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Lessing and Emerson: Conscious Evolution and Ideal Reality

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Lessing and Emerson: Conscious Evolution

and Ideal Reality

(TITLE)

BY

Rachel Hills Newell

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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Abstract

That Better we call the Ideal. Ideal is not opposed to Real, but to Actual. The Ideal is the Real. The Actual is but the apparent and temporary.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

I am convinced that we all stand at an open door, and that there is a new man about to be born, who has never been twisted by drudgery; a man whose pride as a man will not be assured by his capacity to shoulder work and responsibilities which he detests, which bore him, which are too small for what he could be; a man whose strength will not be gauged by the values of the mystique of suffering.

-Doris Lessing

Although Doris Lessing writes during the twentieth century in England and Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote during the nineteenth century in America, they both explore the complexity of human existence through their work. Both authors visualize the possibility of an "ideal reality," or human evolution, and believe human beings are capable of transforming ordinary, or actual, reality into ideal reality. The human potential for the creation of the ideal, however, depends on the development of that potential to its fullest extent. Lessing and Emerson believe only the individual is capable of completely developing human potential. Through a series of steps, or experiences, the individual develops his or her potential and ultimately becomes capable of transforming ordinary reality into ideal reality.

In probing the more complicated aspects of human existence in their work, both Lessing and Emerson aim to instruct and educate readers. The two authors use their art to model their own beliefs and behavior as well as to effect transformation among all readers. Lessing and Emerson expect from readers active rather than passive reading-- readers must alter their behavior based on what they read instead of merely reading a work and forgetting about it. The art of writing, for Lessing and Emerson, represents a

vehicle through which they transmit their ideas and cause people to act, or to work for human evolution.

Though Lessing and Emerson write from very different and very distinct environments, neither can easily be categorized as a certain type of writer. While Lessing expresses ideas mainly through fiction and Emerson through essays, both authors examine the various philosophical issues central to human existence. The authors transcend all categories in their attempts to explore and explain the human condition and, in transcending those categories, redefine the role of the artist. Art, for Lessing and Emerson, does not represent merely a form of entertainment. Art represents the human condition, and the two authors consider their art essential to the evolution of humanity.

While Lessing and Emerson appear, on the surface, to be very different from one another--a twentieth-century English female novelist and a nineteenth-century American male essayist--they contemplate many of the same philosophical ideas important to people of any century or country. Emerson is regarded as one of the greatest writers/thinkers of the nineteenth century as a result of his ideas about the human condition. His ideas transcend all boundaries and hold meaning for all humans. Lessing's career of exploring human existence aligns her with the transcendental Emerson, making her one of the wisest and most observant writers/thinkers of the twentieth century. Lessing's vision transcends all boundaries and incorporates all of humanity, and ultimately points toward the evolution of the human race.

Prefatory Note

My goal in this thesis has been to get closer to understanding the complex, spiritual views of life held by Lessing and Emerson to absorb their work into my life. I will not simply stop thinking about the authors' words after finishing my thesis although many readers and critics simply do stop. The ideas Lessing and Emerson express are designed to bring me closer to the path to self-reliance although they cannot force me into becoming self-reliant. Working toward self-reliance is a completely personal choice, a choice that no one but the individual can make. The work of both authors, however, has become a permanent part of my life, allowing me to act rather than merely analyze, to view human existence with a different perspective and to realize the possibility and necessity of self-reliance in terms of creating ideal reality. Lessing and Emerson both write to effect transformation on all levels of reality, or to encourage conversion from ordinary reality to ideal reality, and that such conversion must begin within the self-reliant individual.

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Part I

Emerson and the Ideal Reality

But now we are a mob. Man does not stand in awe of man, nor is his genius admonished to stay at home, to put itself in communication with the internal ocean, but it goes abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men. We must go alone. . . Why should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood, and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation.

-Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

The criticism and attack on institutions which we have witnessed, has made one thing plain, that society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him: he has become tediously good in some particular, but negligent or narrow in the rest; and hypocrisy and vanity are often the disgusting result.

What is the use of the concert of the false and the disunited? There can be no concert in two, where there is no concert in one. When the individual is not *individual*, but is dual; when his thoughts look one way, and his actions another; when his faith is traversed by his habits; when his will, enlightened by reason, is warped by his sense; when with one hand he rows, and with the other backs water, what concert can be?

-Emerson, "New England Reformers"

When Emerson wrote and lectured during the 1840's and 50's, he observed an American society full of disjointed and disconnected people. He watched as many Americans erroneously attempted to fix enormous social problems, such as slavery and the establishment of a materialistic society, without first "fixing" themselves. The reality Emerson saw during the nineteenth century was a flawed reality, a reality in which individuals moved always away from themselves and from other people. Constant and deliberate separation between the person and the individual and between the person and all people, in Emerson's eyes, leads to a regressive society, or a society in which people seem to pedal backward instead of forward. Emerson's solution to this human separation lies in the individual development of self-reliance. Individuals who are self-reliant fix

themselves before attempting to fix society and, as a result, contribute to the progress rather than the regression of humanity.

"Society everywhere," Emerson tells us, "is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater" ("Self-Reliance" 31). Emerson believes people train themselves to deny their individuality for the sake of conformity. Society appears to operate more effectively when all members conform, and so society continually breeds conformists. Emerson goes on to say in "Self-Reliance" that "a man must consider what a blindman's-buff is this game of conformity" (34). Playing the game of conformity only inhibits individuality and, in effect, inhibits human progress. For Emerson, human progress is only possible when human beings are in balance with each other and with the universe. The universal balance Emerson visualizes begins with the individual, and if the individual denies his or her individuality, he or she disrupts the balance and halts human progress altogether.

Behind the pleasant facade of conformity, Emerson sees an unmoving society, a society full of massive groups of people who act and think alike. Emerson interprets this mass imitation as social regression, and as a result, uses his writing to educate people in the subject of human progress. Through his essays and lectures, Emerson defines the ideal reality he envisions for humanity and explains the steps required for transforming "ordinary reality" into "ideal reality." "It is easy to see," Emerson tells us, "that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their

property; in their speculative views" (45). Though he calls for renovation on all levels of human life, the individual is ultimately responsible for beginning the renovation--the individual must become self-reliant before humanity can progress.

To become self-reliant, an individual must look beyond social institutions, beyond human relationships, beyond the muck of society to find his or her self. According to Emerson, we "must take the way from man, not to man" to discover the self (41). The self is always there, eternally, in the background of life, waiting to be acknowledged, waiting to be used. Emerson tells us that the only path to truth, or to the ideal, runs through the individual: "If we live truly, we shall see truly. . .The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well" (41). Separating oneself from the passion of life leads to the discovery of the self, or the soul, which in turn leads to individual self-reliance. Emerson believes that once the individual finds the soul, he or she sees Truth, sees the core of human life:

Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom, and trade, and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things. Where he is, there is nature. He measures you, and all men, and all events. Ordinarily, every body in society reminds us of somewhat else, or of some other person. Character, reality, reminds you of nothing else; it takes the place of whole creation. (37)

The self is the root, the center from which life branches. Being self-reliant means seeing the "whole creation" in the self.

While self-reliant individuals understand that the whole creation resides in the self, they also understand each individual self as a distinct entity that must be cultivated. For Emerson, being self-reliant means understanding the whole (the entire universe) and the part (the individual) at the same time. The part, or the individual, works always within the whole, but cannot work effectively to promote human progress without being self-reliant. According to James M. Albrecht, "Emersonian self-reliance is best understood as [the] willingness to find sufficient meaning in the exercise and development of our individual powers" (117). To become self-reliant, each person must first understand the function of the individual. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson describes the function of the individual: "Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and time fully to accomplish his design" (37). Emerson believes each person must accomplish his or her personal design, but that design cannot be completed without the acknowledgement of the self as a dynamic entity. The self-reliant person comprehends his or her role as a distinct individual while at the same time perceiving himself or herself as an essential part of the entire scheme of eternity.

Comprehending one's role in the scheme of eternity requires that the individual examine himself or herself apart from the group, or the rest of humanity. Emerson believes the group clouds the individual's vision of the self and that only by separating from the group is the individual able to discover the self. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson explains the importance of the individual's separation from humanity while seeking the self:

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. (33)

The group tends to inflict its own expectations on the individual rather than allowing the individual to become a distinct person, making isolation from the group necessary during periods of self-discovery. Emerson believes that "rigid concepts of morality stifle life by preventing us from seeing and developing our own unique creative possibilities" (Albrecht 122). Self-realization is impossible while the individual conforms to society's desires and expectations. "The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is," Emerson writes, "that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character" ("Self-Reliance" 33). Conformity erases the individual's character and shrouds the self, causing the individual to behave according to the group's standards.

Although Emerson believes each individual plays a role within the group, he expects the individual to recognize his or her self before playing that role. An adequate education provides each individual with the means to recognize his or her self. In his "Address on Education," Emerson calls for a "complete education," for "academic institutions to have a wider scope" (203). With a "complete" education, all people would be equipped to live as individuals within the group, or to live as self-reliant individuals. In "New England Reformers," Emerson describes problems with contemporary American education as well as solutions to these problems:

The popular education has been taxed with a want of truth and nature. . . . We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands, or our legs, or our eyes, or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods, we cannot tell our course by the stars, nor the hour of the day by the sun . . . it seems as if a man should learn to plant, or to fish, or to hunt, that he might secure his subsistence at all events, and not be painful to his friends and fellow men. The lessons of science should be experimental also. The sight of a planet through a telescope, is worth all the course on astronomy: the shock of the electric spark in the elbow, out-values all the theories; the taste of nitrous oxide, the firing of an artificial volcano, are better than volumes of chemistry. (364)

Emerson's education would teach people to study things in books as well as things outside of books. Reading a book about the solar system cannot simulate looking at the solar system through a telescope, and Emerson believes experiencing reality outside of books would enable each individual to understand more about himself or herself and ultimately to understand the various part of his or her world.

Through education, the individual gains an understanding of the different aspects of his or her world, which culminates in his or her understanding of the spirituality of the world. For Emerson, discovering spirituality means discovering the intricate connections among all things in the universe, or in nature, and realizing the presence of the entire universe in all things. In "The American Scholar," Emerson tells us each individual holds

the universe within himself or herself. "The world is nothing," he writes, "the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature . . . in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all" (Richardson 99). Emerson believes people, for the most part, fail to recognize their connections to the universe:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beautitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. ("The Over-Soul" 156)

If human beings stop looking at things in parts and begin to see the parts as a whole, they will understand the higher power, the spirituality, that permeates and connects all things. An adequate education, according to Emerson, would teach people "that the universe is represented in an atom, in a moment of time" (170). The universe, or nature, for Emerson, is represented in all things, regardless of size, and each person must discover this eternal representation to become self-reliant.

Emerson's notion of the ideal reality relies on his idea of spirituality, or of the whole. Without experiencing the whole, the individual cannot reach a state of self-reliance. As Stephen E. Whicher states in "The Dream of Greatness," "This self-sufficient unity or wholeness . . . [represents] the central objective of the egoistic and

transcendental Emerson" (68). The self-reliant individual realizes he or she cannot see one thing without seeing another and that "there is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself" (Emerson, "The American Scholar" 84). For Emerson, self-reliance means perceiving the separate parts that form the whole as well as perceiving the whole as an entity in and of itself. The self-reliant individual recognizes that "God is essentially self, and that ideally . . . the two should and can be identical" (Whicher 64). The person who sees within himself or herself the individual self as well as the entire universe is the self-reliant individual.

In becoming self-reliant, the individual becomes capable of transforming ordinary reality into the ideal reality visualized by Emerson. Self-reliant individuals transform reality by genuinely contemplating human existence and by finding Truth. For Emerson, the ideal reality consists of people who "measure their esteem of each other [not] by what each has, [but] by what each is" ("Self-Reliance" 51), people who trust themselves, people who see "the genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, [as] demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul" (42). The creation of the ideal reality arises only when people begin acknowledging each other for what they truly are, and people acknowledge one another only through developing self-reliance. According to Emerson, self-reliance alone sparks the transformation of reality from the ordinary to the ideal, and the self-reliant individual therefore serves as the key to human progress.

Part II

Lessing and the Path to Self-Reliance

Hendin: How do you feel about your own career as a writer?

Lessing: Well, I have right here a quotation which I took off the wall from the wall-newspaper downstairs, and it reads: "The function of art is to make that understood which in the form of argument would be incomprehensible," and that was written by Tolstoy. And that is what I feel about writing.

-Lessing in an interview with Josephine Hendin

The totality of life cannot be understood, so runs Sufi teaching, if it is studied only through the methods which we use in everyday living. This is partly because, although the question, "What is it all about?" can of course be posed in a nominally reasonable sequence of words, the answer is not to be expressed in a similar way. It comes through experience, and enlightenment.

-Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

As a twentieth-century British writer, Doris Lessing is far removed from Emerson, yet she also examines the idea of individual self-reliance. Like Emerson, Lessing believes in the possibility of the creation of an ideal reality and in the idea that human beings possess far more potential for improving their lives than they believe they possess. Although the potential of transforming reality into the ideal exists within all humans, the ideal cannot be achieved unless we explore that potential. According to Lessing, humans must explore their potential through a series of experiences during which they learn about themselves and about their world. These experiences culminate in a perceptive, capable individual who embodies Emerson's idea of the self-reliant individual.

Through her writing, Lessing explains the path to self-reliance in terms of individual experience. For Lessing, the individual holds the key to the creation of ideal reality but must travel the path to self-reliance before finding the key. The journey to self-reliance requires the individual to discover his or her self, to recognize his or her

significance in relation to the rest of humanity and to perceive the interlinking nature of all things in the universe. This journey, as Lessing points out in many of her works, is not an easy one. "What I have found," Lessing says to an interviewer, "is the beginnings of a way of looking at things which unfolds as you go on, and if that is an annoying phrase I can't help it. You discover all the time. It is not an easy thing" (Ingersoll 80). While on the path to self-reliance, the individual will experience good and evil, happiness and sadness, self-development and self-destructiveness, togetherness and detachment, regeneration and breakdown. Although the journey to self-reliance will often overwhelm and discourage the individual, Lessing believes each person must make the journey in order to unlock the human potential to create the ideal.

As a writer, Lessing has attempted to explore the social and psychological history of the twentieth century and has contemplated the larger issues of human existence in exploring that history. The major movements of the twentieth century, such as socialism, psychology, and scientific advancement, appear again and again throughout her work reflecting her perpetual interest in human behavior. While Lessing despises being categorized, she is generally considered a realist. Realism, however, fails to accurately define her due to her use of non-realistic forms of writing such as space-fiction, or "hypothetical fiction" (Pickering 5). Regardless of the form she uses, however, Lessing studies the relationship between the individual and the whole (or the universe) in nearly all of her work. This relationship is central to Lessing's writing career because the relationship is central to human existence.

Lessing's foremost work in the exploration of the relationship between the individual and the whole is the *Children of Violence* series. Through the five-volume

series, the main character, Martha Quest, travels the path of self-discovery and eventually becomes self-reliant. Lessing traces Martha through the five volumes of the series and describes her experiences as an individual coming to terms with the people around her and with her own individuality in relation to the universe. Martha's life experiences parallel those which Emerson believes each self-reliant individual encounters. As a young person, Martha discovers herself as an entity separate from all other people and begins resisting those who attempt to control her. Martha's eventual rejection of the oppressive factors of her life leads to her realization that those factors should not be completely rejected. Rather than discarding the world around her, Martha learns to live in it, or rather with it. Through learning to exist with the world, she comes to realize the Emersonian notion of existence--that all things connect to all other things--and that people cannot see ideal reality until they see the connections, until they become self-reliant.

For Lessing and Emerson, all people are potentially self-reliant. Self-reliance is not reserved merely for certain elite groups of people, but is rather held within each individual. Each person exists as a part of the universe--the person is inside the universe and the universe is inside the person--and is capable of knowing the universe. What separates the self-reliant individual from the non-self-reliant individual is not eliteness or superiority, but a conscious choice to begin the journey toward a state of self-reliance. The journey is not easy--it is a demanding, lifelong process. A person cannot simply wake up one day a self-reliant individual. All people must experience the path to self-reliance. They must, as Emerson states, "pass through the whole cycle of experience" to reach self-reliance ("History" 25). Lessing and Emerson both believe that all who choose to do so are capable of experiencing the path.

-The Individual-

Looking back now, I no longer see these enormous blocs, nations, movements, systems, faiths, religions, but only individuals, people who when I was young I might have valued, but not with much belief in the possibility of their changing anything. Looking back, I see what a great influence an individual may have, even an apparently obscure person, living a small, quiet life. It is the individuals who change societies, give birth to new ideas, who, standing out against tides of opinion, change them. . .

But it is my belief that it is always the individual, in the long run, who will set the tone, provide the real development in a society.

-Lessing, "Laboratories of Social Change"

The first step to becoming self-reliant lies in recognizing oneself as an individual among all of humanity. Though each person absorbs the influences of other people, he or she must remember and retain his or her individuality. Once the individual understands himself or herself as a distinct person with distinct thoughts and feelings, he or she must detach from society, or from the group, to understand the self. Society bombards each person with its desire for conformity, its ideas of right and wrong, its group thinking, and severely inhibits the self-development of the individual while within the group. Isolating oneself from the group allows the individual to focus on the self rather than on the group.

As the heroine of Lessing's *Children of Violence* series, Martha Quest, comes of age, she realizes her thinking differs markedly from that of those around her. In realizing her individual thinking, Martha rejects many aspects of her life to gain the freedom to explore her self. The beliefs of her fellow British colonists and of her family represent restrictive systems that force Martha to think for others rather than for herself. Rather than conform to the social mentality that surrounds her, Martha chooses to reject it and to remain faithful to her own thinking. Although this rejection destroys some of her relationships, Martha refuses to sacrifice her self for the sake of conformity and chooses instead to live according to the Emersonian principle that "the soul may be trusted to the

end" (Emerson, "Love" 107). The soul, or self, becomes Martha's foundation for the rest of her life. Although she does not completely understand her self until much later, she understands that the self is the determining force in her life, that the self, if allowed, will tell her what to do.

Although Martha is expected to share the racist views of the British colonists of Central Africa, she realizes early in life that she disagrees and refuses to conform to the general racist attitude. Martha's parents express the colonial racism when they discuss "the international ring of Jews who controlled the world" and the assumption that all kaffirs are "dirty and lazy and inherently stupid" (Lessing, *Martha Quest* 26). Martha constantly defends the people her parents despise before realizing "that against some things reason is powerless" (26). As a result, she is perpetually criticized by her parents for her anti-racist attitude. When Martha announces her plan to go for a solitary walk, her parents take her to task for her relaxed attitude about the dangers of the natives. Young white girls, according to Mrs. Quest, risk being raped by a native if they walk alone. Martha, however, believes the natives pose no threat and tells her parents "Oh, don't be ridiculous. . . If a native raped me, then he'd be hung and I'd be a national heroine, so he wouldn't do it, even if he wanted to" (39). Mr. and Mrs. Quest immediately begin a long lecture on "the consequences of her attitude":

It ended with 'And so they'll drive us into the sea, and then the country will be ruined, what would these ignorant blacks do without us.' And the usual inconsequent conclusion: 'They have no sense of gratitude at all for what we do for them.' It had all been said so often that it rang stale and false for both sides. . . (39)

As a result of hearing her parents' racist comments so often in light of the fact that natives did not habitually attack young white girls, Martha begins rejecting her parents and realizing that their lectures come not from personal experience, but from the racist illusions generated by society. In resisting her parents, Martha resists the social illusions surrounding her and chooses to rely on her self to establish individuality.

While Mrs. Quest's racist attitude offends Martha, her desire for complete control over her daughter erects a barrier between mother and daughter. Mrs. Quest maintains very defined expectations of appropriate behavior in relation to her daughter, but Martha chooses not to live up to her mother's standards and continually defies her mother. The two women see things in opposites and can do nothing but clash with one another, which eventually destroys their relationship.

Appearances are very important to Mrs. Quest, and her obsession with forcing Martha to behave "appropriately" establishes a lifelong barrier between herself and her daughter. Any misbehavior on Martha's part would not only tarnish Martha's reputation, but also that of the entire Quest family. Mrs. Quest therefore establishes specific rules for Martha. She believes Martha should not spend time with certain people such as Marnie Van Rensberg, "whom she [Mrs. Quest] found in altogether bad taste, wearing grown-up clothes and lipstick at fifteen, and talking about 'boys'" (6-7) or the Jewish Cohen boys (10). Martha, of course, opposes her mother on these issues and spends time with Marnie and the Cohen boys anyway. Mrs. Quest also attempts to force Martha to wear clothing designed for little girls instead of allowing her to wear more grown-up clothing. Once Martha turns sixteen, she decides to redesign some of her little girl clothes into more adult looking outfits. When Mrs. Quest found Martha altering her clothing, she "came

quickly across the room, and laid her hands on either side of the girl's waist, as if trying to press her back into childhood":

Suddenly Martha moved backwards, and involuntarily lifted her hand; she was shuddering with disgust at the touch of her own mother, and had been going to slap her across the face. She dropped her hand, amazed at her own violence; and Mrs. Quest coloured and said ineffectually, 'My dear . . . ! . . . 'I'm sixteen,' said Martha, between set teeth, in a stifled voice . . . (17)

This clothes battle reinforces Martha's decision to live on her own terms and also helps her realize the difficulty of maintaining her own thoughts. As Emerson tells us in "Self-Reliance," maintaining an individual opinion is hard "because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it" (33). Mrs. Quest believes she knows what is best for Martha, but Mrs. Quest is not Martha and therefore cannot know what is best for her.

Martha, for her entire life, is tortured by her relationship with Mrs. Quest, but she cannot force herself to live on her mother's terms rather than on her own. To survive, Martha blocks out her painful relationship with her mother and spends much of her adult life trying to forget the pain instead of coming to terms with it. After moving from Africa to England, Martha believes she will avoid any confrontation with her mother and feels free to live her own way without thinking about Mrs. Quest. When Mrs. Quest, however, announces in a letter that she plans on moving to England to live with her daughter, Martha experiences a breakdown. Mrs. Quest's impending arrival brings a flood of memories over Martha and she realizes

She had been blocking off the pain, and had blocked off half of her life with it. Her memory had gone. Well, almost. But in a few weeks, Mrs. Quest would arrive in this house, to this life Martha was living now, and as usual not one thing about it could be revealed to her because she would be so upset. (Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* 229)

Martha despises not only the thought of confronting her mother, but also the thought of hiding her real life for the sake of pleasing Mrs. Quest.

As a result of confronting her painful past, Martha feels the need to schedule an appointment with a psychologist, Dr. Lamb, to talk about her state of mind. When Dr. Lamb asks about Martha's reasons for making an appointment, Martha replies:

it was that her mother was about to pay her a visit. Her problem was that what her intelligence said had no effect at all on her emotions. The first said that her mother deserved, at last, a pair of loving arms and someone to comfort her until she died. Her emotions put her to bed with the covers over her head, made her a creature without will or energy.

(248)

In blocking out her past, Martha erases part of her self and when confronted with the past, she realizes she must remember it completely and retrieve that part of her self. When Mrs. Quest finally arrives, Martha has dealt with her past and decides against any more hiding of anything. She says to her mother:

What I don't want to happen is that we should go through this - pretending - no, I don't mean that. I mean, you never did like what I am, how I am. But what's the use of . . . we could either put a good face on

things, and be polite, all that kind of thing - but wouldn't it be better if we could try . . . You see, I know this isn't exactly an orthodox household, but if you take it as it is then . . . You know, we don't all have the same ideas about life, do we . . . Wouldn't it be better if you tried to - accept me as I am? (287-8)

Martha, instead of rejecting her mother as she did as a child, accepts her mother "as she is." Mrs. Quest is not going to change, and Martha realizes that shutting out their relationship with the expectation that Mrs. Quest change her way of thinking will benefit no one. Martha also realizes, however, that she cannot suppress her self even while surrounded by people who think very differently than she thinks. Although she completely rejects her mother during childhood to preserve her self, Martha understands as an adult that preserving the self without completely denying anything works better than complete rejection.

Having rejected her mother and the racist colonists, Martha must look to other things for comfort and a feeling of belonging. Her love of reading and her connection to the natural world provide solace in her otherwise difficult adolescent years. Although her mother and society disapprove of her extensive reading and time spent outdoors, Martha feels the most freedom and the most herself in the company of books and nature.

Literature, for Martha, represents a comforting and accepting entity in the absence of a nurturing family and society. Books allow Martha to "leave" her stifled life in Central Africa and to experience other people and places. Most importantly, books help Martha cope with her difficult teenage years:

. . . Martha, in an agony of adolescent misery, was lying among the long

grass under a tree, repeating to herself that her mother was hateful, all these old women hateful, every one of these relationships, with their lies, evasions, compromises, wholly disgusting. For she was suffering that misery peculiar to the young, that they are going to be cheated by circumstances out of the full life every nerve and instinct is clamouring for. . . She was not only miserable, she could focus a dispassionate eye on that misery. This detached observer, felt perhaps as a clear-lit space situated just behind the forehead, was the gift of the Cohen boys at the station, who had been lending her books for the last two years. (Lessing, *Martha Quest* 7-8)

Through reading literature, Martha realizes she is "adolescent, and therefore bound to be unhappy" (8). While reading the classic authors helps Martha perceive her own life in the context of the lives of others, it does not impart to her new facts and ideas about life. Although she wants to experience new ways of thinking, she is very resistant to the authors, such as H.G. Wells, who write about "different" ideas (28). Martha realizes "there are only two ways of reading: one of them deepens and intensifies what one already knows; from the other, one takes new facts, new views to weave into one's life. She was saturated with the first, and needed the second," the "new facts" and "new views," to gain freedom from her restrictive life (28). Books not only allow Martha freedom from her personal situation, but they also compel her to think for herself and to develop her individuality.

While books help Martha cope with adolescence, her connection to nature arouses her understanding of her place in the universe. As a child, Martha spends much of her

time outdoors exploring the landscape she lives in and taking refuge from her daily life. Once she reaches adolescence, she senses a strong connection between nature and herself and reflects that

There was certainly a definite point at which the thing began. It was not; then it was suddenly inescapable, and nothing could have frightened it away. There was a slow integration, during which she, and the little animals, and the moving grasses, and the sun-warmed trees, and the slopes of shivering silvery meadows, and the great dome of blue light overhead, and the stones of the earth under her feet, became one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms. She felt rivers under the ground forcing themselves painfully along her veins, swelling them out in an unbearable pressure; her flesh was the earth, and suffered growth like a ferment; and her eyes stared, fixed like the eye of the sun . . . during that space of time (which was timeless) she understood quite finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity . . . For that moment, while space and time kneaded her flesh, she knew futility; that is, what was futile was her own idea of herself and her place in the chaos of matter. What was demanded of her was that she should accept something quite different; it was as if something new was demanding conception, with her flesh as host; as if there were a necessity, which she must bring herself to accept, that she should allow herself to dissolve and be formed by that necessity.

(52-3)

Through her connection with nature, Martha glimpses something larger than her own personal life and realizes she makes up only a miniscule part of the whole of life. In the "American Scholar," Emerson describes the kind of connections Martha makes:

To the young mind every thing is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things and see them in one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem. (84)

Through connecting with nature and seeing that each thing is related to all others, Martha realizes she must strive for something more universal, that "necessity," rather than getting caught up in only her own life. This realization ultimately determines her behavior throughout the rest of her life.

Although Martha recognizes the connections among all things in the universe during adolescence, she does not completely understand her role as an individual within the universe until much later in life. Until Martha figures out how to discover her self, she tries on different "selves," or roles, in order to understand herself as an individual. In attempting to define herself, she slides into common societal roles such as wife, mother and political activist. These common roles do not work for Martha, though, because they are not "Martha." As a distinct individual, Martha cannot live a role without first finding her self or without making the role she lives a branch of her self. The roles Martha plays hide her individuality from herself as well as from other people, and hidden individuality contributes nothing to the struggle for self-reliance. Though the various screens Martha

creates leave her in a state of near-misery for several years, she eventually learns, by recognizing her actions as screens, that personal contentment is possible only if she finds her self.

One of the first and most destructive roles Martha tries on is the role of wife. Though Martha observes married couples all around her and sees that marriage is a fairly common, normal behavior, the idea of marriage means nothing to her but confinement and restriction. Near the end of *Martha Quest*, however, Martha spontaneously decides one night to marry Douglas Knowell. Waking up the next morning, Martha realizes the idea of marriage repulses her:

On the following morning she woke in a panic. She told herself she was mad, or rather, had been, for now she was quite sane. She did not want to marry Douglas, she did not want to marry at all. With a cold, disparaging eye, she looked at the image of Douglas and shuddered. She told herself that she would ring him from the office and tell him they had both made a terrible mistake. Calm descended on her, and she went to the office, spiritually free once again. In this mood she walked into the office, and was greeted by congratulations. (224)

Martha feels "spiritually free" once she decides to call the wedding off, but believes she must go through with it after her fellow employees congratulate her. Getting married is "the thing to do," and Martha, because she has not discovered her self, cannot resist marriage. The freedom Martha feels before she gets to the office reflects her self, reflects the fact that she is doing what she wants to do. Deciding to go through with the wedding traps Martha and separates her from that free feeling, or rather from her true self.

Pregnancy separates Martha further from herself since she must take on the role of mother in addition to taking on the role of wife. The birth of Douglas and Martha's daughter, Caroline, prompts Douglas to buy a house, a house that Martha must maintain in addition to caring for Caroline. Martha immediately feels restricted with her duties as mother and housewife and resents Caroline for imposing those restrictions. Though Martha loves her daughter, she considers Caroline

that hard and unalterable fact which turned [her] life, in spite of a pleasant and helpful nurse-girl, into a routine which began at five sharp every morning, when the light first showed, and ended at seven in the evening, when she went to bed. The rhythm of Caroline's needs was in sharp discord with her own; she adjusted herself, she did what was necessary, but it was her sense of duty which regulated her. Being a mother, or rather, the business of looking after a child, as distinct from carrying and giving birth to one, was not a fulfilment but a drag on herself. (*A Proper Marriage* 253)

Martha finds no fulfillment in Caroline because the role of "mother" does not represent her self. Personal fulfillment is impossible as long as Martha plays roles without first finding her true self. The duties of family life eventually induces Martha to strip herself of the roles of wife and mother by divorcing Douglas and leaving Caroline to be raised by her father. Martha abandons her family because she realizes her routine life as a wife and mother is self-defeating and because she longs for the freedom to be herself, though she is not exactly sure of the meaning of "herself."

Though Martha leaves her husband and daughter in order to be "herself," she slips into another role instead. Amidst the racial injustice and the climate of World War II in central Africa, Martha joins the Communist movement. As a political activist, Martha works tirelessly for her cause, all the while believing she is being herself. She also marries Anton Hesse, the leader of her activist group, although she despised being married to her first husband. By marrying Anton, Martha believes she is doing something natural in terms of her role as a political activist because a marriage to a fellow Communist reinforces her devotion to the movement.

As the Communist group slowly falls apart, Martha realizes she has merely been playing another role. After realizing her group is finished, Martha reflects on her time as part of the Communist Party and as Anton's wife and thinks "That's another two years of my life gone. The phrase two years seemed meaningless: they had been years of such hard work, excitement, happiness and learning that they seemed more important than all the time she had lived before. She thought, 'Well, that's over'" (*A Ripple from the Storm* 261). Martha pours all of her energy into the Communist movement and feels empty when it fragments. The countless hours spent working for the cause mean nothing since the cause has disintegrated. Although Martha has worked constantly and has felt happy for two years, she has not been searching for her self during those two years. When the role of political activist disintegrates, Martha disintegrates with it because she does not know her self.

By taking on various roles and remaining unfulfilled, Martha realizes she must live differently to attain personal fulfillment. Defining social roles such as wife, mother and political activist fail to unlock Martha's individuality, therefore inhibiting her self-

discovery. She must discover her self before taking on the roles society assigns. The social roles that cause problems for Martha Quest also cause problems for Emerson. In "The American Scholar," he expresses his disappointment with society for prescribing various roles to people without teaching them that the roles they take on are parts of a greater whole (83). If Martha had known the whole and her self, which comes from knowing the whole, she might have fared better in her roles. Instead, she must completely discard her roles to discover her self. The only method of finding the self lies in detachment and isolation, and after Martha's role as a Communist deteriorates, she decides to move from Africa to England. Moving to a different country will provide her with the detached, isolated environment conducive to self-discovery.

Martha's desire for detachment mirrors Lessing's belief that self-discovery is impossible under the conditions of routine, daily life. Lessing herself, like her heroine, left Africa and moved to England when her own life became monotonous due to many of the same circumstances Martha encounters in the *Children of Violence* series. In "Laboratories of Social Change," Lessing tells us that detachment from routine provides the only means for finding the self (70). The process of self-discovery requires each individual to spend a period of time with only himself or herself. Consistent distractions such as family, money and social problems inhibit the process of self-recognition, and Lessing considers detachment and isolation essential to the realization of the self.

For the first few weeks after arriving in London, Martha remains "anonymous, unnoticed, - free" (*The Four-Gated City* 12). The people of the city are strangers to her and therefore expect nothing of her. As a wanderer with no job, no ties, no routine,

Martha is free to focus on herself as an individual. After several weeks of solitary roaming, Martha stops near the bay during a walk and glimpses her self for the first time:

In a street full of strangers, on the top of a bus in a part of London all barren little houses and smoking chimneys - who was she? Martha? Certainly not 'Matty'. She became lightheaded, empty, sometimes dizzy. But by the river, looking down at the moving water, she was connected still with - a feeling of being herself. She was able to see herself as if from a hundred yards up, a tiny coloured blob, among other blobs, on top of a bus, or in a street. Today she could see herself, a black blob, in Mrs. Van's coat, a small black blob beside a long grey parapet. A tiny entity among swarms: then down, back inside herself, to stand, arms on damp concrete: this was what she was, a taste or flavour of existence without a name.

(25-6)

During the course of this self-exploration, Martha begins recognizing her self as a distinct, self-contained entity impervious to social roles and decides to search more deeply to completely understand her self. Since arriving in London, Martha "had learned that if she walked long enough, slept slightly enough to be conscious of her dreams, ate at random, was struck by new experience throughout the day, then her whole self cleared, lightened, she became alive and light and aware" (45). In this light state, Martha is capable of connecting with her true self. She sees her mind as a "soft dark empty place" and wonders "who then was she behind the banalities of the day? A young woman? No, nothing but a soft dark receptive intelligence, that was all" (46-7). The "soft dark receptive intelligence" Martha reaches is her self. Though Martha will not completely

understand her self until later in her life, she discovers that her self is there. Thus she can reattach to daily life as an individual prepared for developing, or evolving, her self to its full potential.

Martha's experiences during her period of detachment from the world are not abnormal. Self-development during periods of isolation is a psychological experience common to all human beings. Psychologist Anthony Storr writes in *Solitude* that "Removing oneself voluntarily from one's habitual environment promotes self-understanding and contact with those inner depths of being which elude one in the hurly-burly of day-to-day life" (34-5). Martha's detachment reprograms her mind to ignore the outside world and allows her to spend time thinking only about her self. Spending time alone links her with "self-discovery and self-realization; with becoming aware of [her] deepest needs, feelings and impulses" (21). Although Martha is a fictitious character, her experiences with detachment and self-discovery closely resemble Lessing's personal experiences with isolation. As a result of experiencing detachment from daily life, Lessing realizes everyone "needs a certain distance, detachment; and it is precisely this detachment that makes possible. . . a step forwards in social consciousness" ("Laboratories of Social Change" 70). Isolation from reality not only allows the individual to discover the self, but also allows him or her to begin the evolutionary process of becoming self-reliant.

-The Group-

When we're in a group, we tend to think as that group does: we may even have joined the group to find "like-minded" people. But we also find our thinking changing because we belong to a group. It is the hardest thing in the world to maintain an individual dissident opinion, as a member of a group.

-Lessing, "Group Minds"

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

-Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

A balance has to be struck between wanting something for oneself and wanting it for the community as well.

-Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

Once the individual recognizes the self during a period of isolation, he or she is capable of returning to society, or to the group. Returning to the group forces the individual into the difficult task of developing the self within the context of society which, in turn, pushes the individual along the path to self-reliance. Though all people must see themselves as individuals, they must also realize their connection to all of humanity. While Emerson describes the self-reliant individual as one who "keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude," Lessing explains, through her essays and fiction, the process of maintaining individual independence while within the group and of reaching self-reliance ("Self-Reliance" 33). Becoming self-reliant means maintaining the individual self while within the group, or recognizing oneself as a part of the group without being consumed by the group. Total submission to the group destroys the individual's potential to reach self-reliance because to submit means to sacrifice the self.

In rejoining society, the individual is bombarded by "group thinking," or the thought patterns of the majority. Though these patterns of thought may not contribute to human progress, people tend to hold on to them simply because vast numbers of other

people hold onto them. Group thinking is the result of a society of people who imitate one another rather than think on their own. Mimicking the behavior of people leads to a destructive and suicidal entity described by Lessing as the "group mind." Lessing, in "Group Minds," expresses her belief that many Westerners have been trained to say to themselves "I am a citizen of a free society, and that means I am an individual, making individual choices. My mind is my own, my opinions are chosen by me, I am free to do as I will, and at the worst the pressures on me are economic, that is to say I may be too poor to do as I want" (47). She goes on to say that "People in the West therefore may go through their entire lives never thinking to analyze this very flattering picture, and as a result are helpless against all kinds of pressures on them to conform in many kinds of ways (47). The indoctrinated belief that we as Westerners are free individuals making our own choices hides the fact that we are operating merely as a group mind, that we are not making our own choices. Because many people believe they are free, and because we have been taught to believe we are free, we succumb to the thinking of the group mind and believe we are free.

The individual must learn to resist giving in to the group mind mentality and must live on his or her own terms. Lessing believes each person must preserve his or her self in the midst of the group to avoid submitting to group thinking. Self-preservation does not, however, imply the complete rejection of other people or ideas. Human beings are "group animals still, and there is nothing wrong with that," says Lessing in "Group Minds" (48). People need one another, and "whether or not they are enjoying intimate relationships, human beings need a sense of being part of a larger community" (Storr 13). That larger community, or the group, actually provides the individual with information necessary to

maintaining individuality. Each individual must observe himself or herself in the context of a group of people to discern the differences between people. In *Solitude*, Storr writes:

If by personality we mean a man's 'distinctive personal character' we are obliged to recognize that we can only conceive of such an entity in terms of contrasting it with other personal characters. One cannot even begin to be conscious of oneself as a separate individual without another person with whom to compare oneself. A man in isolation is a collective man, a man without individuality. (147)

People, by nature, need to participate in the collective. The individual seeking self-reliance, however, must participate in the collective without allowing himself or herself to be consumed, or taken over, by the group mind. As Lessing states in "Laboratories of Social Change," "One learns nothing, about anything, ever, when in a state of boiling ferment, or partisan enthusiasm" (70).

For Lessing, understanding the way the group actually operates as opposed to how it should operate allows the individual to resist succumbing to the group mind. Although the group mind is a single entity, it permeates all levels of human life and determines the behavior of people. Lessing describes the collective in "Group Minds" as "follow-my-leader, people all saying the same thing at the same time" (51). She goes on to say:

One can say of course that this is only 'the way of the world.' But does it have to be? If it does have to be, then at least we could expect it, understand it, and make allowances for it. Perhaps if it is a mechanism that

is known to be one then in might be easier for [people] to be braver and less like sheep in their pronouncements. (51)

If the individual understands the group mind, he or she is capable of resisting it. In understanding the operation of the collective, people gain the ability to determine their own lives, or to become self-reliant, and to contribute to the progress of humanity.

Martha Quest, in *The Four-Gated City*, discovers not only the operation of the group mind, but also that participating in the group mentality is an act of human instinct. After spending several weeks wandering the city of London, Martha meets a friend, Phoebe, for dinner. Martha does not attempt to dress appropriately for the dinner and realizes immediately after Phoebe arrives that she (Martha) "was a disappointment" (92). Martha's "linen sleeveless dress on a day which was only by courtesy a summer's day" does not meet Phoebe's standards and Phoebe shuns Martha (92). After digesting Phoebe's reaction, Martha questions the "standards" she does not satisfy and realizes:

There was something in the human mind that separated and divided . . . the insight of knowledge she now held, of the nature of separation, of division (for any number of different sets of words would serve to state it, none being of any real use), was clear and keen - she understood, sitting there, while the soup sent a fine steam of appetite up to her nostrils, understood *really* (but in a new way, was in the grip of a vision), how human beings could be separated so absolutely by a slight difference in the texture of their living that they could not talk to each other, must be wary, or enemies. (92)

The natural human behavior of separating and dividing leads directly to the group mind mentality. Martha's revelation of the division among people echoes Emerson's words in "Spiritual Laws." "We foolishly think," he writes, "in our days of sin, that we must court friends by compliance to the customs of society, to its dress, its breeding, and its estimates" (85). Complying with the "customs of society," or society's habit of categorizing, simply because it is customary to comply creates the group mind. Only by resisting the supposed need to classify are people able to resist the group mind mentality.

Lessing believes understanding the collective coincides with accepting the fact that many social systems such as politics, religion, social hierarchies and gender role expectations are worthless and destructive. These systems, by merely recycling past ideas and calling them "new," fail to produce fresh ideas and serve only to inhibit the individual which, in turn, inhibits human progress. Lessing believes a faulty, incomplete education perpetuates the recycling within various social systems, and that a new, complete educational system provides the only way to stop the recycling.

The systems of education humans use to educate themselves are, Lessing believes, inefficient and ineffective on all levels. Education, as we now understand it, fails to promote human progress, and instead churns out vast amounts of like-minded people who regard themselves as knowledgeable individuals. In "Laboratories of Social Change," Lessing tells us education trains people for small bits of life rather than for life in general. "But all the pressures go the other way," she writes, "towards learning only what is immediately useful, what is functional. More and more the demand is for people to be educated to function in an almost entirely temporary stage of technology. Educated for the short term" (71). A short-term education produces group minds, people who act

and think in ways designated by the majority during a given period of time, rather than self-reliant individuals.

An example of the transmission of the group mind mentality through education appears in Lessing's *The Singing Door*, a play about a society that has developed underground. The people who make up the underground society, or who live in the Underplace, believe they have been trapped there for many years. They have, however, designed "myths" about escaping to the Outside through a door. For the majority of the people living in the Underplace, the door is nonexistent, is only something mythical according to their educational system. When a few individuals who do in fact know the door exists begin spreading the word that the door will open soon, they are restrained, or are given "medical care" as a result of insanity:

First Low-Leveller: But what's wrong with them?

Fifth Precept: We are under medical care because we insist on discussing
Item 99. Tonight.

Second Low-Leveller: Never heard of it.

Fifth Precept: The Door is going to open. It is going to open.

Third Low-Leveller: Oh I see, they're nuts. (86)

Although the door to the Outside stands in plain view to all people in the Underplace, the inhabitants have been educated to consider the door and its meaning a myth, which influences them to ridicule and punish those who believe the door truly exists. After the people who believe in the door walk through it and escape the Underplace, a delegate says "I saw them all run through the light. I mean through the Door. They ran through the singing . . . I saw them . . . I saw what happened. They've escaped! They've got out.

They've left this Underplace for Outside! They are free, I tell you. Free, free, free" (96). The small collection of people who think for themselves and who resist the mass-belief that the door is non-existent end up free in the Outside while the majority remains trapped in the Underplace. For Lessing, freedom, or self-reliance, is possible only when the individual functions inside the group but outside the group mind.

Though Lessing believes education, in its current standing, is useless, she believes people are capable of transforming it into an individually and socially productive system. Once people understand the failures of the current educational systems, they will be able to begin forming new systems of education. An example of the failures of education appears in *The Four-Gated City* when Paul Coldridge decides he wants to leave school. Martha, who acts as a mother to Paul, believes Paul should be allowed to end his formal education because it is not benefiting him. Martha describes Paul's educational experience as follows:

When he first got to this new school, he allowed himself to be brilliant, for as long as it took to demonstrate that he could come first any time he liked. Then he lost interest. He continued to say that the moment he was legally able to leave school, he would. (367)

Paul loses interest in his education because he can master it so quickly. Formal education does not challenge him but instead bores him. This boredom is a result of the fact that, as Emerson states in "The American Scholar," "the book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,-- let us hold by this . . . They look backward and not forward" (87). If educational systems do not progress or evolve with new generations of people and new geniuses, they cannot

adequately educate people. A backward-looking pedagogy influences people to reject education as a worthless endeavor.

Lessing believes the transformation of education must begin with children. "We have to start with the education of children," she argues, "to teach them how to accept themselves as complete individuals, regardless of their group or race" (Ingersoll 107). Educating young people to think about themselves as individuals within the group will help produce self-reliant adults. To influence young people to think about their individuality, Lessing suggests that parents, schools and governments adopt the following curriculum:

You are going to have to live in a world full of mass movements, both religious and political, mass ideas, mass cultures. Every hour of every day you will be deluged with ideas and opinions that are mass produced. . . . It will seem to you many times in your life that there is no point in holding out against these pressures, that you are not strong enough. But you are going to be taught how to examine these mass ideas, these apparently irresistible pressures, taught how to think for yourself. . . . You will be taught that no matter how much you have to conform outwardly, to keep your own being alive inwardly, your own judgment, your own thought. . . . ("Laboratories of Social Change" 75-6)

If we are conditioned through education to expect an attack from the group mind, we will be better equipped to fight the attack and to avoid being stripped of our individuality.

The form of education Lessing promotes is a "complete education," an education that includes both technical skills, such as reading and writing, and general skills, such as

understanding of human behavior. All people must gain knowledge in both areas to become self-reliant. In "Laboratories of Social Change," Lessing describes that under the ideal educational system,

You will be taught to read history, so as to learn how short-lived ideas are, how apparently the most irresistible and persuasive ideas can, and do, vanish overnight. You will be taught to read literature, which is the study of mankind by itself, so as to understand the development of people and peoples. Literature is a branch of anthropology, a branch of history; and we will make sure that you will know how to judge an idea from the point of view of long-term human memory. . . To these studies will be added those new branches of information, the young sciences of psychology, social psychology, sociology and so on, so that you may understand your own behaviour, and the behaviour of the group which will be, all your life, both your comfort and your enemy, both your support and your greatest temptation, since to disagree with your friends--you group animal--will always be painful. (75)

The complete education Lessing suggests requires that each individual be taught to analyze human behavior on an individual as well as social level. People will learn, through this ideal education, the patterns of human behavior which will, in turn, enable them to resist repeating those patterns.

A complete education, Lessing believes, would eliminate pattern thinking among humans. Individuals receiving a complete education would make informed decisions about themselves and about the group with which they are involved instead of merely

repeating observed behavior. Understanding the workings of the collective and acting on that understanding not only allows the individual to maintain the self while within the group, but also results in self-development within the individual seeking self-reliance. Analyzing human behavior produces knowledge of human life, and with that knowledge, the individual is capable of perceiving himself or herself as a distinct but integral part of the collective.

-The Whole-

The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul. For it is the inert effort of each thought, having formed itself into a circular wave of circumstance. . .to heap itself on that ridge, and to solidify and hem in the life. But if the soul is quick and strong, it bursts over that boundary on all sides, and expands another orbit on the great deep, which also runs up into a high wave, with attempt again to stop and to bind. But the heart refuses to be imprisoned; in its first and narrowest pulses, it already tends outward with a vast force, and to immense and innumerable expansions.

-Emerson, "Circles"

To the Sufi, the evolution of the Sufi is within himself and also in his relationship with society. The development of the community, and the destiny of all creation--including even nominally inanimate creation--is interwoven with the destiny of the Sufi. He may have to detach himself for a period from society--for a moment, a month, or even more--but ultimately he is interlinked with the eternal whole.

-Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

I am writing this, sitting on a low white wall that has patterns on it. People are all around me, working at this and that. We are in tents in the meantime, everything makeshift and even difficult but it doesn't seem so, and everything is happening in this new way, there is no need to argue and argue and discuss and disagree and confer and accuse and fight and then kill. All that is over, it is finished, it is dead.

-Doris Lessing, *Shikasta*

Recognizing the self and understanding the collective prepares the individual to perceive the "whole," or the connections among all things in the universe. As the final step to becoming self-reliant, perceiving the whole requires that each person think on a higher level, or enter into a state of higher consciousness. To reach this higher state of consciousness, a person must transition from rational thinking to non-rational thinking, or must learn to think outside the realms of reason and society. In thinking outside the boundaries of reality, the individual perceives the various spheres, or levels, of the universe--the individual, social, rational and non-rational spheres--at the same time. Perceiving the various realms illuminates for the individual not only the higher power that flows through all things, but also the fact that the entire universe is contained within each individual. The higher power animates all things and cannot be separated from

existence, and the individual who realizes the nature of the higher power is the self-reliant individual.

For Lessing, "higher consciousness" is a form of spirituality through which the individual becomes aware of a higher power or harmony permeating the entire universe. Lessing's conception of the higher power most likely comes from her study of Sufism, an Islamic mystical discipline that stresses the importance of the individual's self-conception within the universe, and his or her contribution to the universe as a result of that self-conception. Though Sufism is a mystical discipline, Sufis do not categorize Sufism as a religion simply because it lacks a formal, definable structure. Religion is a social invention with specific form while Sufism represents a universal "spiritual consciousness." Idries Shah, Lessing's teacher, explains the Sufi's idea of religion:

Formal religion is for the Sufi merely a shell, though a genuine one, which fulfills a function. When the human consciousness has penetrated beyond this social framework, the Sufi understands the real meaning of religion. The mystics of other persuasions do not think in this manner at all. They may transcend outer religious forms, but they do not emphasize the fact that outer religion is only a prelude to special experience. Most ecstasies remain attached to a rapturous symbolization of some concept derived from their religion. The Sufi uses religion and psychology to pass beyond all this. Having done so, he 'returns to the world,' to guide others on the way. (29)

The "real meaning of religion" Shah speaks of represents Lessing's notion of the higher power, or the universal harmony, that formal religion cannot comprehend. Lessing

considers herself "absolutely, childishly, allergic to religions--even though [she has] the greatest respect for [human] nature, which is profoundly religious" and sees Sufism as a spiritual alternative to the restrictions of formal religion (Ingersoll 199). Through studying Sufism, the individual gains the ability to break through the barriers of the social and rational worlds to the non-rational and universal realms, and to thus reach a state of higher consciousness, or of self-reliance.

The non-rational or universal realm, according to Lessing, is a realm without the social structures and rules human beings live with on a daily basis. Lessing believes the social world confines people to various "prisons" or categories in which they are required to behave in very specific ways. In an interview with Christopher Bigsby, Lessing expresses her belief that "We live in a series of prisons called race, class, male and female. There are always those classifications" (78). Humans cannot live in the social world without being classified into categories. As an author, Lessing has continually been categorized by fans and critics into various prisons such as "color-bar writer," "feminist," "Communist writer," "Sufi," and "space-fiction writer," but she sees no point to these categories and says to her classifiers "I've never felt anything but me" (119). The categorization of human beings, for Lessing, is a destructive and unevolutionary practice. All people live dynamic lives and think dynamic thoughts, and confining people to certain roles only inhibits the dynamic nature of human existence. As a person leaves the social realm and enters the universal realm, he or she no longer thinks in terms of categories, but rather views human life as a collection of individuals, who are the same and different at once, interacting with one another.

Observing life from the universal realm means noticing the similarities rather than merely pointing out the differences among people. In response to interviewer Minda Bikman, Lessing comments: "Our whole language, the way we think, is set up for putting things into departments. We've got far more in common with each other than what separates us" (62). As a species, human beings are, by nature, connected to one another through biological, physical and emotional traits, but Lessing believes we ignore our similarities and "see only oppositions, the yeses, the noes, the whites, the blacks. So we busy ourselves and consider ourselves well turned out by affirming for ourselves. . .the marking out of the territory" (197). If we were to stop pointing out the things that separate us, we would realize that "We live in essentially the same manner; we encounter pretty much the same questions, the same difficulties," and that we are, in fact, quite similar to one another (197-8). In discarding our differences, our categories, our prisons, we gain a clearer vision of the interlinking nature of human life and begin developing into self-reliant, evolved beings.

The most important step in discarding our differences is to accept that we do, in fact, maintain preconceived notions about ourselves. Lessing believes that although people in general, especially Westerners, believe they operate from their own free will, they actually operate based on sets of rules given to them by society. While studying with Idries Shah, Lessing discovered the preconceived notions she maintained about herself and was disgusted by them. When Shah said to her "you have been programmed to want authority; you want to be told what to do, you want a guru, you want something to belong to, you want rules," she does not believe him (80). Only after paying attention to her behavior in certain situations does she realize the truth of Shah's lesson. During an

interview with Christopher Bigsby, Lessing admits to wanting rules and to the difficulty of eliminating the desire for them:

I did want all those things. Well, now, please God, I don't. But the thing is you learn to shed all the time, not through an intellectual process at all; all the time you are put into situations where you see the truth about yourself and it isn't at all pretty, actually. It is humiliating. (80-1)

Shedding the desire for rules enables us to break down the fabricated barriers, or differences, that separate us.

In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing explains, through Martha's experience with Lynda Coldridge, the destructiveness of the differences that separate human beings from one another. Lynda was diagnosed at an early age with schizophrenia and has lived in and out of mental institutions in an effort to deal with the illness. Doctors label Lynda as schizophrenic when she claims to hear voices in her head and, as a result, "treat" her specifically for schizophrenia. As a prisoner inside a disease, Lynda is considered mad, unstable, different from "normal" people. Martha, after getting to know Lynda, begins seeing this disease, schizophrenia, not so much as an illness, but an alternative way of perceiving reality. Martha realizes

There were people whose machinery had gone wrong, and they were like radio sets which, instead of being tuned in to one programme, were tuned in to a dozen simultaneously. *And they didn't know how to switch them off.* Even to imagine the hell of it was enough to make one want to run, to cover one's ears. (Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* 540)

Lynda was tuned in to several programs at the same time, but those programs were the thoughts of other people. Schizophrenia, in Lynda's case, is not necessarily a bad state of mind, but a different, abnormal state of mind. As a result of her abnormality, however, social standards classify Lynda as "different" and therefore "bad," although the "schizophrenia" Lynda experiences may appear in any "normal" person under the appropriate conditions.

While Lessing explains the barriers between the individual and society in *The Four-Gated City*, she also exposes the ridiculousness of the barriers commonly built between a child and a parent or guardian. While acting as a mother to Paul Coldridge, Martha finds herself using different techniques to get Paul to behave in certain ways. In trying to accomplish the nearly impossible task of getting Paul to do his homework, Martha creates "a forceful authoritarian" though she "did not like this way of dealing with children, and could never believe that Paul did not see through her when she made use of this particular personality" (*The Four-Gated City* 372). Martha sees the authoritarian persona as "sheer nonsense" and believes playing the role of the authoritarian while battling Paul is "merely a ritual" with no reason behind it (372). Although it is probably important for Paul to do his homework, Martha realizes he will not do his homework if he does not want to and that erecting a barrier between Paul and herself (by becoming an authority figure) benefits no one. Paul's personality is very defined and Martha sees that "with Paul's personality one fought. Ridiculous battles, as far as she was concerned" (372). Martha's motive for fighting Paul's individuality is to change him, to make him conform to certain standards, and this motive goes against all of Martha's beliefs. After being fought constantly during her youth by her mother, Martha realizes that fighting

individuality leads only to the creation of barriers, some lifelong, between parents and children. Instead of challenging a child's personality, parents should accept the child as a distinct individual and allow him or her to develop that individuality. As Emerson tells us in "Spiritual Laws," "there is a soul at the centre of nature, and over the will of every man so that none of us can wrong the universe" (79). Attempting to inhibit or alter a child's personality is the equivalent of trying to alter nature which ultimately defies the natural workings of the universe and leads only to chaos and imbalance.

While Lessing describes Martha's experience with the problems of the establishment of barriers among human beings in *The Four-Gated City*, she describes the downfall of human life as a result of the creation of barriers between humans and all other parts of the universe in *Shikasta*. By creating Shikasta, a violent, futuristic planet that represents earth, Lessing shows the need for balance among all things within the universe. The whole, or higher power, Lessing visualizes is only possible in a balanced, harmonious universe. All things in the universe must be in alignment--animals, nature, solar systems--before the higher power can operate.

In *Shikasta*, Lessing describes life on Shikasta from its paradisiacal beginnings to its periods of regression and regeneration. Canopus, the ruling planet in the solar system, uses Shikasta to experiment with combining two races of human beings, the Giants and the Natives. Though the experiment is at first successful, it is quickly disturbed by Shammat, the vampire planet of the solar system. Shammat steals energy from Shikasta and in doing so, destroys the balance of Shikasta. Without a balanced environment, Shikasta degrades quickly and turns into an environment of "War. Civil War. Murder.

Torture. Exploitation. Oppression and suppression. And always lies, lies, lies. Always in the name of progress, and equality and development and democracy" (*Shikasta* 120).

In losing its balance, harmony, Shikasta loses its higher power, or its "substance of we feeling." The substance of we feeling, or S.O.W.F., represents the connection humans feel with one another as well as with the universe. If the S.O.W.F. disintegrates, the connection humans feel with one another and with the universe also disintegrates. Life on Shikasta falls completely apart with the loss of the S.O.W.F. and Shikastans begin destroying each other and nature as a result:

The two great Dictatorships established themselves with total ruthlessness. Both spread ideologies based on the suppression and oppression of whole populations of differing sects, opinions, religions, local cultures. . .[all people] had in common that technology was the key to all good, and that good was always material increase, gain, comfort, pleasure. The real purposes of life. . .had been forgotten. . .And all this time the earth was being ripped out, the fuels wasted, the soils depleted by an improvident and short-sighted agriculture, the animals and plants slaughtered and destroyed, the seas being filled with filth and poison, the atmosphere was corrupted - and always, all the time, the propaganda machines thumped out: more, more, more, drink more, eat more, consume more, discard more - in a frenzy, a mania. These were maddened creatures, and the small voices that rose in protest were not enough to halt the processes that had been set in motion and were sustained by greed. By the lack of substance-of-we-feeling. (118-19)

Shammat's disruption of Shikasta's balance sends Shikastans into a repetitive pattern of greed and hate that entrenches itself deeper with each generation and that causes the universe to fragment more with the passage of time. Shikastans no longer feel connected to each other or to the universe and, as a result, erect barriers and shun one another in an attempt to preserve their territories. The barriers further degrade the S.O.W.F. until Shikastans lose virtually all sense of balance within the universe.

For Lessing, the environment on earth, at the present time, parallels the environment on Shikasta. The earth is flooded with disconnected individuals who resist and feed off of one another at the same time without recognizing the whole of the universe:

We're *living* in catastrophe: how many people die of hunger every year, how many children die? There are thirty wars going on at this very moment. Because they're not the big wars, we seem to pretend that they're not important. We're poisoning our seas, and our water supply--we all know this--our trees are dying in various parts of the world. This is a state of catastrophe. We're not very bright as animals yet, are we? (Ingersoll 171)

Human beings do not live in balance with each other or with the universe and, as a result, live their entire lives in a catastrophic environment. Although humans live in an unbalanced environment, they possess the potential to create balance and to tap into the higher power. By dismantling the barriers we place around our territories, we gain the ability to connect with one another and with the universe to establish harmony.

Once the inhabitants of Shikasta rediscover the underlying connections, or the S.O.W.F., flowing through all things in the universe, they begin restructuring life on the planet into a peaceful and harmonious existence. The discovery of the higher power allows Shikastans to tap into the higher power and, in turn, to organize and strengthen their lives into lives that benefit them as individuals as well as small, necessary parts of the universe. As Shikastans begin feeling a stronger current of the S.O.W.F., they begin designing new cities in ways they previously knew nothing about. Kassim Sherban describes this new Shikasta phenomenon in a letter to his relatives:

Then we were roaming about over the hillside and the plateau. There were about twenty of us doing this. Suddenly we all knew quite clearly where the city should be. We knew it all at once. Then we found a spring, in the middle of the place. That was how this city was begun. It is going to be a star city, five points. . . The first houses are already up, and the central circular place is paved, and the basin of the fountain is made. As we build, wonderful patterns appear as if our hands were being taught in a way we know nothing about. (Lessing, *Shikasta* 446)

Kassim describes the feeling of the S.O.W.F. as it flows through one person to the next, causing them to work together to rebuild and redesign life on Shikasta. The flow of the S.O.W.F. is so strong that Kassim believes it "will go on for us, as if we were being slowly lifted and filled and washed by a soft singing wind that clears our sad muddled minds and holds us safe and heals us and feeds us with lessons we never imagined" (447). A strong flow of the S.O.W.F., or the higher power, induces each individual to disregard

differences between himself or herself and other people and to work with other individuals to establish universal harmony.

The S.O.W.F. Kassim feels in *Shikasta* is also felt by Martha as she nears the end of her journey to self-reliance in *The Four-Gated City*. After living with Lynda for several years and trying to understand the psychology of the human mind, Martha decides to spend three months alone to do "work," or to explore her own mind. During this time of work, Martha stops eating and sleeping in order to reach unknown areas of her mind. The first area she reaches is the "self-hater":

She was completely in the grip of this self-hating person, or aspect of herself. Remorse? No, it was more that her whole life was being turned inside out, so that she looked at it in reverse, and there was nothing anywhere in it that was good; it was all dark, all cruel, all callous, all 'bad'. Oh, she was bad, oh she was wicked, oh, how very evil and bad and wicked she was. (*The Four-Gated City* 558)

The self-hater represents the part of Martha's mind formed by society's constant criticism. As a non-conformist, Martha has led a life full of "bad" and "wrong" behavior and is consequently ridiculed by the group. This ridicule manifests itself in the form of the self-hater and causes a part of Martha's brain to tell her she is bad because she refuses to conform. Martha is incapable of reaching any other part of her mind as long as she remains under the control of the self-hater and must escape the self-hater to expand her understanding of humanity.

Once Martha frees herself from the self-hater, she encounters various aspects of her own personality. She is "a breathing individuality of faceted green, reflecting sky,

house, pavement, cloud, man, woman and dog, a gaunt, wretched woman in an old towelling bathrobe, [and] watches the facets of her personality march past" (565). Her personality is a complex combination of all things formed into a person called Martha. Watching her personality march past allows Martha to see her self as an entity existing in various realms, or on different levels of reality, at the same time. In recognizing the abilities of the self, Martha realizes her ability to move from one realm to the other at any given moment. She tells herself

You've got to be alert enough to catch a thought as it is born. That is how to distinguish. There are different qualities in thoughts. Very slight differences in quality. One should be able to learn how to tell an overheard thought or words from the self-hater, for instance. Yes. Into a mind comes different qualities of . . . Hearing a thought of Lynda is different. How? No emotion. Remember this, remember it. Words trickling through your head with no emotion: that's likely to be overheard, someone else's thought.

There is emotion in the self-hater. (560)

By understanding her different thoughts, Martha understands the different qualities of each realm and becomes capable of tapping into specific realms at different times. This experience reflects Emerson's belief that "the mind opens and reveals the laws which traverse the universe and make things what they are, then shrinks the great world at once into a mere illustration and fable of this mind" ("Divinity School Address" 106). Tapping into the different realms allows Martha simultaneously to see the various parts of the universe, or to perceive the higher power that runs through all things, and ultimately to live as a self-reliant individual.

In becoming self-reliant, Martha becomes capable of living harmoniously with everything surrounding her. At the end of *The Four-Gated City*, Martha records her experiences of this harmonious living after leaving England as a result of the "Catastrophe" of the twentieth century's final decade. Because of some sort of nuclear event, England is contaminated and uninhabitable, which causes citizens to relocate. Martha relocates with a group of people to an unknown island where they immediately begin forming a civilization of their own. Without modern resources, such as clothing, medicine and buildings, the group must work together to survive. Martha describes this communal civilization:

a place with a rare fine air, a 'high' air, if I can use that word. Sometimes it seems that inside ordinary light shimmers another kind of brilliance, but very subtle and delicate. And the texture of our lives, eating, sleeping, being together, has a note in it that can't be quite caught, as if we were all of us a half-tone or a bridging chord in some symphony being played out of earshot with icebergs and forests and mountains for instruments. There is a transparency, a crystalline gleam. (Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* 658)

Existing together instead of separately leads people to realize the symphony of human existence and to create the ideal reality visualized by Lessing and Emerson. A society made up of individuals who understand themselves in relation to all other people leads to the evolution of the human race, and the island society Martha experiences does in fact show signs of evolution. While Martha develops over the course of time the ability to "hear" the thoughts of other people, the island children are born with this ability. Martha describes them as "grown up - no, not physically of course, but mentally, emotionally":

One talks to them as if they were adult - no, not that; one talks to them as if they are superior to us . . . which they are. They all carry with them a gentle strong authority. They don't have to be shielded from the knowledge of what the human race is in this century - they know it. I don't know how they know it. It is as if - can I put it like this? - they are beings who include that history in themselves and who have transcended it. They include us in a comprehension we can't begin to imagine. These seven children are our - but we have no word for it. The nearest to it is that they are our guardians. They guard us. (660)

The people of the island are individual, communal and evolutionary and, as a result, exist in ideal reality.

Lessing believes all people are capable of perceiving the higher power if they look for it. The higher power is not reserved for a group of "elect" individuals, but actually resides in each human being. As Idries Shah states,

. . . preternatural experience and the mystical goal is something nearer to mankind than is realized. The assumption that something esoteric or transcendental must be far off or complicated has been assumed by the ignorance of individuals. And that kind of individual is the least qualified to judge the matter. It is "far off" only in a direction which he does not realize. (67)

Each individual's realization of the self and of the function of the self within the collective illuminates the presence of the higher power in all people. In discovering the self as a distinct entity as well as recognizing the self as an integral part of the universe,

the individual perceives the connections among all things and thus perceives the higher power.

Though the individual's realization of the higher power is important, this realization benefits no one unless the individual understands that the higher power gives life to all things, that the existence of all things depends on the higher power. Only through recognizing the operation of the higher power in all things are people capable of ignoring their differences and paying attention to the common traits they share. In ignoring differences, human beings transcend the social and rational realms and enter the non-rational realm from which they perceive the whole, or the interconnection of all things. For Lessing, the individual who observes the whole has reached the state of self-reliance. By traveling the long and often difficult path to self-reliance, the individual arrives at an understanding of himself or herself in terms of the universe, which is the equivalent of self-reliance. Although the journey to self-reliance challenges the individual, it provides the only means for establishing balance, or harmony, within the universe. Self-reliant individuals are balanced individuals and are, in the end, the only people capable of creating universal harmony.

Part III

-The Ideal-

The world is awaking to the idea of union. . .It is and will be magic. Men will live and communicate, and plough, and reap, and govern, as by added ethereal power, when once they are united; as in a celebrated experiment, by expiration and respiration exactly together, four persons lift a heavy man from the ground by the little finger only, and without sense of weight. But this union must be inward, and not one of covenants, and is to be reached by a reverse of the methods they use. The union is only perfect, when all the uniters are isolated. It is the union of friends who live in different streets or towns. Each man, if he attempts to join himself to others, is on all sides cramped and diminished of his proportion; and the stricter the union, the smaller and the more pitiful he is. But leave him alone, to recognize in every hour and place the secret soul, he will go up and down doing the works of a true member, and, to the astonishment of all, the work will be done with concert, though no man spoke. Government will be adamant without any governor. The union must be ideal in actual individualism.

-Emerson, "New England Reformers"

There are only two choices: that we force ourselves into the effort of imagination necessary to become what we are capable of being; or that we submit to being ruled by the office boys of big business, or the socialist bureaucrats who have forgotten that socialism means a desire for goodness and compassion--and the end of submission is that we shall blow ourselves up.

-Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice"

Sufism is believed by its followers to be the inner, "secret" teaching that is concealed within every religion; and because its bases are in every human mind already, Sufic development must inevitably find its expression everywhere.

-Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

Ideal reality, for Emerson and Lessing, consists of a world of people who actually understand one another and who work together to promote a balanced and evolutionary society. The existence of this ideal is determined only by the forward-looking, or self-reliant, individuals of the world. Although self-reliant individuals are a minority, as Lessing states in "You Are Damned, We Are Saved," they bear the responsibility of evolving humanity: ". . .it seems to me that our future, the future of everybody, depends on this minority. And that we should be thinking of ways to educate our children to strengthen this minority and not, as we mostly do now, to revere the pack" (19). The few self-reliant individuals in existence hold the power to transform reality into the ideal.

As artists, Emerson and Lessing strive to create the ideal through influencing their readers to act. Human progress is possible only when people make an active effort to evolve, and both authors encourage this action through their writing. Although Emerson and Lessing use different art forms, they both instruct readers to consciously contribute to the progress of humanity. Without individual action, humanity will never progress and the ideal reality will never exist.

In nineteenth-century America, Emerson instructed people in human evolution through lectures and essays. While he did not explain the methods of evolving humanity in great detail, he described the components of the ideal reality and pointed out human behavior detrimental to human progress. In twentieth-century England, Lessing, like Emerson, educates people in human progress. Lessing, however, transmits her message mainly through fiction. Fiction allows Lessing to provide specific details on the process of human evolution and to describe the techniques necessary to creating the ideal reality. In choosing fiction as the form through which she transmits her ideas, Lessing takes Emerson's instruction a step further and actually maps out the procedure for contributing to human evolution.

As an author, Lessing considers her work a "model" for those seeking to transform reality. She does not, however, use "model" in the traditional sense--a behavior that must be imitated to achieve a specific end--but instead gives the word evolutionary meaning. Rather than merely imitating the model, Lessing's readers should use the model to learn about themselves and about human behavior. Readers must not strive to behave in exactly the same ways as Lessing nor should they try to pattern themselves exactly after Martha Quest or any other character created by Lessing. "Insist on yourself; never

imitate" as Emerson tells us in "Self-Reliance," and Lessing would agree (48). Her goal as a writer is not to influence people to imitate her, but to influence people to use her models to become self-reliant, or to arrive at the "recognition of man, the responsible individual, voluntarily submitting his will to the collective, but never finally; and insisting on making his own personal and private judgements before every act of submission" (Lessing, "A Small Personal Voice" 12). Lessing writes to educate, and imitation is not the goal of education.

While Lessing believes that readers will not imitate her, she believes they should "act" after reading her work. "Acting" consists of putting forth the effort to make sense of the ideas presented in the writing and putting those ideas to work in society. Lessing believes her novels should be read "for illumination, in order to enlarge one's perception of life" (5). The reader must not simply finish a book and stop thinking about the ideas expressed in the book, but must act on those ideas to become self-reliant and to progress humanity.

Although Lessing describes the path to self-reliance, she believes that knowing the path and experiencing it are two very different things. The path is both the same and different for each individual. While all people must go through the same basic steps to achieve self-reliance, the experiences they encounter in going through those steps will differ from those of others. Each individual, Lessing believes, must discover his or her own personal path.

While all people are capable of realizing the path to self-reliance, Lessing and Emerson both believe that realization is a subtle and unfolding event. Although people may choose to travel the path, they do not merely wake up one day with knowledge of

their paths. The path creates itself as the individual progresses and constantly exposes new experiences and lessons. For this reason, Lessing and Emerson believe the path is describable but indefinable. No individual can say "I am on the path to self-reliance." We do not really know we are on the path, we feel that we are on the path. We feel the path inside ourselves and know, as a result, that we have chosen to experience the path.

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