundly influenced by Africa, both as a child, a mature woman and a novelist. Even though the history of her parents' arrival in Rhodesia might have positioned her in the role of the colonial-settler, she has a complex relationship with Africa. She is burdened by the legacy of her parents' nationalistic and racist attitudes towards the Southern Rhodesian people. But she strives to transcend the boundaries of nationalism and colonialism. In *Going Home* (1957), regarded partly as a personal narrative and partly as a travel notebook, she writes that "Africa belongs to Africans. The sooner they take it, the better. But a country also belongs to those who feel at home in it" (*GH* 11). The novelist is indubitably one of "those" who feel at home in it, insofar as from the moment she left Africa she considered herself an exile. Sage considers that Lessing was "an expert in unsettlement" (Sage 11) and Judith Gardiner views her as "a colonial in exile," whose work is characterized by "a fruitful unsettledness that makes [her both an] inheritor and [an] antagonist to imperialism" (Gardiner, 13).

In *Under My Skin*, Lessing describes her childhood love for the African bush and how she used to spend hours in solitary and spectacular landscapes which became a source of inspiration for her, especially for her first work *The Grass Is Singing:* "the most important thing was the space, you know, there was practically nobody around, and I used to spend hours by myself in the bush." She adds, "I did things that no girl of that time would have done in Britain or in Europe. We had a kind of freedom and independence that now I marvel at, I was so lucky to have had it" (*UMS* 120). Nowhere is her pleasure more evident than in *Under My Skin*. She details with relish the flora and fauna of the region—the "cedrillatoona" trees, the "musasa" trees, the "mafuti" trees: "growing at its root was an excrescence, like a sea creature, coral sheaths where protruded the tender and brilliant claws of new leaves, and these were like green velvet" (56).

[508] Leigh Gilmore. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-representation*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1994. p. 10.

> It is as if the thatch is whispering. All at once I understand, my ears fill with the sound of the frogs and toads down in the vlei. It is raining. The sound is the dry thatch filling with water, swelling, and the frogs are exulting with the rain. Because I understand, everything falls into its proper place about me, the thatch of the roof soaking up its wet from the sky, the frogs sounding as loud as if they are down the hill, but they are a couple of miles off, the soft fall of the rain on the earth and the leaves, and the lightning, still far away. And then, confirming the order of the night, there is a sudden bang of thunder. I lie back, content, under the net, listening, and slowly sink back into a sleep full of the sounds of rain. (*UMS* 50)

Passages like this celebrate special moments, Wordsworthian "spots of time" in which the child is intensely open to experience and aware of the restorative power of the natural world so much so that Lessing could observe that if we give time its due phenomenological weight, then most of our life is over by the time we are ten.

Africa also played a major role in that it molded Lessing's political consciousness. She indicted the settler colonial society for its "coldness [and] stinginess of the heart" (*UMS* 155) toward blacks. The various forms of injustice suffered by the indigenous people transformed her into a woman particularly enraged at the unjust subordination of the black population by a minority of white settlers. She became involved in the Communist Party of Southern Rhodesia in the 1940s because the communists "were the only people [she] had ever met who fought the color bar in their lives" (*GH* 248).

Her outspoken opposition to the white minority government ruling the country during Ian Smith's regime was so strong that she was banned for twenty-five years from Rhodesia (and South Africa), thus becoming one of the voices of that "white" Africa which strongly expressed their political identification with the black majority. This event, dating back to 1956, was recorded in her article "Being Prohibited."[509]

In a parallel manner to Africa, the travel to London enabled Lessing to reinvent her aesthetic self in an alternative historical and geographical site: "it became the substitute for the mature social experience—the deepening knowledge of a society—which my background and the nature of my life denied me" (*WIS* 15). In order to pursue her artistic career, Lessing found no other way but to escape the bush and leave her family and two children, and move to her homeland: Arriving at London with the typescript of her first novel *The Grass Is Singing*, she confesses, "I could at last be wholly myself. I felt myself to be self-created, self-sufficient" (*WIS* 3). This best proves that place affects the autobiographer to a great extent.

[509] Doris Lessing. "Being Prohibited." *New Statesman*, 51 (21 April 1956). pp. 410-412.

3-The relational autobiographical self: Knowing the self through the (m)other

> "…[Y]our own self, your personality and existence are reflected within the mind of each of the people whom you meet and live with, into a likeness, a caricature and a lie."
>
> Isak Dinesen, *The Roads Round Pisa*

In *How Our Lives Become Stories*[510] (1999), Paul John Eakin questions the conventional theories underlying the study of selfhood in autobiography when he asks, "Why do we so easily forget that the first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origins and subsequent formation?" (43). He goes on to point out that the assumption that autobiography, which means telling one's own story, "promotes an illusion of self-determination" (43).

Eakin's observation that "all identity is relational" (43) came only after the 1980s however in contrast with the earlier widely shared view the autonomy of the self in autobiography—a view which ignored the fact that the self is also "defined by—and lives in terms of—its relations to others" (43). His stance gave precedence to intersubjectivity over individuality, and foregrounds the self's contingent dependence on others.

It is noteworthy that this shift should have originated in feminist approaches to autobiography: The term "relational autobiography" was first used by Susan Stanford Friedman to define the self in women's autobiography as being a "sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identification that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness."[511]

Eakin's relational approach to life-writing is in keeping with Lessing's, for she herself confesses in *Walking in The Shade*, "I was seeing my early life more clearly with every new person I met; for a casual remark could question things I had taken for granted for years" (15). I shall then adopt his viewpoint to show that Doris Lessing's sense of self is relational and bund up with the mother in particular. The figure of the mother is pervasive in her life-writing, where the maternal, both through absence and presence, greatly affects her identity. *Under My Skin* features an uncompromising child and young woman who fight against her

[510] Jean Paul Eakin. *How Our Lives Becomes Stories*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999.

[511] Susan Stanford Friedman. "Women's Autobiographical Selves." T*he Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women 's Autobiographical Writings.* Ed. Shari Benstock, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. p. 44.

upbringing, her environment and especially her mother. To what extent is her sense of self shaped by her relation with Emily Maude? Does she succeed throughout years in healing the traumas of her conflictual and strenuous relationship with her mother? Does she ultimately overcome her feelings of matrophobia? In order to answer these questions, I shall first review the controversy on autobiographical selfhood starting from Georges Gusdorf, one of the earliest theorists of autobiography down to today's autobiographical critics and theorists.

In his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," Gusdorf writes:

> Each of us tends to think of himself as the center of a living space: I count, my existence is significant to the world, and my death will leave the world incomplete. In narrating my life, I give witness of myself even from beyond my death and so can preserve this precious capital that ought not disappear. The author of an autobiography gives a sort of relief to his image by reference to the environment with its independent existence; he looks at himself being and delights in being looked at—he calls himself as witness for himself; others he calls as witness for what is irreplaceable witness for himself; others he calls as witness for what is irreplaceable in his presence.[512]

To Gusdorf, autobiography is a manifestation of the centredness of the self. The relation between the world and the self is perceived by the self as a reference point and autobiography is viewed as a means connecting the self and the world, and by which the self realizes the significance of its existence. Such an existence is "independent" (29).

Gusdorf views the autobiographer as a historian "reassembl[ing] the scattered elements of his individual life and […] regroup[ing] them in a comprehensive sketch" (35). In this sense, autobiography is a mirror or "portrait" (35) of the author. By "portrait," Gusdorf does not mean "the moment of external appearance" that a painter captures but "a complete and coherent expression" of the author's "entire destiny" (35). The self is for him constant and unique; it is caught up in a process which entails a beginning and a destination. The "entire destiny" in autobiography therefore "perfects" itself when the self completes the journey of its growth.

However, Gusdorf's view on the autonomous and singular self as a universal phenomenon was challenged in the late 1980s when feminists advanced the idea of the female self as plural and relational. It was first Mary G. Mason who criticized in her essay "The Other Voices: Autobiographies of Women Writers" Gusdorf's theory on the self, viewing it as

[512] Georges Gusdorf. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." *Autobiography:* Essays *Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. p. 29.

"inappropriate as a model for women's life-writing"[513] because it "did not accord with the deepest realities of women's experience" (210). Then came Susan Friedman's essay "Women's Autobiographical Selves" (1988), which debunked Gusdorf's "model of separate and unique selfhood" in autobiographies" and denounced the "critical bias that leads to the marginalization of autobiographical texts by women and minorities."[514]

Friedman adopts Chodorow's view on female relationality, arguing that when the autobiographer looks back onto his/her earlier past, rather than embarks on a quest for autonomy as Gusdorf suggests, s/he comes to an understanding of his/her "self-creation" (36) by exploring his/her "past interrelation with his/her parents" (36). She argues that women "define and experience themselves relationally, especially in relation to mother issues" (207), thus supporting Friedman's model. She writes in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1989):

> The care and socialization of girls by women ensure the production of feminine personalities founded on relation and connection, with flexible rather than rigid ego boundaries, and with a comparatively secure sense of gender identity. This is one explanation for how women's relative embeddedness is reproduced from generation to generation, and why it exists within almost every society.[515]

Gusdorf's emphasis on individualism and the centrality of the self was also interpreted by Hooton, in *Stories of Herself When Young* (1990), as a patriarchal view on autobiography when she pointed out that

> On the one hand critics have seized on the modernist implications of autobiography as self-reflexive, self-enacting discourse; on the other, they have virtually ignored the equally challenging potential of feminist theory. If the criticism of autobiography is pre-eminently concerned with ideologies of selfhood, it must also be concerned with ideologies of gender, yet autobiographical theory has consistently turned a blind eye to the relationship.[516]

---

[513] Mary G. Mason. "The Other Voices: Autobiographies of Women Writers." In James Olney, *Autobiography*. p. 210.

[514] Susan Stanford. "Women's Autobiographical Selve:ice." *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women 's Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Shari Benstock, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. p. 34.

[515] Nancy J. Chodorow. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989 p. 57.

[516] Joy Hooton. *Stories of Herself When Young*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. p. 80.

Hooton was greatly inspired by the psychologist Jean Baker Miller who shows, in *Towards a New Psychology of Women,* that interconnectedness with others is essential to the female concept of selfhood:

> One central feature is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of connections with others. Indeed, women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships. Eventually, for many women the threat of disruption of connection is perceived not as just a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self.[517]

In the light of the theory of relationality, Lessing's sense of self is paradoxically shaped to a great extent by resistance to and identification with the mother—an ambivalence which according to Newman lies in the fact that the daughter has a propensity to establish fluid and permeable ego boundaries with her mother while she simultaneously fears the "loss of her own self and autonomy [through] reabsorption with the mother."[518]

From the beginning of *Under My Skin*, Lessing stoutly rejects any kind of identification with her mother. The autobiographical 'I' sounds like a small child repeating "I will not; I simply will not" be like her (*UMS* 157, 190, 201, 262). But despite her fierce determination to separate from her mother's body, she ultimately seems to merge with her. It turns out that Lessing's attempt at breaking "some ancient chain of repetition of repetition" is doomed to failure. While she criticizes her mother for not being able to display her emotions, claiming that "she talked about love often" and that "the tenderness she had never been taught came out in worrying and fussing" *(UMS 26),* she grows as reserved as her mother. Her inability to display her emotions comes out in her controlled description of her mother's death. Her feelings of "grief" upon the death of her mother are described in a "chilly grey semi-frozen condition—an occluded grief" (*WIS* 223) as she realizes that she would have been unable to live with her ageing mother, even if it might have saved her life.

Lessing's decision to leave her two children from her first marriage in Southern Rhodesia while she settled in England is a reproduction of the abandonment her own mother experienced, which accounts for her inability to show warmth and love to her daughter. The grand-mother was indeed absent in the life of Lessing's mother. She was almost invisible:

---

[517] Jean Baker Miller. *Towards a New Psychology of Women.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. p. 83.

[518] Neuman explains this paradox: Daughters will speak (in autobiography about mother's bodies) with great ambivalence , for it is daughters who caught in the contradictory position of identifying with while separating from their mother's bodies. (76)

"There is not even a photograph of Emily. She is nobody. She is nothing at all" (*UMS* 1). Lessing's mother does not have any clear memory of her own mother except the words by the servants: "she was pretty but all she cared about was horses and dancing" (*UMS* 1).

Even though Lessing explained leaving her children was instigated by her fear of becoming her mother, she could not help being like her:

> I explained to them [her children] that they would understand later why I had left … I carried, like a defective genre, a kind of doom or fatality, which would trap them as it had me, if I stayed. Leaving I would break some ancient chain of repetition… This feeling of doom, of fatality… was what had made me, and from my earliest childhood, repeat and repeat, 'I will *not*, simply will not'. And yet I had been swept along on some surface, or public, wave ever since I had left the farm (and my typewriter) taking my fate in my hands, or so I thought, to become one of the town's marriageable girls, then wife, then mother. (*UMS* 262)

As a creative young woman writer, Lessing experienced a conflict between her maternal feelings and the need to preserve herself. Her agony at repeating what she most hated in her mother—"her pressure, her insistence, her close jealous supervision, her curiosity—all the pathetic identification of a woman whose gratification is only in her children" (*UMS* 112), prompted her to save herself by abandoning her children and husband.

Lessing's own behavior as a mother was to a large extent determined by her early childhood experience. The mother's voice seeped so far down under Lessing's skin so deeply that she acknowledges in the epigraph to *Under My Skin*:

> I've got you under my skin
> I've got you deep in the heart of me
> So deep in my heart you're really a part of me
> I've got you under my skin
> I've tried not to give in… (vi)

If the title "Under My Skin" seems to promise a self-revelatory life-writing, the above epigraph ironically reveals that the hidden addressee of the book, the "you" deep in Lessing's heart, under her skin, emerges all too plausibly as her long dead mother. It is clear that Lessing paradoxically identifies with her mother even as she tries to separate from her.

- Reconciliation with the mother

Lessing's second autobiographical volume provided her with an opportunity to explore the maternal relationship retrospectively. The autobiographer said it was the focal point of her autobiographical writing: "There are aspects of my life I am always trying to understand better […] including my relation with my mother" (*WIS* 15). She adds:

> What I did not know was how to define myself […]. There was a hiatus, a lack, a blur—and it was to do with parents and particularly with my mother. I had fought her steadily, relentlessly, and I had had to—but what was it all about? Why? And I was not able to answer that, entirely, until I was in my seventies, and even then perhaps not finally. (*WIS* 16)

Writing autobiography was for Lessing a medium through which she might better understand her mother's life, from the perspective of an aged woman. She realized that "for years I lived in a state of accusation against my mother, at first hot, then cold, and hard, and the pain, not to say anguish, was deep and genuine. But now I ask myself, against what expectations, what promises, was I matching what actually happened?" (*UMS* 15)
Lessing's transcendence of her matrophobia thus came at an old age with a radical change from the rebellious self, the intense hatred and furious feelings that we see her feeling towards her mother in the first volume of her autobiography to a willingness to set up a dialogue with her through autobiography. This was mainly achieved by creating and endeavoring to understand her mother as a separate woman. The daughter as a writing subject was capable of placing Maude Tayler in the social, historical, sexual, racial and ethnic, economic and political context of her life.

But this understanding of the mother came only after her death, as she puts it in the following quotation: "you have to be grown up, really grown up, not merely in years, to understand your parents" (*WIS* 159). She acknowledges that it took her a longer time to understand that her mother was the girl who had defied her father in order to become a nurse, standing up for years to his refusal to even speak to her. She was the woman who impressed everyone she met with her vigor, her competence, her independence, her humor. "I cannot imagine that, had I met the young Emily Maude McVeagh, I would have much to say to her, but I would have had to admire her" (*WIS* 160). Lessing goes on observing:

> I think what happened was this: When she arrived on that farm […]; when she knew that this would be her future, a lonely one, because of her neighbors, with whom she had nothing in common; when she knew that the forward drive of her life which had been towards some form of conventional middle—class living, was blocked; when she knew her husband was an invalid and would not be able to keep his grasp on life… then she had a breakdown and took to her bed. (*WIS* 160-1)

But it took two years after her mother's death for her to be able to dispel her grey semi-frozen condition and submerge herself once again in the "hot struggle of emotion". She describes her mother's death, this time, in a more personal and emotional terms:

> There are deaths that are not blows but bruises, spreading darkly, out of sight, not even really fading. I sometimes think, suppose she were to walk in now, an old woman, here I am an old woman … how would we be? [...] I think I would simply put my arms around her. Around who? Little Emily, whose mother died when she was three leaving her to the servants, a cold unloving stepmother, a cold dutiful father. (*WIS* 224)

This reaction towards the imagined resurrected dead mother is much warmer than the defensive hypothesis, decades earlier, that even if her mother "returned to life" and "stood there, brave, humble, uncomprehending […] nothing could have been different" (*WIS* 223). It also conveys a change in Lessing's ability to display emotions by contrast with her earlier choice to "express her grief by passively listening to blues while suppressing the emotions which Lessing could not out of honesty allow herself, like simple tears."

Forty years after her mother's death, Lessing envisions her mother and herself meeting in the present as two "old women" who might share "some kind of humorous comprehension" of the damned awfulness of life (*WIS* 224). In *Walking in the Shade,* Lessing finally seems able, through compassion and imaginative transcendence of her life-long battle with her mother, to resolve the conflict she has experienced all along the years with her mother.

We can then conclude that the interconnectedness characteristic of Lessing's sense of selfhood in regard with her mother tends to support the theory of the relationality of the self in women's autobiographies.

CONCLUSION

Doris Lessing is recognized as one of the major women writers of the twentieth-century. Voicing at first her dissent against apartheid and colonialism, early espousing left-wing causes, then growing fascinated with psychology and Sufism, dealing with controversial themes and writing in a variety of forms and techniques, she was always interested in the problematic issue of the quest for female selfhood and self-knowledge, be it in her fiction or her autobiographies. This is why this work is dedicated to examining and analyzing this theme in her early fiction.

This thesis reflects the trajectory of Lessing's work from her early African novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) to her later autobiographies *Under My Skin* (1994) and *Walking in the Shade* (1997). It is an attempt at analyzing the heroines' quest for selfhood within a deconstructive approach to female identity, which consists in undermining the humanist subject's myth of unity and autonomy and subverting the logocentric hierarchy of fixed categories of thought. I have tried to show, however, that Lessing is not a deconstructionist in a radical postmodernist sense, for the notion of female selfhood in her fiction lies beyond the "dissolution of human subjectivity"[519] characteristic of postmodernism. The second reason is that the pattern of deconstruction is followed by the reconstruction of a more integrated self, open to otherness and multiplicity.

In order to do so, I have endeavored to decipher the rationale behind Lessing's distinctive and seemingly perplexing aesthetic vision. Her shift from Marxism and Communism in her early novels to Jungian psychology and the anti-psychiatry movement of R. D. Laing and her impregnation with Sufism and mysticism in her later works mirror a changing sense of female selfhood and the quest it involves. This self, contrary to what the heroines, in their constant search for authenticity and wholeness first imagined, is dynamic and ever-fluctuating rather than fixed, multiple and fragmented rather than whole, and the quest is nomadic rather than linear. It reveals a deterritorialized cartography of the self lying beyond fixed origins and roots and a nomadic thought that departs from "arborescent"[520] models of cognition. Her nomadic spirit, often overlooked by critics, is the stamp of a restless woman-writer who constantly crossed frontiers—historical, geographical and mental. Born in

[519] Patricia Waugh. *Practicing Postmodernism, Reading Modernism.* London: Edward Arnold, 1992. Print.

[520] Gilles Deleuze,, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. p. 4.

Kermanshah (present-day Iran) in 1919, growing-up for almost thirty years in the African bush in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), then moving to England with the manuscript of her first novel *The Grass is Singing* in 1949, and settling in London for more than 50 years, she was much influenced by this rich background, which accounts for her eclectic themes and versatile style.

Lessing's journey of self-knowledge in real life is echoed in her novels and autobiographies by different female protagonists who are highly self-conscious, not only reflecting upon the world around them, but also immersed in various and changing situations. Having relinquished the dialectical and oppositional mode of relations towards the m(other), these characters ultimately acquire knowledge by accepting and merging with this other in breakdown or mystical experiences. Their movement outward in search of true selfhood thus becomes an inward movement, and the "voyage out," to borrow from Virginia Woolf, turns out to be a "voyage in"—one that leads to the center of the self.

Lessing's shift in paradigm also accounts for her evolving aesthetic vision. As we follow Martha Quest from South Africa to the streets of London and Lynda's "mad" basement in *Children of Violence,* to the cataclysmic world of London in *The Four-Gated City*, we track the novelist's developing narrative form and techniques. The realistic novel, with its commitment to logic, causality and rationality, was gradually replaced by generic experimentation, fragmented narratives and fantasy. This departure from realism was a preparation for Lessing's venture into outer space and speculative fiction in her later novel *Shikasta* (1979), the first volume of the *Canopus in Argos: Archive* series (1979–1984). The fantastic ending of *The Four-Gated City* heralded the unexpected universe of science fiction that Lessing would develop in her later fiction. Her inventive writing techniques and her evolving views of life were the result of the developing awareness that commitments to old ideologies or conventional narrative styles worked against the solutions she had been striving to define regarding the quest for selfhood. Archaic philosophies and ossified systems of thought seemed to confine the female subject in essentialist, dualistic and fixed categories. Liberating such a subject was made possible by freeing linguistic signs and "decolonizing" genres.

This work's ambition has also been to clarify Lessing's equivocal relationship with feminism: she felt uncomfortable at being identified as a feminist writer because of the reductive logic underlying such a characterization. Even though she dealt with feminist issues related to gender inequality and women's specific problems, she refused to voice simplistic

statements about men and women and to have her fiction considered as a manifesto in praise of the feminist cause. Her occasionally blunt articulation of this discomfort reveals that she accused radical feminists of unwittingly "rubbishing men"[521] and failing to achieve concrete progress. She refused to endorse the idea that women are the victims of injustice and men the perpetrators. This stance is reflected in a vision of the man-woman relationship implying that it should be based on complementarity rather than antagonism and discord. She saw the world as a "whole" constituted by and embracing fragmentation, breakdown, dualism and dissent. This perception is indicative of a writer who was against codifications of all kinds—political, social, sexual, creative, intellectual, formal and generic.

Lessing refused to be pigeon-holed into various other categories derived from contemporary criticism. She dismissed labels in interviews, but this dislike is also evidenced by the constant emergence of new ideas in her fiction. She also extended the scope of her writing, thus eluding easy categorization. When she became popular with the publication of *The Grass Is Singing,* the label of "African writer" clung to her because of her fame and the volume of African stories that followed. The colonial theme is obviously important in her fiction, and her treatment of the problem prefigured anti-colonial attitudes. Her political commitment also classified her as a Marxist writer. She was given many other labels—communist, feminist, psychiatrist, mystic, prophetic—among others. But her sharp awareness of how ideologies structure human existence in the modern world made her very conscious of the perils of indoctrination and labeling.

The first chapter demonstrates how the female protagonists' quest for selfhood is first hampered by the effect of the social and political structures on female consciousness and self, revealing the deterministic outlook which characterizes Lessing's first novels *The Grass Is Singing*, *A Proper Marriage*, and *Martha Quest*. This determinism, at the thematic and aesthetic levels, is to be accounted for by the novelist's stout belief in Communist and Marxist ideologies in the early 1950s. In her initial writings, Lessing seemed to be preoccupied with racism, colonialism and the color bar and how they mold the heroines' conception of selfhood. We found that the female characters Martha Quest and Mary Turner are trapped by gender and lured by mirrors (physical or metaphorical) in the sterile patriarchal and colonial environment of Southern Rhodesia. These characters are inexorably shaped by their

[521] Gibbons, Fiachra. "Lay off Men, Lessing Tells Feminists:" *Special Report*: Edinburgh Festival 2001, Guardian .co.uk, August 14, 2001.

surroundings and unable to act in their confined world. They are also inscribed in matrilineal plots and their sense of identity is to a great extent bound up with that of the mother.

The first part of the first chapter is dedicated to the study of the mirror and its symbolic dimension as well as to the concomitant idea of the gaze, which provides the first tool on the way to self-knowledge. Lessing's young protagonists explore the oxymoronic nature of their quest as they attempt to discover whether they should define themselves through the cultural values of the looking glass or instead break the mirror to search for their true identity. They wrestle with the forces which bear over their sense of self and threaten to lure them into accepting a framed, passive and silent image of womanhood. Their quest therefore starts as an escape from the expectations of motherhood and the assumptions of gender towards a more creative and autonomous selfhood.

The refracting effect of the mirror over the heroine's psyche produces a fragmented self and thwarts their desire for unity and wholeness. Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories showed the dissolution of a unified and stable identity. For him as for Doris Lessing, the mirror initiates the entrance of the subject into the symbolic order, the deflection of "the specular I" into "the social I" and announces the omnipresence of cultural coding.

Lessing found that, in order to free the female subject, it was necessary to revolutionize the form of the novel and its writing techniques so as to challenge conventional understandings of language. But this was not for the simple purpose of aesthetic experimentation, but rather to depict the fragmentation and alienation of the world around her. The Golden Notebook provides an outstanding example of metafiction, presenting an intrepid experimentation consisting in a breath-taking narrative developed through diaries. Its textual fragmentation and diaristic experiments deny unity and integrity and foreground a postmodern conception of female subjectivity. It mimics the female protagonist's miscellaneous selves, for just as she attempted to "decolonize" generic categorizations and formal narrative rules, Lessing also endeavored to "decolonize" gendered subjectivity.

Another aspect of Lessing's experimentation is her play with the laws of genre. In a parodic way, she uses and abuses, installs and subverts in *Children of Violence* the conventional forms of the masculine *bildungsroman* in order to deconstruct the androcentric genre of novels of development. The quest for self-knowledge takes another dimension as it equally departs from the classical female tradition of the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman*.

This textual innovation started in the late 1960s when dissenting movements like the second wave of feminism and the anti-psychiatry movement challenged the hegemony of conventional medical and psychological models of madness. Anti-psychiatric thinking underlies a number of Lessing's literary texts, most notably *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four-Gated City*, in which the novelist drew upon R. D. Laing's account of schizophrenia and, indeed, largely based her own representations of madness on his understanding of that experience. Schizophrenia as experienced by Martha Quest is viewed from the perspective of existential phenomenology. The experience of the schizoid or divided self as a mode of being in the world is a way to cope with a hostile environment.

The journey into the unconscious turns out to be a prerequisite to a broader understanding of the self. It comes about when the ego leaves the narrow bounds of its *persona*, or social mask and plunges into the unconscious. Within a Jungian perspective, the second chapter therefore explores the role of dreams and imagination, which illuminate areas of the psyche to which the heroines do not have access in conscious life and shows how it advances the quest and elevates the questers' consciousness to a transcendental realm. The first part of chapter II traces the process of the psychic growth of the female protagonist in terms of individuation, analyzing the use of several archetypes, particularly the *persona*, the shadow and the mandala associated with Jungian psychoanalysis.
In *The Grass Is Singing*, Moses personifies Mary's "shadow"—the repressed, dark, hidden and alien side of her personality which contradicts those aspects which she can only acknowledge consciously. Dreams are also important for Kate Brown as they light up her inner journey in *The Summer Before the Dark.* We have analyzed the symbolism of the seal, which appears in the protagonist's dreams to guide her towards her self-discovery. In *Children of Violence*, Martha's dreams and visions do not have the same quality throughout the series. They have all kinds of functions, from wish-fulfilling fantasies through nightmarish repetitions to prophecies. They also have a compensatory and healing function as they mitigate the harshness of an arid external reality. Most importantly, Martha is able to learn from the experience of this alternative reality; she finds in her dreams the potential to transform her life.

The second part of chapter II analyses the inner journey through madness or schizophrenia. This breakdown is often a dual or collective experience emphasizing the intersubjective nature of such a descent, as exemplified by the couples Martha Quest/Lynda Coldridge in *The Four-Gated City* and Anna Wulf/Saul Green in *The Golden Notebook*. The

descent into madness, for Anna Wulf, is a path to self-knowledge as it allows her to shed her social roles and fuse with her male partner Saul Green. Martha Quest lives the same experience with the madwoman Lynda Coldridge, who allows her psychological "breakthrough," liberation and renewal. The encounter with the mad or the abnormal, all along the journey, consists, in a Deleuzian sense, in "a line of flight" or deterritorialisation according to which the quest changes in nature, connects with other multiplicities and opens up new paths.

Although Lessing does not claim to be a phenomenologist, this kind of perspective is also apparent in her interest in Sufism, which "believes itself to be the substance of that current which can develop man to a higher stage in his evolution" (*SPV* 133). This interest in Sufi philosophy provides a template for the protagonists' reconstructive journey. The heroines transcend the limits of ego-centeredness and gain the kind of superior knowledge beyond immanence—"the limits of the matter, the body, sensibility, being worldliness."[522] In *Children of Violence*, Martha Quest manages to escape her solipsistic world through spiritual assent and best incarnates the concept of awakening central to Sufism. In *The Four-Gated City* (1969), she becomes a reflective consciousness absorbed in other characters. No longer individualistic and self-centered, she stands as a witness of and reflector upon the surrounding selves and their life conflicts.

But the basic premise underlying Lessing's interest in Sufism rests in the Sufi belief in the possible transcendence of the ordinary limitations of the human mind. Whereas old discourses such as science, Western humanism, logocentrism and Marxism offer a one-dimensional mode of cognition that would distort a broader understanding of reality, Sufism offers methods of going beyond that one–dimensional mode of perception. Lessing explained in the "Sufi Way" that "it is all about growing in consciousness, in self-awareness, all about seeking the light beyond all our humanly-constructed (and often arrogantly and fearfully defended) screens."[523]

Sufis also hold that humanity is in a constant flow of evolution, the direction of which has taken a more metaphysical and spiritual route, as Lessing put it in "The Sufi Way:"

> I soon realized that I'm doing much more than contemplating. I'm already walking the Sufi Way, as are all of us who are striving to live lives of consciousness,

[522] Patrice Haynes. *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy*. New York: Bloomsburry, 2012. p. 1.

[523] Doris Lessing. "The Sufis." *Time Bites: Views and Reviews*. USA: Fourth Estate, LTD, 2004. p. 22.

> conscience, and compassion; we just may not have realized that this term, one among many, exists to name this journey toward union with the Sacred—a journey that is both intimately personal and universal.[524]

This interaction between the personal and the universal, the outer and inner modes of consciousness is the matrix of the heroine's inner development.

The third chapter deals with Lessing's autobiographical writing, revealing its own textual codes, almost destabilizing the "autobiographical pact." The act of narrativizing the self in autobiography is continuously rendered problematic by questions of memory, performativity and discursivity. Lessing positions her writings on the porous boundary between fact and fiction. Autobiography, which initially may seem more transparent, poses its own challenges to truth because, in her judgment, memory is "a careless and lazy organ, not only a self-flattering one" (13). She suggests that, even with the best of intentions to tell the story of one's life without embellishment or distortion, "we make up our pasts."

Lessing's experimentation with genres best crystallizes in her constant crossing of borders between fiction and autobiography. She conceded that her fictional writing contains many autobiographical elements, particularly as reflected in the experiences of her first alter ego, Martha Quest, in the five-volume series, Children of Violence. "Mise en abyme" is one of the most potent devices adopted in order to foreground the overlap of fiction and autobiography. When she writes her fictional works, Lessing, who disperses pieces of herself into numerous characters such as Martha Quest, Anna Wulf and Ella, is in a state of constant self-revision. The experimental dispersal of selves in the two genres reflects the difficulties in drawing strict demarcations between autobiography and fiction. Lessing thus transcends the frontiers of genre and the idea that autobiographical writings are unique gestures of self-disclosure, for there are always others in the mirror of fiction.

Since the truth of the autobiographical "I" turns out to be discursive, and therefore fictitious, the autobiographical narrative constructs multiple selves that are deployed in different contexts and for different purposes. Lessing cannot create her identity in a holistic fashion through autobiography because a person is made up of many selves.

Although *Under My Skin* may appear as a traditional and transparent autobiographical text in which the writer faithfully records past memories and factual events, it turns out to be a postmodern one in which she questions the autobiographical genre itself

[524] *Ibid*. p. 25.

and challenges its key concepts of "truth," "history" and "memory." The postmodernity of *Under My Skin* is manifest in its characteristic self-reflexivity and metafictionality; the constructive nature of its account; the discursive quality of self-representation; and the fragmented, sometimes incoherent identities it displays, baffling the reader because of the blurring of Lessing's sense of selfhood.

Against masculine autobiographies, Lessing's autobiography worked to delegitimate and undo such scripts, and reconceptualize history and literature in terms that recognize women's contributions. She therefore advanced the autobiographical mode as the expression of the experiences of women writers, who had till then occupied the peripheral or marginal spaces of society. Autobiography became for her not only an act of self-assertion but also of self-creation.

In the light of the theory of relationality, the last part of the final chapter tried to show that Lessing's sense of self is paradoxically shaped to a great extent by resistance to and identification with the mother. Although her relationship to her mother was strained during her life, the second volume of her autobiography shows that she became reconciled with her. Overcoming her matrophobia thus came at an old age with a radical change from a rebellious self, intense hatred and furious feelings towards her mother to a willingness to set up a dialogue between her mother and herself through autobiography.

Lessing's novelistic and autobiographical writings reveal a belief in the non-unitary, multi-layered and dynamic vision of the female subject. This subject is deconstructed in order to better emerge enlightened, and free. Joyce Carol Oates was right when she said: "It might be said of Doris Lessing, as Walt Whitman boasted of himself: I am vast, I contain multitudes."[525] She encapsulates the multitude of experiences and selves in her constant effort to alter our expectations about life and about the range of our own consciousness. She possessed a unique sensitivity, writing out of her own intense experience, her own subjectivity, but at the same time writing out of the spirit of the times. But she would also write beyond the bounds of time and space in her late science-fiction works. She may have attempted to suggest that there are other worlds to explore and unfathom and other alternative ways in which identity could be apprehended.

[525] https://web.usfca.edu/jco/dorislessing/

Bibliography

I. Primary sources

1. Novels

Lessing, Doris. *The Grass Is Singing.* London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994.

---. *Martha Quest* (*Children of Violence, Vol.* I). London: Granada Publishing, 1965.

---. *A Proper Marriage* (*Children of Violence*, Vol. II). London: Granada Publishing Limited, Panther Books Ltd, 1966.

---. *A Ripple from the Storm* (*Children of Violence*, Vol. III). Toronto Sydney, New York: Granada Publishing Limited, Panther Books Ltd, 1969.

---. *The Golden Notebook.* London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1973.

---. *Landlocked*, (*Children of Violence*, Vol. VI). London: Granada Publishing Limited, Panther Books Ltd, 1973.

---. *The Four-Gated City* (*Children of Violence,* Vol. V). Glasgow: Paladin Books, 1990.

---. *The Summer Before the Dark.* London: A Flamingo Modern Classic, 2002.

2. Essays

---. *A Small Personal Voice: Essays*, Reviews, Interviews. New York: Knopf, 1974.

---. *In Pursuit of the English: A Documentary.* London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1960.

---. *Going Home*. Great Britain: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1957.

---. *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*. USA: Harper and Row, 1987.

---. *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1987.

---. *Under My Skin, Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949*. London: Harper Collins, 1994.

---. *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949 to 1962*. London: Harper Collins, 1997.
---. *Time Bites: Views and Reviews*. USA: Fourth Estate, LTD, 2004.

3. Articles (by Doris Lessing)

---. "An Ancient Way to New Freedom." *The Elephant in the Dark. Ed*. Leonard Lewin. New York: Dutton, 1976.
---. "Being Prohibited." *New Statesman*, 51 (21 April 1956).
----. "Group Minds." *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. 7th edition. Ed Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen. New York: Longman, 1999.

II. Secondary sources

1. Theoretical sources

1. 1. Psychoanalytic theory

- **Articles**

Amin, Kartina. "The Chiasm of Rhythm: A Merleau-Pontian Revision of Lacanian embodiment." *Chiasmi International: Merleau-Ponty. The Real and The Imaginary.* USA: University of Memphis, 2003.
Felman, Shoshana. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5 (1975).
Freud, Sigmund. "Libido Theory and Narcissism." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1951.
---. "Female Sexuality." *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud XXI*. London: Hogarth, 1961.
Jung, Carl Gustav. "Civilization in Transition." *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung.* Ed. H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Princeton University Press, 1953.

---. “Mandalas.” *The Collected Works.* Vol. 9. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959.
---. “Psychological Types.” *The Collected Works*. Vol. 6. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959.
---. “Psychology and Religion: West and East.” *The Collected Works.* Vol. 11. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959.
---. “The Language of Dreams”. *The Undiscovered Self: Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams. The Collected Works.* Vol. 18. Trans. G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull. USA: Princeton University Press, 1977.
Lacan, Jacques. “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the “I” as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.” *Ecrits, A Selection*. Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977.
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. “The Child’s Relations with Others.” *M. Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception.* Trans. William Cobb. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
---. *The Visible and the Invisible.* Evanston, III: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

- **Works**

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 2008.
Burston, Daniel. *The Wings of Madness. The Life and Work of R. D Laing.* Cambridge, Massachusttes: Harvard University Press, 1996.
Chaucer, Lynn S. *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness.* USA: Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1992.
Chodorow, Nancy J. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.
Cooper, David. *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry.* London: Paladin, 1967.
Crossley, Nick. *Contesting Psychiatry: Social Movements in Mental Health.* USA and Canada: Routledge, 2006.
Dillon, Martin C. *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1996.
Freud, Sigmund. *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*. Trans. James Strachey. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970.
---. *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung.*

Ed. Alan McGlashan. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979.

---. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Recorded and edited by A. Jaffé. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983.

---. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. London: Pantheon Books, 1953.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits. A Selection.* Trans. Alan Schneider. UK: Tavistock, 1977.

---. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques Alain Miller. Trans. Alain Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique [1953–1954]*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Laing, Ronald David, and A. Esterson. *Sanity, Madness and the Family*. London: Penguin, 1964.

Laing, R. D. *The Divided Self*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965.

---. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible.* Evanston III: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Miller, Jean Baker. *Towards a New Psychology of Women.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. USA: Basic Books, 2000.

Ornstein, Robert. *The Psychology of Consciousness*. Oxford, England: Penguin, 1972.

Polack, Jean-Claude. *Épreuves de la folie, travail psychanalytique et processus psychotiques*. Ramonville Saint-Agnès : Collection « des Travaux et des Jours », 2006.

Pribram, Karl H. *Languages of the Brain: Experimental Paradoxes and Principles in Neurophysiology.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture*. 1830-1980. London: Virago, 1987.

Toadvine, Ted, and Leonard Lawlor. *The Merleau-Ponty Reader.* USA: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

1. 2. Discourse analysis and linguistic theory

- **Articles**

Bakhtin, Mikhail. “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism.” *Speech Genre and Other Essays.* Ed. Caryl Emerson & Michel Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1986.

Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author.” *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997.

Daymond, M. J. “Writing Autobiography and Writing Fiction.” *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography.* Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2006.

Derrida, Jacques. “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences.” *Writing and Difference*, 1966.

---. “The Law of Genres.” *Critical Inquiry* 7, 1980.

De Man, Paul. “Autobiography as De-facement.” *Modern Language Notes*. 94, 1979.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. “Women’s Autobiographical Selves.” *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings.* Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Kaplen, Karen. “Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects.” *Decolonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography*. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1992.

Gusdorf, Georges. “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography.” *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Perloff, Marjorie. “Introduction.” *Postmodern Genres*. Ed. Marjorie Perloff. London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.

Lejeune, Philippe. “The Autobiographical Contract.” *French Literary Theory Today*. Ed. Tzetvan Todorov. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Sammons, Jeffrey L. “The Bildungsroman for Non-specialists, an Attempt at Clarification.” *Reflection and Action, Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Ed. James Hardin. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.

Lukács, Georg. “Realism in the Balance.” *Aesthetics and Politics*. Ed. Ronald Taylor et al. London: New Left Books, 1977. pp. 28-57.

Lyotard, Jean-François. “From Answer to Question: What is the Postmodern?” *The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts*. Ed. Michael Drolet. London: Routledge, 2003.

Sekula, Allan. “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning.” *Thinking Photography.* Ed. Victor Burgin. Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1982.
Sprinker, Michael. “Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography.” *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
Stanton, Domna. “Autobiography: Is the Subject Different?” *The Female Autograph.* Ed. Domna C. Stanton. New York: New York Literary Forum V, 1984.
Williams, Raymond. “Realism and the Contemporary Novel.” *Universities and Left Review*. Vol. 4, Summer 1958.

- **Works**

Alexander, Marguerite. *Flights From Realism: Themes and Strategies in Postmodernist British and American Fiction.* Great Britain: Edward Arnold, 1990.
Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality.* London: Routledge, 1999.
Austin, Jean Angshaw. *How to Do Things with Words.* Eds. J. O. Urmson, M. Sbisa. Oxford: Clarendon Harvard, 1955.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984
---. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Salvic Series, no. 1. USA: Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
---. *Image-Music-Text.* London: Fontana Press, 1977.
Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics.* Coral Gable: University of Miami Press, 1971.
Benstock, Shari. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings.* Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
Benveniste, Emile. *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, II. France : Gallimard, 1974.
Brdozki, Bella, and C. Schenck. *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics.* USA: Cornell University Press and Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1975.
Dallenbach, Lucien. *The Mirror in the Text.* Trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes. Chi-

cago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

De Biasi, Pierre-Marc. *La génétique des textes.* Paris : Nathan Université, 2000.

Eakin, J. P. *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Field, Trevor. *Form and Function in the Diary Novel.* USA: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989.

Fludernik, Monika. *An Introduction to Narratology*. London: Routlege, 2009.

Foster, Hal. *Postmodern Culture*. Britain: Pluto Press, 1990.

Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. USA: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Gindin, James. *Postwar British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963.

Girard, René. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque.* Bernard Grasset, Paris : 1961.

Gudmundsdottir, Gunnthorunn. Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing. New York: Rodopi B. V., 2003.

Hutcheon, Linda. A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

---. *A Theory of Parody.* New York and London: Methuen, 1985.

---. *Ironie/ parodie, 1. Réflexions théoriques*. Canada : Les Editions Trintextes Trinity College, 2005.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Jelinek, Estelle C. *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

Kontje, Todd Curtis. *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*. Columbia: Camden House, 1993.

Kuhn, Anna. *Canon as Narrative, A Feminist Reading.* New York: Peter Lang, 1991.

Lima, Maria Helena. *Decolonizing Genre: Caribbean Women Writers and the Bildungsroman*. College Park: University of Marylan, 1993.

Martinson, Deborah. *In The Pressure of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1992.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Great Britain: Routledge, 1991.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture.* New York: Verso, 1987.

Mortier, Daniel. *Les grands genres littéraires*. Paris : H. Champion, 2001.

Rousset, Jean. *Narcisse romancier.* Paris : Librairie José Corti, 1973.

Rugg, Linda Haverty. *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography.* USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Sangsue, Daniel. *La Parodie*. Paris : Hachette, 1994.

Smith, S. & Watson. J. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. (2nd ed.). USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Great Britain: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Thévoz, Michel. *Le langage de la rupture*. France : Presses Universitaires de France, 1978.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Genres in Discourse*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

---. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Press, 1973.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.* London: The Hogarth Press, 1987 [1957].

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1984.

1. 3. Gender studies

- **Articles**

Bartkey, Lee Sandra. "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." *Feminism and Foucault, Reflections on Resistance*. Ed. I. Diamond and L. Quinby. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999. pp. 25-45.

Butler, Judith. "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions." *The Judith Butler Reader*. Ed. Sarah Salih. Malde, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

---. "Burning Acts−Injurious Speech." *Performativity and Performance.* Ed. A. Parker, E. K. Sedgwick. London: Routledge, 1995.

---. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." *The Twentieth-Century Performance Read-*

er. Ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts. London: Routledge, 1996.

Das, Liza. "Interrogating Culture: Sexuality, Madness and Marxism in the London Novels of Doris Lessing." *Studies in Women Writers in English.* Vol. VI, 2007.

Felman, Shoshana. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5 (1975). pp. 2-10.

Flieger, Jerry A. "Becoming-Woman: Deleuze, Schreber and Molecular Identification." In Buchanan, Ian, and Claire Colebrook. *Deleuze and Feminist Theory.* Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 2000.

Gilligan, Carol. "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of self and Morality." *The Future of Difference*. Ed. Hester Einstein and Alice Jardine, Barnard College Women's Center. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980.

Herndl, Diane Price. "The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic." *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic.* Ed. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry, 7-24, Feminist Criticism and Theory Series. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Times." *Signs.* Vol. 7. N° 1. 1981.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary theory*. London: Routledge, 1985.

Morgan, Ellen. "Human Becoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel." *Images of Women in Fiction, Feminist Perspectives.* Ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972.

Patmore, Coventry. "The Angel in the House." *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*. Eds. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle. Peterborough: Broadview, 1999.

Riviere, Jean. "Womanliness as a Masquerade." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Vol. 10, 1929.

- **Works**

Batsleer, Janet. Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke, and Chris Weedon. *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class.* USA and Canada: Routledge, 2003.

Battersby, Christine. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. London: The Women's Press, 1989.

Beaudrillard, Jean, et Marc Guillaume. *Figures de l'altérité*. Paris : Descartes et Cie, 1994.

Ben Abbes, Hédi. *Frontières et syncrétismes*, Actes du colloque organisé les 27 et 28 mars

1998 par le groupe de recherche ALSO (Art, littérature et société dans les Pays Anglophones). Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002.

Bergner, Gwen. *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex, and Psychoanalysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *La domination masculine*. Paris: Seuil, 1998.

---. Le sens commun : *La distinction critique sociale du jugement.* Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1979.

Buchanan, Ian, and Claire Colebrook. *Deleuze and Feminist Theory.* Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 2000.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge, 1999.

Carter, Angela. *Notes from the Front Line, On Gender and Writing*. Ed. Michèle Wandor, London: Pandora, 1983.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Chowers, Eyal. *The Modern Self in the Labyrinth: Politics and the Entrapment Imagination.* USA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Craik, Jennifer. *The Face of Fashion, Cultural Studies in Fashion*. London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005.

Cusset, François. *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis.* Paris : La Découverte, 2005.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex.* Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: India University Press, 1984.

---. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction.* Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1989.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Dialogues/ Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet*. France : Flammarion, 1996.

---. Difference and Repetition. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987.

Didier, Béatrice. *L'écriture-femme.* Paris : PUF, 1981.

Felber, Lynette. *Gender and Genre in Novels without End, The British Roman-Fleuve*. USA: University Press of Florida, 1995.

Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change.* Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.

---. *The History of Sexuality.* Trans. R. Hurley. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.

---. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault.* Ed. Luther H. Hartin et al. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development.* USA: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Goodman, Elisabeth. *Approaching Literature: Literature and Gender*. USA and Canada: The Open University, Routledge, 1996.

Grenier-Torres, Chrystelle. *L'identité genrée au coeur des transformations : du corps sexué au corps genré.* Paris : L'Harmattan, 2010.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot, Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. USA: Midland Book, 1989.

Hogeland, Lisa Maria. *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement*. USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.* New York: Routledge, 2015.

Huntington, Patricia, and Nancy J. Holland. *Feminist Interpretation of Martin Heidegger*. USA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. G. Gill Cornell. New York: University Press, Ithaca, 1985.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

La Belle, Jenijoy. *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Laqueur, Thomas. *La fabrique du sexe : essai sur le corps et le genre en Occident.* Traduit de l'anglais par Michel Gautier. Paris : Gallimard, 1992.

Lauret, Maria. *Liberating Literature.* London (EC4P 4EE): Routledge, 1994.

Lombardi, Giancarlo. *Rooms with a View: Feminist Diary Fiction, 1952-1999*. London: Associated University Press, 2002.

Marret, Sophie, et Claude Le Fustec. *La fabrique du genre : (dé)constructions du féminin et*

du masculin dans les arts et la littérature anglophones. Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008.

Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender.* London: Routledge, 2013.

Mercier, Michel. *Le roman féminin*. Vendôme : PUF, 1976.

Miles, Rosalind. *The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel*. USA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.

Parker, Rozsika. *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence.* London: Routledge, 1995.

Pratt, Annis. *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction.* USA: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 1981.

Regard, Frédéric. *L'écriture féminine en Angleterre* : Perspectives postféministes. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002.

Rich, Adrienne. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. London: Virago, 1986.

Robinson, Sally. *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Sceats, Sarah. *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

---. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture. 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987.

---. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Virago Press, 1986.

Théry, Irène. *La distinction de sexe: Une nouvelle approche de l'égalité*. Paris : Odile Jacob, 2007.

Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Wilson, Elizabeth. *Adorned in Dreams, Fashion and Modernity.* New York: IB. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2005

---. *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968*. London: Tavistock, 1980.

Woolf, Virginia. *Women and Writing. Ed. Michelle Barret.* New York: Harcourt, 1979.

1. 4. Philosophy

- **Articles**

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays.* Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971. pp. 127-188.

Derrida, Jacques. “The Calculation of the Subject. *Who Comes After the Subject?” Cahiers Confrontation* 20, Winter 1989. pp. 91-114.

Sekula, Allan. “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning.” *Thinking Photography.* Ed. Victor Burgin. Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1982.

Torrents, Nissa. “Testimony to Mysticism.” [1980]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations*. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994.

- **Works**

Austin, Reginald. *Racism and Aparteid in Southern Africa, Rhodesia.* Paris: The Unesco Press, 1975.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1993.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.

---. *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

---. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject.* New York: Picador, 2004.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Buckley, Paul and F. David Peat. *A Question of Physics: Conversations in Physics and Biology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Davies, Tony. *Humanism. The New Critical Idiom*. Routledge: USA and Canada, 1997.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

---. *Writing and Difference.* Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1966.

Gergen, Kenneth. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962.

Holland, Eugene W. *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis.* USA and Canada: Routledge, 1999.

Shah, Idris. *The Sufis.* London: The Octagon Press, 1999.

Jackson, John E. *La question du moi, un aspect de la modernité poétique européenne* : T.S. Eliot, Paul Celan, Yves Bunnefoy. Baconnière-Neuchatel. Suisse : Langages, 1978.

Kahn, Coppélia, and Gayle Greene. *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*. USA and Canada: Routledge, 1993.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Altérité et Transcendance*. Paris : Fata Morgana, 1995.

Marx, Karl. "Préface." *Contribution à la critique de l'économie politique*. Trans. M. Husson, and G. Badia. Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977.

Malabou, Catherine. *Changer de différence : le féminin et la question philosophique.* Paris : Galilée, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy. Trans. Walter Kauffman.* New York: Random House Press, 1967.

Paras, Eric. *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge.* Other Press: New York, 2006.

Radhakrishnan, R. *Between Identity and Location: The Cultural Politics of Theory.* India: Orient Longman, 2007.

Raschke, Deborah. *Modernism, Metaphysics and Sexuality.* Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006.

Relph, Edward. Place and Placelessness. London: Pion, 1976.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: The Citadel Press, 1966.

Wilson, Elizabeth. *Adorned in Dreams, Fashion and Modernity*. New York: Tauris and Co

Ltd, 2005.

2. 2. Critical sources on Doris Lessing

2. 1. Critical articles on Doris Lessing

Adams, Adrian. “Le cercueil dans la valise: L’Afrique et l’avenir des Européens dans les romans de Doris Lessing” (“A Casket in the Wallet. Africa and the White People’s Future in the Novels of Doris Lessing”). *Cahiers d'études africaines.* Vol. 24, Cahier 94, 1984, pp. 266-268.

Allen, Orphia Jane. “Structure and Motif in Doris Lessing’s A Man and Two Women.” *Doris Lessing.* Eds. Margaret Church and William T. Stafford. Special Issue of Modern Fiction Studies 26. 1, 1980.

Barnouw, Dagmar. “‘Disorderly Company’: From *The Golden Notebook* to *The Four- Gated City.*” Eds. Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger. *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*. New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1986. 115-125. Print.

Bazin, Nancy Topping. “The Evolution of Doris Lessing’s Art from Mystical Moments to Space Fiction.” *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Reunion in Science Fiction/Fantasy*. Ed. Robert Reilly. West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. pp. 157-167.

Brevet-Barbaud, Anne-Laure. “Figures de la discontinuité subjective dans *A Proper Marriage* de Doris Lessing.” *Les Cahiers de CEIMA* 1. pp. 47-59, 2003.

Budhos, Shirley. “The Theme of Enclosure in Selected Works by Doris Lessing.” *Research in African Literature.* Vol. 19, No. 2, Special Issue on Women’s Writing, Summer 1988, pp. 266-268.

Cederstrom, Lorelei. “Doris Lessing’s Use of Satire in *The Summer Before the Dark*.” *Doris Lessing.* Eds. Margaret Church and William T. Stafford. Special Issue of Modern Fiction Studies 26. 1 (1980), pp. 131-47.

Christ, Carol P. “Diving Deep and Surfacing.” *Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*, 1980, pp. 159, in Mystics Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 4, December 1988, pp. 216-217.

Das, Liza. “Interrogating Culture: Sexuality, Madness and Marxism in the London Novels of Doris Lessing.” *Studies in Women Writers in English.* Vol. VI, 2007, pp. 20-44.

Fishburn, Catherine. “Doris Lessing: Life, Work, and Criticism.” *A Literature of Their Own,*

Virago Press, London, 1978.
---. “The Manichean Allegories of Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*.” *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 25, No. 4, Winter 1994, pp. 1-15.
---. “The Nightmare Repetition: the Mother-Daughter Conflict in Doris Lessing’s *Children Of Violence*.” *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. Eds. Cathy Davidson and E. M. Broner, New York: Unger, 1980, pp. 207-216.
Frampton, Edith. “Horrors of the Breast: Cultural Boundaries and the Abject in *The Grass Is Singing*.” *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings.* Eds. Susan Watkins and Alice Ridout, London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009.
Gee, Maggie, and Lisa Appignanesi. “The Contemporary Writer: Gender and Genre.” *Writing: a Woman's Business: Women, Writing and the Market Place.* Manchester [England] and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998.
Gohlman, Susan A. “Martha Hesse of *The Four-Gated City*: A *Bildungsroman* Already behind her.” *South Atlantic Bulletin.* Vol. 43, No. 4, (November 1978), pp. 95-106.
Greene, Gayle. “Doris Lessing’s *Landlocked*: A New Kind of Knowledge.” *Contemporary Literature.* Vol. 28. No. 1. (Spring 1987), pp. 82-103.
---. “Feminist Fiction, Feminist Form, Frontiers.” *A Journal of Women Studies.* Vol. 11, No. 2/3, Spirituality, Values, and Ethics, 1990, pp. 82-88.
Gurr, Andrew. “The Freedom of Exile in Naipaul and Doris Lessing.” *Ariel.* 13 October 1982, pp. 7-18.
Hardin, Nancy Shields. “The Sufi Teaching Story and Doris Lessing.” *Twentieth Century Literature*. Vol. 23, No. 3, October 1977, pp. 314-326.
Henke, Suzette. “Doris Lessing’s *Golden Notebook*: A Paradox of Postmodern Play.” *Rereading Modernism RLE. New Directions in Feminist Criticism*. Ed. Lisa Rado. New York: Routledge Library Editions, 1994.
Hinz, Evelyn J. “Hierogamy *versus* Wedlock: Types of Marriage, Plots and their Relationship to Genres of Prose Fiction.” *PMLA*. Vol. 91. N 5. October, 1976. pp. 900-913.
Howe, Florence. “A Conversation with Doris Lessing (1966).” *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 14, No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973, pp. 418-436.
Hunter, Eva. “Marriage as Death. A Reading of Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing*.” *Women and Writing in South Africa*. Ed. Cherry Clayton. Marshaltown: Heineman Southern Africa, 1989.
Hunter, Melanie and Duby McIntosh. “A Question of Wholes: Spiritual Intersection, Apocalyptic Vision in the Work of Doris Lessing.” *Doris Lessing Newsletter.* 18. 2 (Winter 1997),

pp. 1, 8-10.

Jouve, Nicole Ward. “Doris Lessing: Of Mud and Other Matter: The *Children of Violence*.” *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue.* London & New York: Routledge, 1991. pp. 119-142.

Kamatchi, P. “Maternal Metaphor: Voice Within in the Autobiographies of Doris Lessing.” *Journal of Literature, Culture, and Media Studies.* Vol. 2, No. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 337-344.

Kaplan, Cora. “Fictions of Feminism: Figuring the Maternal.” *Feminist Studies.* Vol. 20, No. 1, Spring 1994, pp. 153-167.

Kaplan, Sydney, J. “The Limits of Consciousness in the Novels of Doris Lessing.” *Contemporary Literature,* Autumn 14, 1973, pp. 536-549.

Kauffman, Linda S. “Sexuality, Sexual Politics and the Displacement of Identity in *The Golden Notebook*.” *Epistolary Modes In Modern Fiction*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

---. “*The Golden Notebook*: Anna Wulf’s Schizoanalysis.” *Feminist Critical Negotiations*. Eds. Alice A. Parker, and Elisabeth A. Meese. USA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992.

Krouse, Tonya. “Freedom as Effacement in *The Golden Notebook*: Theorizing Pleasure, Subjectivity and Authority.” *Journal of Modern Literature*. Vol. 29, No. 3, Spring 2006, pp. 39-56.

Lefcowitz, Barbara. “Dream and Action in Lessing’s *The Summer Before the Dark*.” *Doris Lessing Newsletter.* Brookly College Press, 1979. pp. 107-120.

Marchino, Lois A. “Maps of New Worlds.” *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers.* Ed. Robert L. Ross. New York: Garland 1991.

---.“The Search for Self in the Novels of Doris Lessing.” *Studies in the Novel.* Vol. 4. N° 2. Commonwealth Novel (Summer 1972). pp. 252-261.

Morgan, Ellen. “Alienation of the Woman Writer in *The Golden Notebook*.” *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 14, No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973, pp. 471-480.

Oates, Joyce Carol. “A Visit with Doris Lessing.” *Southern Review*, ix. 4, October 1973, pp. 873-82.

Perrakis, Phyllis Sternberg. “The Marriage of Inner and Outer Space in Doris Lessing’s Shikasta.” *SF-TH Inc: Science Fiction Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 2, Science Fiction by Women, July 1990, pp. 221-238.

Pickering, Jean. Martha Quest and “the Anguish of Feminine Fragmentation.” Eds. Sprague, Claire and Virginia Tiger. *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*. Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall

& Co, 1986, pp. 94-100.

Rapping, Elayne Antler. “Unfree Women: Feminism in Doris Lessing’s Novels.” *Women's Studies*. Vol. 3, 1975, pp. 29-44.

Rigney, Barbara Hill. “Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel.” Studies in Bronte, Woolf, Lessing and Atwood, 1978, pp. xi-48.

Roberts, Robin. “Post-Modernism and Feminist Science Fiction.” *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Science Fiction by Women, July 1990, pp. 136-15.

Roberts, Sheila. “Sites of Paranoia and Taboo: Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing* and Gordimer’s July's People.” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Autumn 1993, pp. 73-85.

Rose, Ellen Cronan, and Carey Kaplan. “Doris Lessing: The Alchemy of Survival.” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Special Issue on Popular Culture, Summer 1989, pp. 301-304.

Rosen, Ellen I. “Martha’s ‘Quest’ in Lessing’s Children of Violence.” *Frontiers: Mothers and Daughters*, Summer 1978, pp. 54-59.

Rosner, Victoria. “Home Fires: Doris Lessing: Colonial Architecture and the Reproduction of Mothering.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1999, pp. 59-89.

Rubenstein, Roberta. “The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing.” *Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

Schlueter, Paul. “Doris Lessing: The Free Woman’s Commitment.” *Contemporary British Novelists*. Ed. Ch. Shapiro: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965, pp. 48-61.

Schneider, Karen. “A Different War Story: Doris Lessing’s Great Escape.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Autumn 1995, pp. 259-269.

Scott, Lynda. “Lessing’s Early and Transitional Novels: The Beginnings of a Sense of Selfhood.” *Deep South*, Vol. 4, N. 1, Autumn 1998.

---. “Writing the Self: Selected Works of Doris Lessing.” *Deep South*, Vol. 2 n. 2, Winter 1996.

Seamon, David. “Newcomers, Existential Outsiders and Insiders, Their Portrayal in Two Books by Doris Lessing.” *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on the Experience of Place*. Ed. Douglas Pockock. London: Croom Helm, 1981, pp. 85-100.

Sebastyen, Amanda. “Mixed Lessing.” *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 3, No. 5, February 1986, pp. 14-15.

Seligma, Dee. “The Sufi Quest.” *World Literature Written in English*. 12 November 1973, 190-206.

Shields Hardin, Nancy. “Doris Lessing and the Sufi Way.” *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14,

No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973, pp. 565-581.

Spencer, Kathleen L. "Rescuing The Female Child: The Fiction of Joanna Russ" ("La délivrance de l'enfant de sexe féminin: la fiction de Joanna Russ"). SF-TH Inc: *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Science Fiction by Women, July 1990, pp. 167-187.

Spilka, Mark. "Lessing and Lawrence: The Battles of the Sexes." *Contemporary Literature,* 15 (1975), pp. 218-240.

Sprague, Claire. "Re-reading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition." *Chapel Hill*, 1987, xi, pp. 200-210.

---. "'Without Contraries is No Progression:' Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*." *Modern Fiction Studies,* 26 Spring, 1980, pp. 99-116.

Stimpson, Catherine R. "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development.* Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsh, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1983, pp. 186-205.

Stout, Janis P. "A Quest of One's Own: Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*." *A Review of International English Literature.* Vol. 21, N° 2, April 1990. pp. 5-22.

Sukninick Lynn. "Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Special Number on Doris Lessing, Autumn 1973, pp. 515-535.

Thrope, Michael. *Doris Lessing*. London: Longman Group LTD, 1973.

Vlastos, Marion. "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy." *Modern Language Association, PMLA*, Vol. 91, No. 2, March 1976, pp. 245-258.

---. "Sex and the New Woman in *The Golden Notebook*." *The Iowa Review.* Vol. 5, No. 4, Fall 1974, pp. 106-120.

Watkins, Susan. "'Grande Dame' or 'New Woman': Doris Lessing and the Palimpsest." *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory.* Vol. 17, issue 3-4, 2006, pp. 243-62.

---. "Remembering Home: Nation and Identity in the Recent Writing of Doris Lessing." *Feminist Review*, 85, 2007, pp. 97-115.

Webb, Marilyn. "Feminism and Doris Lessing: Becoming the Men We Wanted to Marry." *Village Voice*, XVIII, 14 January, 1973, p. 1.

Worthington, Marjorie. "The Novel Construction of the Writer: Symbiotic Texts, Parasitic Authors in *The Golden Notebook*." *Literature and the Writer.* New York: Editions Rodopi, B.V, 2004.

Zwerdling, Alex. "Toward Prophetic Fiction." *The Sewanee Review*. Vol. 84, No. 2, Spring 1976, pp. xxxvi, xxxviii, xl.

Zak, Michele Wender. "*The Grass Is Singing*: A Little Novel about the Emotions." *Contempo-*

rary Literature. Vol. 14, N. 4 (Autumn 1973).

2. 2. Critical works on Doris Lessing

Bloom, Harold. *Doris Lessing*. USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.

Boone, Joseph Allen. *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism.* USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Danziger, Marie A. *Text/Countertext: Postmodern Paranoia in Samuel Beckett, Doris Lessing, and Philip Roth.* New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Denewet, Christine. *A Woman, fighting her way up and out: A Study of Doris Lessing's Novel*: *The Golden Notebook*. Catholic University of Leuven, 1984.

Draine, Betsy. *Substance under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Print.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-century Women.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. Print.

Fahim, Shadia S. *Doris Lessing and Sufi Equilibrium: The Evolving Form of The Novel*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Fand, Roxanne J. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwoo*d. London: Associated University Presses, 1999.

Galin, Muge. *Between East and West, Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

Greene, Gayle. *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition.* USA: Indiana University Press, 1991.

---. *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change.* USA: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Hite, Molly. *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Holmquist, Ingrid. *From Society to Nature. A Study of Doris Lessing's Children of Violence*. Gothenburg Studies in English 47. Gothenburg, Sweden: Acta Universitatus Gothenburgensis, 1980.

Joannou, Maroula. *Contemporary Women's Writing: From The Golden Notebook to The Color Purple*. USA: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Knapp, Mona. *Doris Lessing*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984. Print.

La Belle, Jenijoy. *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass.* Ithaca: Cornell Uni-

versity Press, 1988.

Labovitz, Esther, K. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Peter Lang, 1986.

Lombardi, Giancarlo. *Rooms with a View: Feminist Diary Fiction, 1952-1999*. London: Associated University Press, 2002.

Martinson, Deborah. *In The Pressure of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1992.

Maslen, Elizabeth. *Doris Lessing*. United Kingdom: Northcote House, 1994.

Michael, Magali Cornier. *Feminism in the Postmodern Impulse, Post-World War II Fiction*. United States of America: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Parker, Alice A. and Elizabeth A. Meese. *Feminist Critical Negotiations*. USA: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 1992.

Perrakis, Phyllis Sternberg. *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing*. USA: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Pratt, Annis and L. S. Dembo. *Doris Lessing: Critical Studies.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974. Print.

Raschke, Deborah, Phyllis Stenberg Perrakis, and Sandra Singer. *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010.

Ridout, Alice Rachel. *The Good Parodist: Beyond Images of Escape in the Fiction of Doris Lessing, Durham Theses*. Durham University, 1997. Thesis available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5067/

Ridout, Alice, and Susan Watkins. *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings.* London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009.

Robinson, Sally. *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction.* USA: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Sage, Lorna. *Contemporary Writers, Doris Lessing*. London: Methuen, 1983.

---. *Doris Lessing: Women in the House of Fiction*. New York: Palgrave, 1992.

Thorpe, Michael. *Doris Lessing.* Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1973.

Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Whittaker, Ruth. *Modern Novelists: Doris Lessing*. London: Macmillan Publishers LTD, 1988.

Yelin, Louise. *From The Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer*. USA: Cornell University Press, 1998.

2. 3. Doctoral Dissertations on Doris Lessing

Brevet, Anne-Laure. “Le sujet et ses reflets dans l'œuvre romanesque de Doris Lessing.” Doctoral Dissertation at la Sorbonne Centrale, 1998.

Cardona, Geneviève. “A Study of Racial Segregation and Political Life in The Children of Violence by Doris Lessing.” Master’s thesis in English Literature. Besançon, 1975.

Seiler-Franklin, Carol. “Boulder-pushers: Women in the Fiction of Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, and Iris Murdoch.” Doctoral Dissertation at Frankfurt University. Bern: P. Lang, 1979.

Munnick, Yvonne. “Ecriture romanesque et engagement politique dans les oeuvres de Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer et André Brink.” Doctoral Dissertation at Toulouse-le-Mirail, 1990.

3. Internet sources

Abel, Elizabeth. “(E)Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women.” *Signs*. Vol. 6, No. 3. (Spring, 1981), pp. 413-435.
URL:http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00979740%28198121%296%3A3%3C413%3A%28ITDOF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6

Checuti, Natacha. “De ‘On ne naît pas femme’ à ‘On n'est pas femme.’ De Simone de Beauvoir à Monique Wittig.” *Genre, sexualité & société* [en ligne], n°1/ printemps 2009, mis en ligne le 09 juillet 2009.
URL: http://gss.revues.org/index477.html

Lessing, Doris. Doris Lessing: Why do we remember: An interview with Michele Field. Publishers Weekly, 1994.
Retrieved from URL: http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-15843056/doris-lessing-whydo.html.

Elmaleh, Eliane. “Les ‘Women’s Studies’ aux États-Unis.” *Transatlantica* [en ligne], 1/2003, mis en ligne le 27 mars 2006.
URL: http://Transatlantica.revues.org/541

Franko, Carol. “Authority, Truth-telling, and Parody: Doris Lessing and ‘the Book.’” *Papers on Language and Literature*, vol. 31, no3, pp. 255-285 (1 p.3/4) / Summer, 1995.

URL:http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3708/is_199507/ai_n8728079/

Gibbons, Fiachra. “Lay off Men, Lessing Tells Feminists”: *Special Report: Edinburgh Festival* 2001, Guardian .co.uk, August 14, 2001.

URL:http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/aug/14/edinburghfestival2001.edinburghbookfestival2001

Havel, Vaclav. “The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World.” Czech Embassy, July 4, 1994.

URL: http://dieoff.org/page38.htm (accessed May 30, 2006).

Hazelton, Lesley. “Doris Lessing on Feminism, Communism and Space fiction.” *The New York Times*. July 25, 1982.

URL:http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/01/10/specials/lessing-space.html

Jensen, Merete Stistrup. “La notion de nature dans les théories de l'écriture féminine.” Clio, numéro 11-2000. *Parler, chanter, lire, écrire,* [en ligne], mis en ligne le 09 novembre 2007.

URL: http://clio.revues.org/index218.html

Libby, Marion Vlastos. “Sex and the New Woman in *The Golden Notebook.”* University of Iowa: *The Iowa Review,* Vol. 5, No.4 (Fall, 1974), pp. 106-120.

Magie, Michael L. “Doris Lessing and Romanticism.” *College English* 38.6 (1977): 531-52. JSTOR. Web. 1 April 2008.

Ommundsen L. “Récits de Voyage : Les aventures du discours féminin.” *Etudes anglaises,* 2007/1, Volume 60, p. 92-100.

URL:http://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID_REVUE=ETAN&ID_NUMPUBLIE=ETAN_601&ID_ARTICLE=ETAN_601_0092

Crown, Sarah. “Doris Lessing Wins Nobel Prize.” October 11, 2007.

URL:http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/oct/11/nobelprize.awardsandprizes (accessed July 7, 2009)

Shah, Idries. “Doris Lessing Pays Tribute to a Great Exponent of Sufism.” *The London Times: On The Commanding Self*, May 5, 1994.

URL: http://ishk.net/sufis/lessing.html

Veschur, Christine. “Quel genre? Résistances et mésententes autour du mot ‘ Genre’ dans le développement.” N° 200 Revue Tiers Monde- octobre-décembre 2009, pp. 785-803.

URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/magazine/27wwln-Q4-t.html?pagewanted=print.

URL:http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/aug/14/edinburghfestival2001.edinburghbookfestival2001.

4. Interviews :

Daymond, M. J. “Writing Autobiography and Writing Fiction.” *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography.* Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie. USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2006.

Dean, Michael. “Writing as Time Runs Out.” *Putting the Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing 1964-1994.* Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. London: Fontana, 1996.

De Bertodano, Helena. “Life is Stronger than Fiction…at 76, Doris Lessing wants to be alone.” *The Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 1996.

T. Frick. “Caged by The Experts.” *Doris Lessing: Conversations.* Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994.

Garner, Dwight. “A Notorious Life. An interview with Doris Lessing.” *Salon*. New York, 1997.

http://www.salon.com/1997/11/11/lessing/

Lee, Hermione. “A conversation with Doris Lessing.” *Wasafiri*, 24 (3), 2009.

Moyers, Bill. “Bill Moyers talks with Doris Lessing.” *Bill Moyers Journal, January 24*, 2003 (PBS video tape).

http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives/lessingnow_vid.html

Stamberg, Susan. “An Interview with Doris Lessing.” *Doris Lessing Newsletter*, 8 Fall, 1984, 3-4, 15.

Torrents, Nissa. “Testimony to Mysticism.” [1980]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton*: Ontario Review Press, 1994.

Vahanian, Noelle. “A Conversation with Catherine Malabou.” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 9 no. 1, (Winter 2008), pp. 1-13.

Von Schwarzkopf, Margarete. “Placing their Fingers on the Wounds of our Times,” [1981]. *Doris Lessing: Conversations. Ed. Earl G. Ingersoll. Princeton*: Ontario Review Press, 1994.

5. Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

Cirlot, J. C. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Routledge New Edition, 1990.

Cod, Lorraine. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Cuddon, J. A. *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998.

Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Gikundi, Simon. "Lessing, Doris." *Encyclopedia of African Literature.* Ed. Simon Gikundi. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.

http://global.britannica.com

Oxford English Dictionary

http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Oxford+English+Dictionary

INDEX NOMINUM

Austin Jean Angshaw 47
Bakhtin Mikhail 101, 125, 135
Barthes Roland 135, 136, 287, 288, 313, 314
Bartkey Sandra 42, 49
Bergson Henri 160
Bhabha Homi 68
Butler Judith 17, 44, 48, 53, 141, 336
Chodorow Nancy 17, 76, 77, 90, 95, 253
Cixous Hélène 143
De Beauvoir Simone 37, 59, 118
De Lauretis Teresa 47, 48
Derrida Jacques 15, 18, 107, 135
Foucault Michel 22, 42, 49, 52, 53, 194, 233, 287
Freud Sigmund 36, 76, 165, 166, 187, 189, 190
Gilbert Sandra 93, 147, 233
Gubar Susan 93, 147, 233
Gusdorf Georges 342
Heidegger Martin 21, 338
Hirsh Marianne 17, 110, 267, 270, 277
Hutcheon Linda 108, 112, 135, 284, 290, 291
Irigaray Luce 17, 42, 48, 55, 143
Jung Carl Gustav 9, 17, 98, 99, 163
Kristeva Julia 17, 92, 143
Lacan Jacques 32, 33, 34, 37, 39, 50, 59, 61, 75, 76, 144
Laing Ronald David 9, 17, 18, 194
Lyotard Jean François 134
Malabou Catherine 27, 54, 380
Marx Karl 71
Merleau-Ponty Maurice 37, 38, 41, 42
Moi Toril 143
Rich Adrienne 17, 75, 82, 91, 305
9, 17, 19, 183, 216, 217, 225, 226, 229, 234, 252, 264, 267, 269, 274, 354
Rubenstein Roberta 23, 126, 163, 186, 191, 218, 221, 229, 262, 263, 268, 280, 324, 327
Sartre Jean-Paul 41, 61, 62
Simone de Beauvoir 17, 37, 55, 118, 297
Shah Idries 20, 262, 263, 265, 271, 277, 281
Showalter Elaine 17, 79, 80, 142, 143, 211, 233, 234, 308
Todorov Tzvetan 126, 133
Waugh Patricia 136, 225, 227, 255, 324
Woolf Virginia 74, 119, 144

INDEX RERUM

androcentric: 4, 109, 110, 116, 124, 309, 356
autobiography : 6, 7, 10, 13, 17, 24, 25, 73, 155, 165, 166, 171, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 306, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 316, 317, 319, 320, 321, 322, 324, 326, 328, 330, 331, 332, 334, 335, 336, 338, 339, 340, 341, 343, 345, 346, 347, 348, 350
bildungsroman: 4, 22, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117, 118, 120, 121, 124, 126, 129, 130, 133, 150, 277
bildungsromane: 108, 110, 112, 125, 130, 356
breakdown: 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 66, 68, 95, 141, 171, 176, 187, 194, 197, 199, 209, 210, 214, 217, 218, 219, 220, 223, 224, 227, 229, 231, 232, 235, 236, 237, 240, 246, 248, 261, 332, 351, 354, 357
breakthrough: 9, 16, 18, 184, 217, 218, 219, 227, 230, 236, 255, 266, 270, 272, 277, 357
collective unconscious: 23, 98, 170, 175, 192, 259
communist: 14, 71, 72, 94, 115, 119, 151, 161, 172, 175, 178, 201, 212, 218, 222, 227, 238, 317, 333, 355
deconstructionist: 9, 14, 20, 353
deterritorializing: 124
discursivity: 300
écriture féminine: 146, 372, 385
essentialist: 11, 15, 53, 132, 137, 152, 232, 257, 354
fantastic: 31, 109, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 158, 249, 354
femininity: 22, 26, 30, 42, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 78, 80, 81, 119, 133, 141, 145, 213, 230
feminism: 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 53, 145, 146, 150, 152, 153, 154, 233, 354, 356
gender : 4, 9, 12, 15, 16, 21, 22, 27, 28, 43, 45, 47, 52, 53, 54, 56, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 78, 81, 82, 107, 108, 111, 112, 118, 119, 120, 130, 132, 141, 142, 143, 147, 148, 150, 151, 154, 213, 220, 222, 226, 227, 229, 230, 236, 288, 308, 309, 310, 324, 327, 347, 348, 354, 355
genre: 4, 5, 22, 24, 43, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 118, 126, 127, 129, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 149, 159, 281, 286, 287, 288, 290, 292, 293, 295, 308, 321, 322, 332, 341, 349, 356, 359, 372, 385
gynocritical: 144
humanism: 14, 28, 154, 357
immanent: 20, 35, 148, 269, 275
intrinsic impurity: 107
lines of flight: 124
madness: 5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18, 23, 69, 119, 124, 157, 193, 194, 195, 197, 214, 218, 226, 227, 228, 230, 231, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 256, 257, 259, 261, 271, 354, 356, 357
mandala: 172, 175, 179, 357
Marxism: 9, 18, 70, 71, 130, 137, 158, 159, 201, 260, 310, 333, 353, 368, 376

mask: 4, 22, 54, 57, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 206, 207, 290, 304, 356
matrophobia: 73, 74, 82, 91, 346, 350, 359
Matrophobic: 74
metafictional: 293
mirror: 4, 6, 15, 22, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 56, 58, 72, 73, 80, 82, 91, 123, 132, 182, 186, 199, 262, 286, 287, 288, 291, 292, 319, 329, 330, 338, 346, 355
mise en abyme: 287, 319, 329
mysticism: 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 19, 23, 165, 259, 260, 262, 263, 264, 268, 270, 353
nomadic: 120, 122, 123, 125, 353
parodic: 109, 112, 115, 123, 290, 319, 356
performativity: 7, 21, 42, 46, 53, 54, 185, 339, 340
persona: 98, 99, 100, 102, 206, 290, 303, 304, 320, 356
phallogocentrism: 142
postmodern: 25, 108, 109, 132, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 193, 286, 287, 292, 298, 306, 317, 356, 359
realistic: 43, 109, 113, 126, 127, 134, 139, 147, 158, 159, 160, 194, 281, 331, 354
referentiality: 288, 289, 291, 298, 300, 301, 313, 317
relational: 7, 10, 19, 90, 255, 257, 302, 303, 345, 347
rhizomatic: 121
schizophrenia: 5, 8, 9, 15, 17, 23, 193, 194, 197, 198, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 216, 218, 219, 222, 224, 226, 261, 356, 357
self-reflexive: 25, 134, 257, 290, 348
specular double: 35, 73, 80
Sufi: 9, 10, 12, 13, 19, 246, 258, 259, 260, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 270, 273, 274, 277, 279, 280, 357, 377, 380, 381
tajalli: 266, 267, 268, 273
the abject: 92
transcendental: 6, 10, 18, 20, 23, 158, 196, 266, 269, 270, 274, 279, 281, 356