

2001

The Voices from the Sanctuary: The Female Narrators of J M Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* and Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*

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Recommended Citation

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The Voices from the Sanctuary: The Female Narrators of
J M Coetzee's In the Heart of the Country and
Doris Lessing's Memoirs of a Survivor
(TITLE)

BY

James L Forman

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2001
YEAR

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ABSTRACT

In both In the Heart of the Country (1977) by J. M. Coetzee and The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974) by Doris Lessing, a female narrator fabricates a sanctuary—mental rather than physical—that enables each woman to challenge, deflect, or adapt to a conflict and that shelters her from a hostile, patriarchal society. For Coetzee’s narrator (Magda) in In the Heart of the Country, writing, rewriting, and editing provide the necessary devices to establish her asylum in her quest for identity. For Lessing’s narrator (the survivor) in The Memoirs of a Survivor, escaping behind the wall allows her to find refuge from and to bring order to a rapidly disintegrating society.

Because the relationship between the author and narrator in these two novels influences the development of these particular features and characteristics of each narrator, an examination of voice provides evidence that the gender of the author does indeed affect the development of the narrators, evident primarily in the images of time and the engendered perceptions of the narrators. Magda writes from the masculine perspective; her voice represents the male-dominated world of Coetzee controlling the situation from a position of power. A dominant first person “I” helps the reader view her not simply as a spinster in the middle of nowhere, but rather as a member of the patriarchal system found in the outside world.

In the situation of Lessing’s survivor, her feminine perspective and feminine empowerment project a strong woman who makes the transition from a patriarchal outside world to a matriarchal world behind the wall. Her actions behind the wall show an acceptance of the past and the present, but also a projection of a better future when dealing with both environments. Without this particular attitude and exacting strength,

the survivor could not have successfully moved into the world of the wall. This feminine perspective and empowerment influence her writing style and require the inclusion of others' stories.

The shelters fabricated by the narrators, examined in the second section of the paper, are defined by the nature of the spatial dimensions (figurative and literal) of the sanctuaries. This concept of sanctuary evolves from writings about ancient Greek cities in which sanctuaries represent places of asylum and refuge. The narrators' sanctuaries are discussed in terms of an asylum for Magda and a refuge for the survivor.

Magda establishes an asylum to adapt to her masculine fight against nature, evidenced by the voice she employs to deal with the outside world. In contrast to Magda's mental asylum, the corporeal nature of the refuge behind the wall represents the unity of the survivor's joining of feminine perception and feminine power. Within the two novels, the personalities, actions, thoughts, relationships, decisions, writing style, voice, and construction of the sanctuaries must be understood within the framework of the perspective and empowerment afforded the narrators by their authors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Dana Ringuette, my advisor, for his guidance, understanding, direction, and patience. In his course, Criticism and Imagination, I was introduced to the writings of J.M. Coetzee with In the Heart of the Country. Dr Ringuette's classroom discussions formed the foundation for this research.

The thesis committee, two excellent professors, taught interesting and valuable courses. Dr Anne Zahlan's British Fiction class provided the second novel for this paper, Doris Lessing's The Memoirs of a Survivor. Connecting the two novels, New World Dialogs with Dr Ann Boswell supplied me the background for gender writing and voices employed in women's literature. They both have very sharp eyes and very sharp pencils.

The encouragement of Jerry, Lori, and Susan is greatly appreciated.

As the saying goes: "For actions above and beyond." This degree would have not been possible without the support of my wife, Carol—I promise this is the last one.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	
Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	
Introduction	1
Voice	4
Sanctuary	30
Conclusion	52
Works Cited	55

Theories of sexual and textual difference have an impact on theories of narrative, particularly autobiographical narrative. (Sidonie Smith 13)

INTRODUCTION

In both In the Heart of the Country (1977) by J. M. Coetzee and The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974) by Doris Lessing, a female narrator fabricates a sanctuary, mental rather than physical, for protection from the problems each woman faces. For Coetzee's narrator, Magda, in In the Heart of the Country, writing, rewriting, and editing provide the necessary devices to establish her asylum in her quest for identity: "There was a time when I imagined that if I talked [or wrote] long enough it would be revealed to me what it means to be an angry spinster in the heart of nowhere" (4). For Lessing's narrator (the survivor) in The Memoirs of a Survivor, escaping behind the wall allows her to find refuge from and to bring order to a rapidly disintegrating society: "For no matter how I swept, picked up and replaced overturned chairs, tables, objects; scrubbed floors and rubbed down walls, whenever I re-entered the rooms after a spell away in my real life, all had to be done again...I decided that what I had to do was repaint the rooms" (63, 65). Both narrators imagine a structure or sanctuary that enables each to challenge, deflect, or adapt to a conflict.

In the Heart of the Country depicts Magda's struggles with the lonely life of the only daughter/child of a South African widower. Pressured by the external power of a patriarchal society and the internal conflicts of an intimidating father, she seeks shelter in the sanctuary of the farm and the asylum of her room. Within the safety of her room, Magda writes/revises about the confrontations with her father. In one incident, after she describes the arrival of her father and his new bride and how she kills them, she recants

her story of a new wife and the murders. Although Magda continues to create narratives about her life, the primary concentration of her writings pertains to the events following the second time she kills her father. Faced now with outside inquires and intrusions, she becomes increasingly more isolated on the farm. Magda writes of her day-to-day struggles to survive and the visions of her future.

The Memoirs of a Survivor chronicles the events of a woman surrounded by a declining society rapidly approaching anarchy. The survivor, a strong independent woman, searches for a solution for her situation. A few citizens believe that migration from the city provides the answer. The survivor has friends who live in the countryside, and fleeing to the country may be an option. However, she suspects some activity behind the wall in her apartment. One day, the wall permits the survivor to journey into the rooms beyond the wall. Shortly after this episode, two strangers and an animal appear at her door. The man states that the young girl (Emily) and her animal (Hugo) are now the responsibility of the survivor. With the burden of two additional beings, the survivor intensifies her search for a sanctuary. As conditions in the outside world deteriorate, the refuge behind the wall offers a new world for all associated with the survivor.

Various forces—race, politics, nationality, socioeconomic conditions, religion, ethnicity, gender—influence an author constructing the complex, multi-dimensional narrator. Focusing on two fundamental areas—narrative voice and characteristics of the shelters fabricated by the narrators—reveals qualities of discourse considered “masculine” which show through the texture of Coetzee’s “female-authored” narration. The text, “produced” by Lessing’s narrating survivor, exhibits traits culturally

recognizable as “feminine.” This paper will illustrate and clarify how the authors’ engendering directly impacts the voice of the narrator and the sanctuary she fabricates.

As a point of reference, whenever the term “gender” is employed in this paper, its connotation will be cultural in context and will not correlate to a biological definition. Studies presented by Judith Butler and David Gilmore—arguing that culture influences answers to the questions “What is a man?” and “What is a woman?” regardless of the biological differences between the two—constitute the foundation for this use of the term “gender.”

This paper, divided into two sections, discusses voice in the first section and the sanctuaries in the second section. The first section examines voice in terms of tone, style, and personality, which determine how a narrator addresses a reader. Because the relationship between the author and narrator in these two novels influences the development of these particular features and characteristics of each narrator, an examination of voice provides evidence that the gender of the author does indeed affect the development of the narrators, evident primarily in the images of time and the engendered perceptions of the narrators.

The shelters fabricated by the narrators, examined in the second section of the paper, are defined by the nature of the spatial dimensions (figurative and literal) of the sanctuaries. This concept of sanctuary evolves from writings about ancient Greek cities in which sanctuaries represent places of asylum and refuge. The narrators’ sanctuaries are discussed in terms of either an asylum or a refuge, and the purpose of each sanctuary is defined for each woman.

Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. (Virginia Woolf 45)

VOICE

Generally speaking, voice refers to distinctive features or specific characteristics of a narrator's tone, style, and personality, which determine how a narrator addresses a reader. Consistent with the authority the author imposes upon his or her individual narrator, each narrator addresses the reader in a different voice. The authors' engendering of the narrators influences the development of these particular features and characteristics of each narrator noted throughout the books. Specifically in these two novels, an examination of voice reveals the authors' influence upon his/her narrator in two areas: the time-images produced and the power projected by the narrators.

The narrators' images of time represent a prime example of the authors' influence upon their respective narrator. For Coetzee's Magda, time interpretations reflect the environment of her finite world of the farm: "In the shadowy hallway the clock ticks away day and night. I am the one who keeps it wound and who weekly, from sun and almanac, corrects it. Time on the farm is the time of the wide world, neither a jot nor a tittle more or less" (3). Time for Lessing's survivor is measured in a different manner, especially the intervals when she is behind the wall: "This time seems now to have gone on and on, yet in fact it was quite short, a matter of months. So much was happening, and every hour seemed crammed with new experience" (79-80). Coetzee's narrator and Lessing's narrator measure the past, present, and future from different perspectives when occupying their sanctuary or describing the outside world.

In preparation for their extensive, figurative journeys, both women commence their narratives with a preamble of memories that trigger a sequence of experiences. Coetzee's narrator re-orders her past as she writes, rewrites, and edits events. Magda's writing begins:

Today my father brought home his new bride. They came clip-clop across the flats in a dog-cart drawn by a horse with an ostrich-plume waving on its forehead, dusty after the long haul. Or perhaps they were drawn by two plumed donkeys, that is also possible. My father wore his black swallowtail coat and stove pipe hat, his bride a wide-brimmed sunhat and a white dress tight at waist and throat. (1)

In addition to altering the horse and donkeys, she admits: "More detail I cannot give unless I begin to embroider, for I was not watching. I was in my room, in the emerald semi-dark of the shuttered late afternoon, reading a book or, more likely, supine with a damp towel over my eyes fighting a migraine" (1).

In succeeding passages, Magda describes how she kills the new bride and groom by hacking them to death: "But fingers are scratching at me from this side of the bed, I am off balance, I must keep a cool head, I must pick them off one by one, recover (with some effort) my axe, and hack with distaste at these new hands, these arms until I have a free moment to draw a sheet over all this shuddering and pound it into quiet" (11).

However, in passage 36, she begins again:

For he does not die so easily after all. Disgruntled, saddle-sore, it is he who rides in out of the sunset. The old days are not gone after all. He has

not brought home a new wife, I am still his daughter if I can unsay the bad words perhaps even his good daughter, though it would be well, I can see, to keep out of his way while he ruminates a failure which I, innocent of the ways of courtship, kept all my life in the economic dark, will fail to understand. My heart leaps at this second chance, but I move demurely, I bow my head. (16-7)

These passages exemplify Magda's ability to alter the undesired past to more pleasant experiences, second chances, and redemptions. Magda's capability to rewrite the past reinforces her control within her sanctuary where conjured images produce a modicum of management required to perfect the imperfect. Her images, the result of rewriting and/or selective descriptions, describe overall events that may or may not actually have happened or that she did not directly observe. As the only witness, controller, interpreter, Magda allows the reader (through the context of her pen) to glimpse a censored portion of occurring proceedings.

On the other hand, Lessing's narrator writes of past concrete, corroborated events shared by others, invoking memories not of an individual, but of a group: "WE ALL remember that time. It was no different for me than for others. Yet we do tell each other over and over again the particularities of the events we shared and the repetition, the listening, is as if we are saying, 'It was like that for you, too? Then that confirms it, yes, it was so, it must have been, I wasn't imagining things'" (1). As she searches for how knowledge of events came to pass, she notes: "One of the things we now know was true for everybody, but which each of us privately thought was evidence of a stubbornly

preserved originality of mind, was that we apprehended what was going on in ways that were not official” (4). Lessing’s narrator then relates the events as she saw them. “I shall begin this account at a time before we were talking about ‘it.’ We were still in the stage of generalised unease. Things weren’t too good, they were even pretty bad” (5). The survivor views her past not just from her own perspective, but also from the contributions of others. Her comments reflect respect rather than disdain for the past. Unlike Magda’s violent actions to resolve problems, less forceful responses of adaptation and assimilation resolve difficulties for Lessing’s survivor.

Coetzee establishes his narrator as a single individual recounting her interpretations of the past. Lessing establishes her narrator as a recorder of the past incorporating the thoughts and feelings of others. Magda struggles against the reality of the past to force a restructuring of events while the survivor paints a bleak past and present with perhaps a better future. In dealing with the past, Jeanne Walker contends “it is possible precisely by understanding the past to become capable of ordering, of re-ordering. One can never re-order the *events* of one’s own past, but it is possible to order one’s own nature by reordering the forms which surround it” (107).

However, Magda possesses the capability of re-ordering her past. Magda does not get along well with her father. Her father comes home with a new bride. Magda kills her father and the new bride. There is/was no new bride. Magda has not killed her father. Life continues. Magda does not get along well with her father. This ability derives not from the power of understanding the past, but from the ability to rewrite and edit events to fashion a more manageable environment. Through writings of her

experiences and the experiences of others, Lessing's narrator attempts to understand and codify the past in order to encounter the present. There are problems in the survivor's world. Emily and Hugo come to live with the survivor. Society disintegrates causing problems for everyone. Emily has problems that involve the survivor. Problems emerge. Some are solved; others are not. Lessing's narrator absorbs the problems; solving the ones she can while reserving the more difficult problems for the wall.

Nicole Jouve, discussing the role and importance of time, writes, "the need to open out to them are what 'writerly' women create as a 'feminine' utterance. It has to be 'written' to be 'uttered,' because it is somehow 'ahead,' a mode of being to be desired. Writing gives form and status to what has no currency" (131-2). Comparing the writing of the two narrators provides an insight into the necessary "feminine utterances" establishing form and status. Although Coetzee's narrator desires "form and status," linear time (of little concern for Magda) appears only in selected passages—events transpire as she wishes them to be ordered. Yesterday or two weeks ago directly impacts on today or maybe tomorrow. Lessing's narrator must inscribe on a tangible medium, not the free-flow of Magda's reporting, actions that have transpired in order to understand and to validate what is happening now. The consistency of the survivor's linear time coverage creates the "form and status" of her "feminine utterances."

The present skips from reference to reference as Coetzee's narrator adds new details and events for what the reader believes is the present, but could just as easily be five years in the past or five years in the future based upon the point of reference the narrator chooses. After killing her father for the second time, Magda loses track of the

time interval and events of the killing: “I suspect that the day the day [sic] was missing I was not there; and if that is so I shall never know how the day was filled....I seem to have grown impatient with the sluggish flow of time” (80). When she misses a day or grows impatient with time, she simply moves on in the story by providing the necessary details (in several versions) for the missing day: “There are, however, other ways in which I could have spent the day and which I cannot ignore. Perhaps I wanted to move him out of the morass he lay in. Perhaps I wanted to take him to another room” (80). The importance of killing her father diminishes with the increasing importance of what she did with his body. From the one central fact of the killing, the details of corpse removal magnify and disintegrate into manifold scenarios of what happened today. Today may be bad, but with the next writing sequence, it will be, eventually, a good day.

The present provides a bleak and disintegrating period for Lessing’s survivor and her society. She ventures from her apartment and hazards a visit to Emily’s house. Within the confines of this environmentally safe and secure residence, she reflects on Emily’s comment on the quality of the air:

And I understood it was true: this was a moment when someone said something which crystallised into fact intimations only partly grasped that had been pointing towards an obvious conclusion...it was that the air we breathed had indeed become hard on our lungs, had been getting fouler and thicker for a long time. We had become used to it, were adapting: I, like everyone else, had been taking short reluctant breaths, as if rationing

what we took into our lungs, our systems, could also ration the poisons—
what poisons? (188)

The narrator's assessment of the situation comprehends the severity of the circumstances and accepts the fact she cannot alter the situation. The survivor cannot rewrite in her memoirs that she took a walk in a beautiful meadow on a clear, sunny day. The poisons cannot be eliminated by a magic solution or newly-invented, anti-smog machine. The misfortune in the outside exists; the magnificence in the wall exists.

Unlike situations in Magda's world, situations in the survivor's world exist simultaneously. The consequences of Magda's world never reveal a tragic outcome. The consequences of the survivor's world do reveal a tragic outcome. The present is what Magda decrees. She has no need for Nicole Jouve's validation of "form and status." Only Lessing's narrator requires the "feminine utterance" to achieve currency.

The importance of tense, especially present tense, illustrates the engendering of the narrator within the context of dominant and subordinate: "The dominant mode is the present, a present open to the flow, the overflowing, the care for a future which only the vibrant openness, the willingness to go beyond knowledge, will make possible" (Jouve 132). Coetzee's narrator, controlling the present tense in her writing, attains this dominant (masculine) role, exploring options for each situation she confronts. Lessing's narrator accepts her predicaments and must passively wait for the wall to open to resolve her difficulties.

From an ever-changing past and present, "barren and solitary" describe the future for Coetzee's narrator. "For the present, however, it appears that nothing is going to

happen, that I may have long to wait before it is time to creep into my mausoleum and pull the door shut behind me” (138). Magda will always live in the present—the dominant tense:

Two stories to comfort myself with: for the truth is, I fear, that there is no past or future, that the medium I live in is an eternal present in which, whether heaving under the weight of that hard man or felling the ice of the scissors-blade at my ear or washing the dead or dressing meat, I am the reluctant polestar about which all this phenomenal universe spins. (116)

Magda, the center of the present universe, acts as the guide, for all things revolve around her axis. Coetzee allows Magda to control her present which, in turn, allows control of the past by rewriting and reordering:

At moments like the present, filled with lugubrious thought, one is tempted to add up one’s reckoning, tie up the loose ends. Will I find the courage to die a crazy old queen in the middle of nowhere, unexplained by and inexplicable to the archaeologists, her tomb full of *naif* whitewash paintings of sky-gods; or am I going to yield to the spectre of reason and explain myself to myself in the only kind of confession we protestants know? To die an enigma with a full soul or to die emptied of my secrets, that is how I picturesquely put the question to myself. (138)

However, Coetzee restricts Magda’s control of the future. She may create excellent stories of yesterday or how exciting today’s activities stimulate her, but she has no creativity toward the future—only questions.

Lessing's narrator understands that visiting the past, exploring the present, and waiting for the future would result in an infinitely better world with unlimited opportunities. The survivor describes the final time when everyone steps into the wall:

We were in a place which might present us with anything—rooms furnished this way or that and spanning the tastes and customs of millennia; walls broken, falling, growing again; a house roof like a forest floor sprouting grasses and birds' nests; rooms smashed, littered, robbed; a bright green lawn under thunderous and glaring clouds and on the lawn a giant black egg of pockmarked iron but polished and glossy, around which, and reflected in the black shine, stood Emily, Hugo, Gerald, her officer father, her large laughing gallant mother, and little Denis, the four-year-old criminal, clinging to Gerald's hand, clutching it and looking up into his face, smiling. (212)

The survivor does not question the future; she envisions a better time and a better place. Her world does not involve more poisons in the air, more gangs roving the streets, or more suffering by the people she loves.

The future provides possibilities for both narrators. However, based upon the writings of each narrator, only Lessing's narrator establishes a shared, concrete narrative. "*Woman as writer*—with woman as the producer of textual meaning....Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics, and the problem of a female language" (Showalter 128). Magda questions her literary success and fulfillment of her writings: "Have I ever fully explained to myself why I do not run away from the farm

and die in civilization in one of the asylums I am sure must abound there, with picture-books at my bedside and a stack of empty coffins in the basement and a trained nurse to put the obol on my tongue?" (138). Her future entries reveal a perspective of resignation from which one can only envision a bleak, sterile tomorrow. The survivor has kept a journal of shared events and feelings: "But the sea we traveled over was the same, the protracted period of unease and tension before the end was the same for everybody, everywhere; in the smaller units of our cities—streets, a cluster of tall blocks of flats, a hotel—as in cities, nations, a continent" (3). Lessing's narrator writes from the perspective of confidence that the difficult period, shared by all, transforms to a vibrant, bounteous tomorrow. In the patriarchal system both narrators inhabit outside of their sanctuaries, destiny is established for both women, but the creation of the future differs. Magda cannot write about the future from within her asylum; the survivor writes about the future from within her refuge and away from the constraints of the outside world.

Both authors' approach to another aspect of time, waiting—a common theme in both books—projects sharply contrasted traits of the narrators. Coetzee's narrator does not enjoy waiting: "I am losing patience with everything. I have no stomach for trotting from room to room performing realistic tasks, conducting stupid conversation with Hendrik" (72). Within the boundaries of her sanctuary, she does not have to wait. Magda, Hendrik, and Anna engage in a flurry of action in which they literally and figuratively cleanse the room where Magda killed her father. Following this frenzied activity, Hendrik and Anna await Magda's orders. While she contemplates her next course of action, she reflects on her difficulty with waiting: "Hendrik and Klein-Anna

stand over me waiting for instructions. I swirl the grounds in my coffee-cup. It is going to be a difficult day, I tell them, a day for waiting. Words come reluctantly to me, they clatter in my mouth and tumble out heavily like stones” (83). Within the boundaries of Magda’s surroundings, she emulates the male-dominated outside world. Coetzee transfers to Magda the power he feels necessary for her to control the sanctuary.

The two worlds of Lessing’s narrator—the peaceful wall and the turbulent outside—provide a dilemma of having to wait or to pursue other avenues of action. The survivor writes: “Or I sat at the times when the sunlight was on the wall, waiting for it to open, to unfold. Or I went about the streets, taking in news and rumours and information with the rest, wondering what to do for the best” (82). Although tormented by the waiting, rewards arrive for the narrator after a time of patience with a visit through the wall: “I waited, watched....Walking through a light screen of leaves, flowers, birds, blossom, the essence of woodland brought to life in the effaced patterns of the wallpaper” (98). Gayle Greene observes: “Yet this passivity becomes potent, since it is her ability to wait out events while being compassionately involved with them, her wise receptivity and attentiveness, that enable her to develop the strengths to lead the characters of her world ‘into another order of world altogether’” (145). When the wall opens for the final time, everyone, Gerald and the children last, passes through the wall: “And then, at the very last moment, they came, his children came running, clinging to his hands and his clothes, and they all followed quickly on after the others as the last walls dissolved” (213). Lessing suggests that feminine passivity increases the survivor’s resistance in

coping with the male-dominated outside forces. The survivor's strength evolves from this acquiescent trait.

Direct confrontation—associated with cultural masculinity—remains the standard for Magda's actions within the confines of the farm. Neighbors, a father and son, have come to discuss men's business with her father: "They have ridden far on a futile errand, they are waiting for an invitation to dismount and take refreshment; but I continue to stand silent and forbidding before them till, exchanging glances, they tip their hats and turn their horses" (116). Passive resistance—associated with cultural femininity—remains the standard for the survivor in viewing the promise of the future: "When I again knew myself to be standing in my living room, the cigarette half burned down, I was left with the conviction of a promise, which did not leave me, no matter how difficult things became later, both in my own life and in these hidden rooms" (14). This direct confrontation versus passive resistance contributes to the authors' selection of the first-person "I" narrative.

Although both stories employ the first-person "I" narrative of a female narrator, the narrator's perceived power originates from the engendered voice furnished by the author during specific situations and periods of time. Within the context of gender and power, Coetzee's narrator functions within a patriarchal system, and Lessing's narrator functions within a matriarchal system.

Magda kills her father a second time; for this incident she uses a rifle to shoot him one night. The next day she returns to her father's room to validate her earlier deed. Her father is sitting up in his bed, blood covering his body. Magda, realizing she needs

assistance, travels to the black farmhand's house. Although Hendrik twice refuses to help Coetzee's narrator, her third attempt persuades him. She writes:

When one truly means what one says, when one speaks not in shouts or panic, but quietly, deliberately, decisively, then one is understood and obeyed. How pleasing to have identified a universal truth. Hendrik gets groggily to his feet and follows me. I give him the rifle to carry. The cartridge in the breech is spent and has been since before midnight. I am harmless, despite appearances. (68)

Coetzee expresses a woman's societal weaknesses by "the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender—in short, any way in which dominant structures shape muted ones" (Rachel DuPlessis 32). Coetzee seizes the opportunity to upgrade the social (power) position of his narrator. "If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or as female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects" (De Lauretis 5). Magda's implied social position, a daughter living in a patriarchal system, would therefore represent an insubstantial voice in telling her story. When Coetzee transmits his patriarchal prestige by invoking the "I" narrative of first-person Magda, this employment of the "I" narrative promotes a stronger voice than the "she" narrative.

In contrast to Coetzee's desire to relate his narrator's story from a more powerful position than she actually occupies, Lessing's narrator tells the story of the outside world

from the point of view of a less powerful member of that society—a status normally assumed by/for a woman in a patriarchal society. The survivor does not belong to any political group; she does not advocate any strong positions to her neighbors; she does not desire to join any migratory tribe. However, she does write a journal that contains her observations and the stories told by others. Inside the wall, Lessing's narrator's voice resonates authority generated from a matriarchal order. In one of her initial visits to the rooms behind the wall, the survivor writes:

Perhaps I did see a face, or the shadow of one. The face I saw clearly later was familiar to me, but it is possible that that face, seen as everything ended, appears in my memory in this place, this early second visit: it had reflected itself back, needing no more to use as a host or as a mirror than the emotion of sweet longing, which hunger was its proper air. This was the rightful inhabitant of the rooms behind the wall. I had no doubt of it then or later. The *exiled* inhabitant; for surely she could not live, never could have lived, in that chill empty shell full of dirty and stale air? (14)

Even at this early stage of the visits beyond the wall, the survivor's awareness of self and the potential preeminence of influence encourage her to endure the tribulations in the outside world and wait patiently for this new world.

Coetzee's narrator appears in command and as an authoritative figure when writing within the confines of her room; however, when initially confronting her father, Hendrik, or the male-controlled society—events outside of her sanctuary (her room when dealing with those on the farm/the farm when dealing with outsiders)—her weaknesses

become exposed. After she kills her father, the farm begins to deteriorate, food supplies start to dwindle, and money becomes a necessity. Magda gives Hendrik a letter to take to the post office for money. Hendrik returns with no money; he only brings back a letter. “He is waiting for me to read. I unfold the letter. It is nothing but a printed form headed ONTTREDDINGS—WITHDRAWALS. In the margin there is a pencilled cross against the line *Handtekening van beleer—Signature of depositor*” (103). Rachel Blau DuPlessis believes that male expectations influence the structure of the female voice in the narrative “because it deepens external realism with a picture of consciousness at work but also because it involves a critique of her own consciousness, saturated as it is with discourses of dominance” (32). By imposing the need for external masculine assistance, Coetzee weakens and subtly alters Magda’s power within the confines of her sanctuary in relation to the outside world. If Coetzee writes in the third person, then Magda has little or no chance to conquer her adversaries on the farm or the outside world. As a third person woman, Magda cannot call on the force of the masculine author to intervene with a transfusion of his authority.

In comparison, as Lessing’s narrator’s power outside the wall diminishes (it is never very strong to begin with), her influence within the wall expands. Although she does not possess control over all of the events within the wall, she maintains and achieves a degree of accomplishment for her activities. When she enters a familiar area, the room has been ransacked in a malicious manner:

The chairs and sofas had been deliberately slashed and jabbed with bayonets or knives, stuffing was spewing out everywhere, brocade

curtains had been ripped off the brass rods and left in heaps....I began cleaning it. I laboured, used many buckets of hot water, scrubbed, mended....Sun and wind were invited into that room and cleaned it. I was by myself all the time, yet did not feel myself to be. Then it was done. (40)

In the outside world, the survivor struggles alone against dominant forces. She has the companionship of Hugo and Emily's sporadic dependence, but she is alone. Behind the wall she feels the presence of an other or of others that provides a spiritual support. She gathers strength and confirmation in her own capabilities. However, as always, no matter how much her influence increases with the wall, the wall allows her entry only at its discretion.

The primary difference between the authors' application of the first-person narrative elucidates the authority afforded to each narrator. A strong patriarchal system contributes to Coetzee's narrator's authority where the "I" produces a more convincing voice than "she" within the narrative. The matriarchal order found within the wall supports the power for Lessing's narrator. In her study of women's autobiographies, Sidonie Smith notes: "[T]hese autobiographers desired the power, authority, and voice of man. None of them accepted the silenced life demanded of most women in their times. They had energy, intelligence, courage, and not a little 'madness' about them" (62). Lessing embodies the traits desired by these autobiographers Smith describes; however, the term "desire" provides the key component. Although Lessing provides the energy, intelligence, and courage for her narrator, Lessing does not "desire" the survivor's writing to contain the overall voice of man. Coetzee provides not only the power,

authority, and voice of man, but also a touch of “madness” for his narrator. Lessing’s writing exemplifies the weaknesses that Smith notes in the majority of women writing an autobiography. These comments are not derogatory toward the style of either Coetzee or Lessing, but accentuate the differences in the writing and the influences by the authors.

Coetzee provides his narrator with options/alternatives available to men, but does not allow the narrator to pursue or follow through on a particular course of action—limits imposed upon women. Magda writes from a masculine perspective, but she acts from a feminine empowerment position. Lessing’s narrator works within a different set of conditions. The survivor writes from a feminine perspective, and she acts from a feminine empowerment position. This specification of conditions does not minimize the effectiveness or impact of the survivor, but it simply characterizes the influences by Lessing.

The expression “perhaps” employed by the authors explains the different perspectives and empowerment positions both inside and outside the sanctuaries. In discussing events outside of the sanctuary, Magda, in passage 236, begins almost every sentence with the word “perhaps.” After Hendrik and his wife, Anna, have run away, Magda, revealing signs of mental regression, contemplates their fate and possible capture by the groups of men looking for her father:

But perhaps they did not shoot them out of hand....Perhaps, as a woman, as a maiden lady weak in the head, I was told nothing....Perhaps, therefore, my story has already had its end, the documents tied up with a ribbon and stored away, and only I do not know, for my own good. Or

perhaps they did indeed bring Hendrik back to the farm, to confront me, and I have forgotten....Perhaps that is the true story, however unflattering to me. Or perhaps I have been mistaken all the time, perhaps my father is not dead after all. (122)

In each situation concerning Hendrik and Anna or events pertaining to her own life, Magda offers alternative behaviors, actions, or conclusions for each occurrence; she does not pursue or follow through on any of her speculations.

For Lessing's survivor, her words—concrete and positive in tone—submit to the reader what events actually transpire; she employs “perhaps” not as an alternative, but as an expression of resolve. This sense of conviction emerges from her description of the worsening conditions of society and her environment both inside and outside the wall:

As that summer ended, there was as bad a state of affairs in the space behind the wall as on this side, with us. Or perhaps it was only that I was seeing what went on there more clearly....I cannot begin to give an idea of the mess in those rooms. Perhaps I could not go into a room at all, it was so heaped with cracking and splintering furniture. (155)

Unlike Coetzee's narrator, whose “perhaps” fabricates inadequate and unobtainable options and alternatives, Lessing's narrator expresses a succinct, finite explanation of what really happened. “The actual content of being a man or woman and the rigidity of the categories themselves are highly variable across cultures and time. Nevertheless, gender relations so far as we have been able to understand them have been (more or less) relations of domination” (Flax 45). Coetzee's narrator dominates the

situation, offers alternative explanations, and suggests untenable options to the situation reinforcing the masculine perspective and feminine empowerment afforded Magda.

Lessing's narrator simply states situations of occurrences that succeed within the framework of feminine perspective and feminine empowerment.

To further emphasize Magda's perspective/empowerment, Coetzee introduces a sense of self-doubt as to her substance and significance: "Am I, I wonder, a thing among things, a body propelled along a track by sinews and bony levers, or am I a monologue moving through time, approximately five feet above the ground, if the ground does not turn out to be just another word, in which case I am indeed lost?" (62). Magda continues this conversation debating her existence: "A woman with red blood in her veins (what colour is mine? a watery pink? an inky violet?)" (62). This questioning and self-doubt introduces the dilemma: Who is writing the story? "If she is, indeed, written, a woman with ink in her veins, then she will preferably do the writing herself" (Rody 164). Indeed, Magda does write her story; however, Coetzee sets the conditions under which she writes her story. Coetzee reinforces the concept of Magda writing by including ordinary, trivial events into Magda's diary/journal:

For an hour it rained. Then it was over, birds sang, the earth steamed, the last fresh runnels dwindled and sank away. Today I darned six pairs of socks for my father. There is a convention older than myself which says that Anna [the black maid] should not do the darning. Today's leg of mutton was excellent: tender, juicy, roasted to a turn. There is a place for all things. Life is possible in the desert. (31)

Michael DuPlessis considers Coetzee a translator, albeit an excellent one, through which his “gender ventriloquism is more apparent—it is a text by a man in which a woman speaks” (127). Even with this apparent “gender ventriloquism,” Coetzee grants his narrator the authority as transcriber:

If the truth be told, I never wanted to fly away with the sky gods. My hope was always that they would descend and live with me here in paradise, making up with their ambrosial breath for all that I lost when the ghostly brown figures of the last people I knew crept away from me in the night. I have never felt myself to be another man’s creature (here they come, how sweet the closing plangencies), I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout (what a consolation that is), I have chosen at every moment my own destiny. (139)

“In Coetzee’s imitations of woman’s writing, there is a tension between the striving after a discourse of the pre-symbolic and the language of the symbolic in which this is articulated....All Coetzee’s female narrators resolutely position themselves as authors of their own narratives” (Parry 49). This dichotomy of strong woman versus skeptical woman reinforces the engendering by Coetzee of his narrator. He attempts to write like a woman, but the “masculine” influences reveal themselves in Magda’s style of writing.

Magda exists most strongly when she writes within her room—her asylum:

I live, I suffer, I am here. With cunning and treachery, if necessary, I fight against becoming one of the forgotten ones of history. I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness

but I am more than that too. When all the lights are out I smile in the dark.

My teeth glint, though no one would believe it. (3)

The strength and conviction of Magda reflect Susan Gubar's explanation of the passive, female creation as a secondary object given an intentional dependency. "But just as important as the anxiety the male pen produces in the would-be woman writer is the horror she experiences at having been defined as his creation" (295). Even when Coetzee performs his "gender ventriloquism," the temperament of the narrator depicts an independent woman and submits to the reader a strong female demeanor that believes in herself. By allowing his narrator to speak in this manner, Coetzee gives her a strong, distinct personality. However strong and distinct this personality may appear, self-doubt undermines her authority. "[W]hat Magda records is everywhere marked by signs of doubt, erasure, denial, and speculation" (Macaskill 457). Fears of her existence exacerbate her continuing periods of doubt: "I suspect that the day the day [sic] was missing I was not there; and if that is so I shall never know how the day was filled. For I seem to exist more and more intermittently. Whole hours, whole afternoons go missing" (80). Paul Cantor writes: "But she has moments when she is puzzled by her ontological status, sensing the artificiality of the conventions according to which she is constructed" (90). These examples clearly demonstrate the masculine perspective and feminine empowerment of Coetzee's influence on Magda.

Lessing's writing envelopes the characters into more of a family with close personal interactions with the survivor representing the mother figure for not only Emily, but for all characters in the book. In the following passage, Lessing's narrator establishes

the bond among the various relationships connecting the two worlds and the people who inhabit those worlds. Until this point in the book, the survivor exists (as did the inhabitants of each territory) in only one world at a time:

But now began a period when something of the flavour of the place behind the wall did continuously invade my real life. It was manifested at first in the sobbing of a child. Very faint, very distant. Sometimes inaudible, or nearly so, and my ears would strain after it and then lose it. It would begin again, and get quite loud, and even when I was perhaps talking to Emily herself, or standing at the window watching events outside, I heard the sobbing of a child, a child alone, disliked, repudiated; and at the same time, beside it, I could hear the complaint of the mother, the woman's complaint, and the two sounds went on side by side, theme and descant. (145)

Emily, the girl who comes to live with the narrator, signifies the attachment between Lessing and her narrator. "The narrator understands the meaning of Emily's action because she can remember her own adolescence and social experiments. Indeed, in one sense, Emily *is* the narrator's remembered adolescence" (Walker 108). This relationship of narrator/Emily extends beyond the story to a relationship of narrator/Lessing. "That Lessing's mother and grandmother were both named Emily suggests why *autobiography* is a relevant term" (Greene 149). However, this comment is more than a suggestion. Emily, as a baby and as a child in the wall; Emily, as she appears in the outside world; Emily provides the medium for the narrator to transit both worlds. In all cases, Lessing's narrator manifests a feminine style of presentation and position.

But more than just an identification autobiography where the term “I” must be constantly used to further the action and thought, Lessing’s narrator continuously involves other people in thoughts and actions. When the decision-time approaches to leave the contemporary world, Lessing’s narrator constantly writes of others:

The question was, where would we be going? To what?...No, all we could see when we looked up and out were the low packed clouds of that winter hurrying towards us: dark cloud, dark cold cloud....And of all those people who had left, the multitudes, what had happened to them? They might as well have walked off the edge of a flat world. (207)

At the end of the book, the narrator continues this inclusion of everyone: “We had been there, waiting for winter to end, and we knew it was a long time, but not as long as our weary senses told us: an interminable time, but still not longer than winter” (211). As noted by Gayle Green, the tone of the book becomes a oneness between the narrator and the others (149). This unity or oneness extends to the relationship between Lessing and the narrator within the context of the style of writing and the close association of characters (specifically Emily and the survivor) that Lessing delineates.

When discussing Emily’s maturing and growing up, especially in Emily’s relationship with Gerald, Lessing’s survivor, subtler in her communications with Emily, writes:

I did not say anything, for our relations were not such that I could ask, or she likely to volunteer. All I knew was what I could see for myself: that she was being filled over and over again with a violence of need that

exploded in her, dazzling her eyes and shaking her body so that she was astonished—needs which could never be slaked by an embrace on the floorboards of an empty room or in the corner of a field. (85)

The mood of the relationships is based upon absolute and singular projection of voice and not just a lack of projection, but a perception of the projection. When the survivor visits Emily, the children are preparing a meal under Emily's supervision. Emily's comments concerning the stew provide an insight into this perception of projection and Emily and the narrator's relationship: "I understood now what I had half noticed before—the way the children reacted when they saw Emily. This was how people respond to Authority...Emily's eyes were on me; she wanted to know what I had seen, what I made of it, what I was thinking" (129).

Lessing's narrator, influenced and somewhat intimidated by the external environment, demonstrates to the reader she is an independent woman (capable of taking care of herself) as the character of woman described by Virginia Woolf: "All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). Lessing's narrator has her own place to live, has adequate money for her needs, and, with due caution, travels from her apartment to obtain the necessities for her existence. Shortly after Emily and Hugo arrive, the survivor shops for dog/cat food for Hugo and something for Emily:

It took some time to find a shop which still stocked such things. I was an object of interest to the shop assistant, an animal-lover, who applauded my intention to stand up for my right to keep 'pets' in those days. I also

interested one or two of the other customers, and I was careful not to say where I lived, when one asked me, and went home by a misleading route, and made sure I was not being followed. On the way I visited several other shops, looking for things I usually did not bother with, they were so hard to track down, so expensive. But at last I did find some biscuits and sweets of a quite decent quality—whatever I thought might appeal to a child. (22-3)

Studies presented by Judith Butler and David Gilmore argue that each culture influences the definitions of “What is a man; What is a woman” regardless of the biological differences between the two. These cultural gender influences expressing the proclivity for a particular action or thought by the author upon the narrator indicate the probability of acquiring a characteristic inherited from the source. The inheritance—passed from the author to the narrator—provides the disposition (specifically the voice) identified in the narrator.

Although Coetzee employs the first-person narrative, the masculine style of writing dominates his narrator. As noted by Ian Glenn: “The play between the I-as-narrator and the I-as-subject is one of the novel’s many stylistic games” (123). The passages discussed in this section reinforce Coetzee’s influence on Magda. Caroline Rody compares Coetzee’s feminist voice on a level with women’s fiction: “Dressed in woman’s clothes he can roar” (162). Coetzee places Magda in a patriarchal society, and he allows her from the power of her sanctuary to co-exist within this society.

Lessing, more corporeal in her presentation of her narrator, places the survivor in a declining society where safety is found behind the wall in a matriarchal sanctuary.

“[T]he body appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriate and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (Butler 8). As the survivor passes from the outside world into the world of the wall, she experiences life on both sides—her body merely the medium to comprehend the situations.

As voice provides examples for the engendering influences of the authors, both narrators’ interaction with internal/external forces can be observed from the sanctuary that each narrator fabricates enabling them to challenge, deflect, or adapt to a conflict.

The American architect, Christopher Alexander, maintains that every building, or group of buildings, has a heart; when you enter that place, you know you have reached the center of things. (Witold Rybczynski 117)

SANCTUARY

Among the numerous avenues available for discussion and exploration, the physical and mental properties of the sanctuaries provide an excellent illustration of the gender influence of the authors. The words “sanctuary,” “shelter,” “refuge,” “asylum,” and “room” are used extensively throughout both books. To clarify, “asylum” for Coetzee’s narrator and “refuge” for Lessing’s narrator are terms that reflect the purpose and function of each sanctuary. These terms evolve from studies of ancient Greek structures in which sanctuaries represent places of asylum and refuge. An asylum offers transitory protection. A refuge is a final destination. Dangers outside of the sanctuary loom for residents of either an asylum or refuge. How the resident views the length of stay determines the status of the sanctuary.

The narrator inside the asylum (Magda) believes she can exist and cope with any danger:

I will pack a basket with sandwiches and fill my purse with money and climb aboard the train and tell the man I want to see the sea: that gives you some idea of how naïve I am. I will take off my shoes and crunch through the seasand, wondering at the millions of tiny deaths that have gone to make it up. I will roll up my skirts and wade in the shallows and be nipped by a crab, a hermit crab, as a cosmic joke, and stare at the horizon, and sigh at immensity of it all, and eat my sandwiches, barely tasting the

crisp sourdough bread, the sweet green fig preserve, and think of my insignificance. Then, chastened, sober, I will catch the train back home and sit on the stoep and watch the flaming sunsets, the crimsons, the pinks, the violets, the oranges, the bloody reads, and heave a sigh and sink my head on my breast and weep hesperian tears for myself, for the life I have not lived, the joy and willingness of an unused body now dusty, dry, unsavoury, for the slowing pulse of my blood. (44)

Magda interacts daily with the outside world, and, from her position of strength within the sanctuary, does not actively fear that outside world. She believes that her stay within the asylum is voluntary, and she can leave any time.

The narrator inside the refuge (the survivor) knows she cannot defeat the outside dangers. Her society worsens each day: “The prisons were as full as ever, though expedients were always being found to empty them: so many crimes were being committed, and there seemed to be new unforeseen categories of crime every day” (180). Lessing’s narrator, barely subsisting in the outside world, realizes that once she enters the refuge she must stay forever.

Both narrators understand that a definite border separates their sanctuaries from the outside worlds. “First, the *peribolos*, the boundary wall...that went all the way round was not an essential element of the sanctuary; the sacred space could be marked by a series of marker stones, with entry involving the crossing of an imaginary line between two of them” (Sourvinou-Inwood 10). The properties of the boundary wall and the structures within the sanctuary differ with the finite asylum boundaries of Coetzee’s

narrator contrasting with the imaginary line that Lessing's narrator must cross to move through the wall to the seemingly endless boundaries of her refuge.

In the beginning accounts, Magda describes her current environment. "In a house shaped by destiny like an H I have lived all my life, in a theatre of stone and sun fenced in with miles of wire, spinning my trail from room to room, looming over the servants, the grim widow-daughter of the dark father" (3). A later entry paints a bleak picture of her future: "How idyllic the old days seem; and how alluring, in a different way, a future in a garden behind barbed wire!" (116). The enclosure limits remain constant, but the controlled space now seems more confining and less attractive. The description of the border enclosure changes from a neutral "fence wire" surrounding the farm to a negative "barbed wire" suggesting a war-zone or prison. Magda envisions a future where her movements are limited, and her options to escape remain within the asylum—not an escape from the asylum.

Although Magda lives within the defined-access borders of her sanctuary, Lessing's narrator must cross over an imaginary line to enter her sanctuary to explore an unbounded territory:

It was not until a few days later that I again stood, cigarette in hand in the mid-morning hour, looking through drifting smoke at the sunlight laid there on the wall, and I thought, Hello! I've been through there; of course I have. How did I manage to forget? And again the wall dissolved and I was through. There were more rooms than I had suspected the first time. I had a strong sense of that, though I did not see them all. Nor did I, on

that occasion, see the man or the woman in overalls. The rooms were empty. To make them habitable, what work needed to be done! (13)

With each visit the narrator discovers more and more—people, rooms, gardens. Subsequent visits expand the boundaries of the refuge. The lack of entry by her own free will creates an even more coveted retreat from the troubles of the outside world. The survivor, even in the face of a deteriorating situation, cannot permanently enter the refuge. She must wait until she is convinced that the refuge is necessary and final.

The sanctuary only defines the area in terms of a physical setting. A sacred area within the sanctuary provides the essential power to survive. Each narrator searches to discover this sacred area. “What was fundamental in Greek sanctuaries...was that it was a sacred space centred around an altar, sometimes including another sacred focus such as a tree or stone, a spring or cave” (Sourvinou-Inwood 11). In the case of Coetzee’s narrator, Magda establishes early in her narrative that her room symbolizes this sacred place. For Lessing’s narrator, the survivor explores the sanctuary at each entry for her sacred place and sacred focus. Her journey, a progression of visits, leads her eventually to discover that the garden is her sacred altar, and the egg represents the sacred focus.

Although Magda does not physically travel outside of the farm, she maintains her freedom to travel within the confines of the asylum and access to safety and solace. After her father has struck her, she retreats to her room, the sacred altar in her asylum:

I have been dealt with. I was a nuisance and now I am dealt with. That is something to think about while I have time on my hands. I find my old place against the wall, comfortable, hazy, even languorous. Whether,

when the thinking begins, it will be thought or dream I cannot guess.

There are vast regions of the world where, if one is to believe what one reads, it is always snowing. Somewhere, in Siberia or Alaska, there is a field, snow-covered, and in the middle of it a pole, aslant, rotten. Though it may be midday the light is so dim that it could be evening. The snow sifts down endlessly. Otherwise there is nothing as far as the eye can see.

(58)

She is free to escape to her room, but not free to escape beyond the confines of the asylum to a world she can only imagine.

The rape sequence involving Hendrik and Magda best illustrates her ability to move (within the boundaries of the farm) from points of danger or unpleasant encounters to her protected area, her room. The narrative begins at passage 205, where the initial encounter occurs in the kitchen with Hendrik in control, and the narrative ends at passage 212 where Magda assumes control of the situation in her room (104-109). The intervening passages clarify how she initiates an assimilation of the conflict—a degradation of Hendrik’s power—eventually manipulating the circumstances of the episode to her advantage.

In passage 205, as Magda tries to flee from the kitchen, Hendrik, the aggressor, stops her: “He grabs me tightly and pulls me back into the kitchen” (104). The kitchen’s location places it far from the security of the room. Her only weapon, a fork, proves useless against Hendrik when she attempts to stab him: “The tines scrape his shoulder, probably not even piercing the skin”(104). Although the passage closes with her

submission to Hendrik, she is unaware of any of the events: “as for what happens next, I do not even know how it is done” (105).

In passage 206, Magda’s efforts (she turns, walks out of the kitchen, and takes two steps before Hendrik stops her) produce some progress toward her room and safety. Her sense of awareness increases as events continue: “I pick up the first thing I see, a fork, and lunge with it, scraping his shoulder. The skin is not even pierced” (105). “Things are happening to me, things are being done to me, I feel them far away, terrible incisions, dull surgery” (105). Although she maintains consciousness for the duration of the attack, the events seem far away to her senses and far removed from her body.

The transition from kitchen to room occurs in the hallway in passage 207. The fork causes no apparent damage. “The fork falls to the floor” (106). Magda places the blame for misfortunes on the others: “It is not my fault that everything is going so badly, it is your wife’s fault, it is her fault and my father’s. And it’s also your fault! You people don’t know where to stop!” (106). The final sentences in the passage all end with exclamation marks. As she and Hendrik near her room, the narrator becomes more aware of her surroundings, her senses become more heightened, and she begins to assert her power.

Although Hendrik initiates the action in passage 208, the combatants now move into the innermost realm of the sanctuary. Magda, more and more in control, commences to diminish Hendrik’s power and to deflect Hendrik’s assault: “I must simply endure until finally I am left alone and begin to rediscover who I am, putting together, in the time of which there is blessedly so much here, the pieces that this unusual afternoon in

my life is disarranging”(106). Time (certainly not a consideration for the narrator within the confines of her room) allows her the opportunity to reflect, to rewrite, to respond to—in different manners and means—what has transpired.

By passage 209, Hendrik has lost all control of the situation and of Magda: “I clench everything together, I have nothing to give him, I am beyond being persuaded” (107). Although Hendrik forces his way into the narrator, his climax signals the end of the “rape” and the end of his dominance. “Shudders run through him from head to foot, I feel them distinctly, more distinctly than anything else yet, this must be the climax of the act, this I know, this I have seen in animals, it is the same everywhere, it signals the end” (107). The narrator’s heightened sense of awareness coincides with her empowerment over the situation and the restructuring of the episode.

In passage 210, the narrator, safe with the sanctity of her room, reflects upon this encounter from its progression of rape (within the confines of the kitchen) to her quandary about womanhood (within the confines of her room): “Am I now a woman?” (107). She contemplates what she has gained, not what she has lost. The fork, which has been so ineffectual in previous passages, now has the power (the narrator’s force) to pierce the skin and bring forth blood: “Fingers grip the spine of a fork, the tines flash out, plunging through the patched shirt, ploughing through the skin. Blood flows” (107-8). This symbolizes Magda’s penetration with the fork as phallus now drawing virgin blood from Hendrik. Within the space of her sanctuary, the narrator reconstructs transgressions accomplished by others (in this scene, Hendrik) into constructive behavior and a modicum of reconciliation for herself.

In passage 211, the narrator completes the adaptation of her recollection of the attack/passage to womanhood: “I have been through everything now and no angel has descended with flaming sword to forbid it” (108). Contemplating the power of her sanctuary (her room) in relation to the location (the kitchen) where the attack originated, she comprehends the capacity of her entire asylum: “It would cost me nothing to go to the kitchen and fetch a knife and cut off the part of this man with which he has been offending me” (108).

In passage 212, Magda reduces the dominated Hendrik to a mere, simple tool enjoyed and manipulated by the narrator within the dominance of her power: “‘You have been sleeping.’ They are my words, soft, from me. How strange. They just come. ‘Please don’t be cross any more. I won’t say anything.’ I turn on my side and look full at him” (109). These are the words and actions of a person in control writing in the voice of power: “He leaves the room, and a moment later I hear the tyres of his bicycle crunch on the gravel, softer and softer as he rides off” (109). Hendrik withdraws from the sacred region of the sanctuary.

Magda knows that her room is her sacred place within her sanctuary/asylum; however, for the survivor the location of her sacred place beyond the wall within her sanctuary/refuge transpires over a long period of time and many visits.

Lessing’s narrator begins with a premonition that something exists behind the wall: “Yet there did come that moment when I had to admit that there was a room behind the wall, perhaps more than one, even a set of rooms, occupying the same space as—or, rather, overlapping with—the corridor” (8). The survivor then suggests the prospect of a

journey to escape the city: “We were talking about what everyone was, the need to leave this city. There had been no public intimation that people should leave....It might be mentioned in passing, as a symptom of something else, as a temporary phenomenon, but not as the big fact in our lives” (9). The survivor enjoins the possibility of leaving with an ambiguous destination.

Despite a scarcity of food, deteriorating public services, and other hardships, the gangs pose the greatest threat to the survivor:

These bands, or gangs had not, to begin with, been particularly violent or harmful to the few people who had refused to leave....Even when parts of our own town took anarchy for granted, we in the north talked and thought of ourselves as immune....Slowly we came to understand that it was our periods of peace, of normality, and not the days of looting and fighting, which were going to be unusual now. And so—we would have to move.

Yes, we would go. Not quite yet. But it would soon be necessary. (10)

The danger of the gangs precipitates the first visit: “I was through the wall and I knew what was there. I did not, that first time, achieve much more than that there were a set of rooms” (10-11). First contact has been established with the opportunity for safety.

After this first visit, a correlation develops between the outside world and this new, inner world. In the fall, the gangs, who live on the streets in her neighborhood for the summer, prepare for movement. Eventually they leave; cleaners eliminate the evidence; normalcy returns. “It was about then I understood that the events on the pavements and what went on between me and Emily might have a connection with what I

saw on my visits behind the wall” (40). When some rooms behind the wall are damaged, the survivor is able to clean, repair, and restore the function and the beauty of this world. She is unable to clean, repair, and restore the function and the beauty of the outside world.

The survivor now enters a period of transition when Emily draws the narrator more into conflict with the movement/activity of the tribes/gangs: “And if she [Emily] was being let down by Gerald—which was how she felt it—then this was painful, but at least she would not go off with him when he took his turn to lead off a tribe” (98). As the outside world changes, so do the rooms behind the wall: “I waited, watched.... Walking through a light screen of leaves, flowers, birds, blossom, the essence of woodland brought to life in the effaced patterns of the wallpaper, I moved through rooms that seemed to have aged since I saw them last” (98). The division between the worlds blurs as the border regions alter appearances. “After all, it was never myself who ordained that now I must interrupt my ordinary life, since it was time to step from one life into another; not I who thinned the sunlight wall; not I who set the stage behind it. I had never had a choice” (100). Although the narrator professes the inability to enter into her sanctuary, she starts to understand more why the wall allows her entry.

The survivor tries many times to force her way behind the wall, thwarted at every attempt:

It was that afternoon I tried deliberately to reach behind the wall: I stood there a long time looking and waiting. The wall did not have light lying on it now, was uniform, dull, blank. I went up and pressed my palms

against it, and moved my hands all over it, feeling and sensing, trying everything to make the heavy solidity of the thing go down under the pressure of my will. It was nonsense, I knew that; it was never because of my, or anybody's wanting when that wall went down and made a bridge or a door. (148)

Events drive the narrator's desperate endeavors to enter her refuge. A crisis occurs, an "it." "I think this is the right place to say something more about 'it.' Though of course there is no 'right' place or time, since there was no particular moment that marked 'its' beginning. And yet there did come a period when everyone was talking about 'it'; and we knew we had not been doing this until recently: there was a different ingredient in our lives" (150). Circumstances force decisions from both Emily and the narrator. Action must be taken—not within the dangerous boundaries of the outside world—within the secure boundaries of the refuge.

The narrator is unable to share the mysteries of the rooms behind the wall. On several occasions she hears the crying of a child, but Emily (sitting in the same room) hears nothing. Without the narrator's ability to share the rooms, the refuge cannot be attained. The times are becoming worse for everyone. One day the wall opens for the survivor and Hugo:

Sitting there one day, staring at the fire-flicker, I was through it and beyond—into the most incongruous scene you could imagine. How can I say "ill-timed" of a world where time did not exist? All the same, even there, where one took what came, did not criticize the order of things, I

was thinking, What a strange scene to show itself now? I was with Hugo. Hugo was not just my accompaniment, an aide, as a dog is. He was a being, a person, in his own right, and necessary to the events I was seeing. (183)

This first entry with another being allows the survivor to continue her journey with the hope that others may join her in the refuge.

Once Lessing's narrator knows that others may join her in the refuge, she begins to plan how to gather everyone for the final voyage. Gerald and the children move into the survivor's building, and Emily stays with the narrator and Hugo. "We [narrator, Emily, Hugo, Gerald] waited all night. Of course we were expecting an attack, a visit, an embassy—something. Above us, in the great empty building there was no sound. And all that following day it snowed, and was dark and cold. We sat and waited, and nothing happened" (211). Finally, in the last scene, everyone joins the survivor in the refuge in the garden area with the black egg. The force of both the sacred space and sacred focus protects forever the survivor and her companions.

The construct of the sanctuary implies a boundary and a port of entry. Although no exact measurement defines either the asylum or the refuge, both narrators discover the crucial space for their peaceful existence: "Spaciousness, then, means being free; freedom implies space. It implies having the power and enough room in which to act" (Fryer 49). Never actually leaving the farm, Coetzee's narrator travels within the asylum from the farm/outside-world borders of confrontation to the safety of her room. Lessing's narrator travels between the refuge and the outside world at the discretion of

the wall. Regardless of their perspective, the common empowerment of the narrators, once in the sanctuary, neutralizes the forces against them from the outside world.

As discussed in the “Voice” section of this paper, the same elements apply in reference to the perspective/empowerment both narrators employ when dealing with the construction of the sanctuaries: “In architecture these different frames of reference for women and men are not necessarily manifest in the use of different spatial forms and building technologies, but rather in the different social and ethical contexts in which women and men are likely to conceptualize and design buildings and spaces” (Agrest 29). Is Magda’s asylum consistent with that of Coetzee’s masculine perspective and feminine empowerment and has the survivor envisioned a refuge consistent with that of Lessing’s feminine perspective and feminine empowerment? These questions may be answered from the viewpoint of agoraphobia, the fear of open places.

Coetzee provides his narrator a desire for wide-open expanses. Magda embraces the vision of the world beyond the farm when she writes (“weaves”) her tale:

Another aspect of myself, now that I am talking about myself, is my love of nature,...When I was a little girl (weave, weave!) in a frilled sunbonnet I would sit all day in the dust, so the story goes, playing with my friends the beetles,...I leave the homestead behind and walk barefoot up the river bed, the hot dark sand crunching beneath my soles and squeezing out between my toes....I would have no qualm, I am sure, if it came to the pinch, though how it could come to this pinch I do not know, about living in a

mud hut, or indeed under a lean-to of branches, out in the veld, eating chickenfeed, talking to the insects. (5-6)

Although she dreams/envisions the vast outside world, she cherishes the asylum. “And while there is one impulse in me that tells me to roll out and erupt harmlessly in the great outdoors, I fear there is another impulse—I am full of contradictions—telling me to hide in a corner like a black widow spider and engulf whoever passes in my venom” (39). The conflict between thought and action within the confines of the sanctuary reinforces the feminine empowerment provided by Coetzee. Magda does not fear the outside world; she just never ventures into this potentially dangerous environment.

For Lessing’s narrator, the thought of being outside (and more distant from the refuge) has become more and more appalling. The roving gangs, packs of wild dogs, and the police pose dangers to her that cannot be easily overcome. The deterioration of buildings, lack of services, and even the quality of the air has made it difficult to be outside: “It was that the air we breathed had indeed become bad on our lungs, had been getting fouler and thicker for a long time”(188). Only by using the air filters indoors can a person breathe properly. When the narrator tells of another woman’s encounter with the wild children, the woman selects a building that was “a place both sheltered and open, so that she could run for it if she had to” (173). The exposed zones only allow an escape to a safer region inside a convenient structure. Although the refuge appears to be open and accessible, the rooms and gardens provide the necessary security for the survivor.

The above examples emphasize the authors’ influences on the narrators. “It [agoraphobia] speaks, after all, the same symbolic language as patriarchal society: the

gendered antinomy between interior and exterior space reasserts the economic (active) function of the male, and the “non-productive” (passive) one of the middle class female” (Meyer 149). While Coetzee’s narrator dreams of the outside world (but will not embrace it), Lessing’s narrator fears the open spaces of the outside world. “It stands to reason that if women perceive public space as unmanageable and threatening, they will avoid it and restrict their mobility within it” (Weisman 70). Even with the empowerment both women possess within the sanctuary, Magda and the survivor avoid the outside world.

Within the structures there remains a division of the mental (for Magda) and the physical (for the survivor). The mental aspect of Coetzee narrator’s asylum contrasts with the corporeal nature of the refuge behind the wall for Lessing’s narrator. Judith Butler notes that there has been a cultural association “of mind with masculinity and body with femininity” (12). Magda believes that she may travel to the outside world, but she accomplishes this through her thoughts. The survivor actually travels in the outside world.

Magda retreats to her room to visit Armoede:

I have never been to Armoede, but with no effort at all, this is one of my faculties, I can bring to life the bleak windswept hill, the iron shanties with the hessian in the doorways, the chickens doomed, scratching in the dust, the cold snot-nosed children toiling back from the dam with the buckets of water, the same chickens scattering now before the donkey-cart in which Hendrik bears away his child-bride, bashful, kerchiefed, while the six

dowry-goats nuzzle the thorns and watch through their yellow eyes a scene in its plenitude forever unknowable to me. (17)

However, Magda never does travel to Armoede or even journeys into town. Mental journeys replace physical travel.

Lessing's narrator does go shopping, does visit Emily across town, and does venture out to the square; however, these movements occur at great mental and physical risk for the survivor. The secure world of the refuge provides a strong contrast to the dangers of the outside world: "Straying through room after room all open to the leaves and the sky, floored with the unpoisoned grasses and flowers of the old world, I saw how extensive was this place, with no boundaries or end that I could find, much larger than I had understood" (99). The comfort of refuge more than compensates for the risks taken when traveling in the outside world.

The architecture of the sanctuaries manifests itself within the framework of the structures based upon usability and interaction. Susan Bordo comments:

Generalizations about gender can obscure and exclude....I would suggest, however, that such determinations cannot be made by methodological fiat but must be decided from context to context.... Rather, one always finds oneself located within structures of dominance and subordination—not least important of which have been those organized around gender. (149)

Coetzee's narrator continues her mental activities and Lessing's narrator continues her physical modifications.

Magda (when faced with what to do with her father's bedroom after the murder) and Hendrik remove the window and replace the window with bricks. They seal the ceiling from the attic. They seal and brick the doorway. Finally, they disconnect the room from the rest of the house by sawing through the wood and bricks with just a hand saw. "Slowly it [the room] rises into the air, a ship of odd angles sailing black against the stars" (82). Although she describes the physical nature of the project, in essence the project is simply a mental exercise. The room, still attached to the house, provides a resting place for her father in another passage of her writings. Lessing's narrator, on the other hand, believes she never has had a choice in the matter of the presentations of the rooms. When she deems a change necessary, the modification is not a structural alteration but a cosmetic variation: "I decided that what I had to do was repaint the rooms" (65). The survivor does not need a structural change to feel safe within the refuge.

A component of agoraphobia that affects the authors' influence is location. Location (public versus private) corresponds to the construction and purpose of the sanctuary. The public nature of the asylum and the private environment of the refuge correspond to the different philosophies of the narrators.

In the case of Coetzee's narrator, everyone knew of the farm, the workers, her father, and Magda's residency there—her life is open to the public. "If a person in trouble entered a sanctuary, he was protected by *asylia*. But his trouble would not be solved simply by staying in a sanctuary.... We know from regulations governing conduct

in sanctuaries that anonymous stay on sacred land was not tolerated” (Sinn 91). Magda possesses an identity—a place in the community. There is no anonymity for her.

The scrutiny of Magda begins shortly after she has killed her father. Two neighbors, father and son, come to the farm looking for her father. “‘No,’ I tell them curtly, ‘he left early this morning...No, I don’t know where...The boy went with him...Probably late. He always comes home late’” (116). Magda realizes that this will not be the last visit: “These are trying times. There are going to be more visits, harder questions to answer, before the visits and the questions stop. There will be much temptation to grovel and weep” (116). These are not the last visitors, but Magda deflects all problems with encounters from the outside while maintaining her sanctuary.

On the other hand, no one but Lessing’s narrator knows about the wall. On several occasions even when Emily is in the room only the survivor can see beyond the wall into the refuge: “There was this juxtaposition: Emily lay with her cheek on rough yellow fur, one still-childish hand enclosing a ragged ear, her tense body expressing emptiness and longing. The wall beside me opened, reminding me again how easily and unexpectedly it could, and I was walking towards a door from which voices came” (85). The wall is far removed from the outside world where only the survivor is allowed entry. Even though the location of ancient sanctuaries was known, the Greek sanctuaries were selected for maximum security. “But as long as one had it in one’s power to choose the site...,then why not consider the conditions under which the site could function as effectively as possible as a place of refuge” (Sinn 103). The wall location in the survivor’s apartment provides excellent protection from discovery and easy access to the

refuge. In this particular case, the outside world is unaware of the refuge and does not know of the survivor's application as a supplicant.

The narrators' approach to nature illustrates the final sphere where the authors' influence separates the two stories: "That man builds and woman inhabits; that man is outside and woman is inside; that man is public and woman is private; that nature, in both its kindest and its cruelest aspect, is female and culture, the ultimate triumph over nature, is male" (Agrest, Conway, and Weisman 11). Whereas Coetzee's narrator encounters nature in a challenge/conflict masculine manner, Lessing's narrator encompasses nature in a rebirth/reformation feminine manner.

Magda constantly struggles with nature from the dust that invades the house to flies feeding upon her father: "Is there no way of cleaning a room definitively? Perhaps if I begin again in the loft, plugging the gaps between roof and walls, pinning paper over the floor, perhaps if then I seal and caulk the doors and window, I can halt the sift of dust and leave the house till the coming of spring" (119). Defending the room where she killed her father from the invading flies, Magda envisions where this encroachment of nature may lead:

One after another the flies fall under my swatter, some erupting in gouts of crop-slime, some folding their legs and passing neatly away, some spinning about angrily on their backs until the *coup de grace* descends. The survivors circle the room waiting for me to tire. But I must keep a clean house and to that end I am tireless. If I abandon this room, locking the door, stuffing the cracks with rags, I will in time find myself

abandoning another room, and then other, until the house is all but lost, its builders all but betrayed, the roof sagging, the shutters clapping, the woodwork cracking, the fabrics rotting, the mice having a field day, only a last room intact. (78)

Lessing's narrator's explorations lead her to discoveries of a nature behind the wall full of life and emergence where sunshine, flowers, plants, insects, people work in harmony—in contrast to the hostilities of the outside world. In one seemingly solid, intact room, she observes the floorboards had disintegrated:

I pulled the planks away, exposing clean earth and insects that were vigorously at their work of re-creation. I pulled back heavy lined curtains to let the sunlight in. The smell of growth came up strong from the stuffy old room, and I ran from there and pushed my way back through fine leafy screens, leaving that place, or realm, to clean growth and working insects because—I had to. (99-100)

The survivor delineates this lack of growth and emergence when she describes Emily's garden: "It was a fine garden in every way, planned, prepared, organized, full of good things, all for use—potatoes, leeks, onions, cabbages, the lot—and not a weed or flower in sight. Some children were at work there, and as they saw Emily they quickened their pace" (131). As conditions in the outside world worsen, the garden, too, begins to deteriorate. On her last visit to Emily's house, the survivor notices that the garden has not been repaired. "I half expected to find that efforts had been made towards restoring the vegetable garden. No. It was wrecked and trampled, and some chickens were at

work in it” (187). Without working closely in alliance with nature, outside forces can intervene and destroy what has been preserved and conserved. The balance between cooperation and coercion distinguishes the line between passivity and exploitation.

Within the context of these approaches to nature, the two narrators reveal the gender influences of the authors. Nature is feminine and passive while husbandry, the active exploitation of nature, is masculine (Agrest 53). Fighting against nature to preserve her sanctuary and ultimately the inner sanctum of her room, Magda resists all the efforts of nature’s invasion of her asylum. The survivor embraces nature for the potential natural expansion of the sanctuary. Lessing’s narrator knows this will be the place she will spend the rest of her life; the harmony, beauty, and tranquility of this world far exceed the disaster of her other world.

As both narrators find themselves within the confines of their respective sanctuaries at the end of their tales, each woman describes her individual fate.

Magda writes about her asylum:

I will in time find myself abandoning another room, and then others, until the house is all but lost,...and then retire, dizzy with sleepiness, for even mad old women, insensible to heat and cold, taking their nourishment from the passing air, from motes of dust and drifting stands of spiderweb and fleas’ eggs, must sleep, to the last room, my own room, with the bed against the wall and the mirror and the table in the corner where, chin in hand, I think my mad old woman’s thought and where I shall die, seated, and rot, and where the flies will suck at me, day after day, to say nothing

of the mice and the ants, until I am a clean white skeleton with nothing more to give the world and can be left in peace, with the spiders in my eyesockets spinning traps for the stragglers to the feast. (78-79)

The survivor has a completely different impression of her final refuge:

We were in that place which might present us with anything—rooms furnished this way or that and spanning the tastes and customs of millennia;...a bright green lawn under thunderous and glaring clouds, and on the lawn a giant black egg of pockmarked iron but polished and glossy, around which, and reflected in the black shine, stood Emily, Hugo, Gerald, her officer father, her large laughing gallant mother, and little Denis, the four-year-old criminal, clinging to Gerald's hand, clutching it and look up into his face, smiling. (212)

“The American architect, Christopher Alexander, maintains that every building, or group of buildings, has a heart; when you enter that place, you know you have reached the center of things” (Rybczynski 117). Magda's room, the sacred area of her universe, offers her a mental view of the outside world and the ability to control events within her sanctuary. For the survivor, the rooms beyond the wall provide the security and opportunity of a new world far beyond the reaches of the imposing outside world.

Woman is not simply an object, however. If we think in terms of the production of culture, she is an art object: she is the ivory carving or mud replica, an icon or doll, but she is not the sculptor. (Susan Gubar 293)

CONCLUSION

Two female narrators write their stories from sanctuaries which shelter them from a hostile, patriarchal society. The common themes binding both novels concern perspective and empowerment. Coetzee's narrator writes and builds from a masculine perspective, but her actions emanate from a feminine empowerment. On the other hand, while actions of Lessing's narrator emanate from a feminine empowerment, she writes and builds from a feminine perspective.

Because Magda writes from the masculine perspective, her voice represents the male-dominated world of Coetzee controlling the situation from a position of power. This power/confidence surfaces when Magda confronts events and people within the confines of her farm sanctuary or the refuge of her room, such as addressing Hendrik or the father-son neighbors searching for her father. A dominant first-person "I" is used by Coetzee to relate Magda's story. The reader must view her not simply as a spinster in the middle of nowhere but rather as a member of the patriarchal system found in the outside world. Understanding this paradox of her position in society makes it possible to understand her doubts about existence and her misgivings about the control she has of her life and her interaction with others.

In the case of the survivor, her feminine perspective and feminine empowerment project a strong woman who makes the transition from a patriarchal outside world to a matriarchal world behind the wall. Her actions behind the wall show an acceptance of

the past and the present, but also a projection of a better future when dealing with both environments. Without this particular attitude and exacting strength, the survivor could not have successfully moved into the world of the wall. This feminine perspective and empowerment influence her writing style and require the inclusion of others' stories.

The meticulous construction of the structures built by the narrators becomes clear when analyzed from these aspects of perception and empowerment. The difference between Magda's asylum and the survivor's refuge accentuates the dichotomy of the two narrators' circumstances and responses to their environments. However, in both structures, the dominance of a matriarchal society prevails for both narrators—Magda and the survivor control their sanctuaries but only when each is in her respective sanctuary.

Magda establishes an asylum to adapt to her masculine fight against nature, evidenced by the voice she employs to deal with the outside world. However, because Coetzee permits her only limited empowerment, we understand why her approach is more confined, as typified by the enclosed area of the farm and the restrictions of her room. Because of the forces pulling on her, Magda's sanctuary incorporates more of a mental atmosphere rather than a physical presence. Her actions are more in line with this struggle of masculine perception and feminine power provided her.

In contrast to Magda's mental asylum, the corporeal nature of the refuge behind the wall represents the unity of the survivor's joining of feminine perception and feminine power. In addition to the rebirth and reformation of society, her comfort with nature reflects the harmony attained in her character.

Within the two novels, the personalities, actions, thoughts, relationships, decisions, writing style, voice, and construction of the sanctuaries must be understood within the framework of the perspective and empowerment afforded the narrators by their authors.

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