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# **Intersubjectivity in the Fiction of Doris Lessing**

**By**

**Shu-ming Hung**

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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Studies

Durham University

2012

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## § Abstract §

In this thesis, I will be examining selective works by the novelist Doris Lessing. The aim of the thesis is to examine Lessing's *oeuvre* by approaching her fiction as an attempt to understand the subject as an effect of intersubjectivity. The thesis approaches the question of intersubjectivity through a broadly psychoanalytic framework, not only engaging with Lessing's own particular interests in psychoanalysis, but also standing back and reframing her work through approaches to intersubjectivity available in work by Freud and Jung, Klein, and object relational and existential dynamic psychologies. The thesis will, throughout, endeavour to situate psychoanalytic approaches in specifically historical and political contexts, also drawing on phenomenology to examine Lessing's depiction of a transcendental mode of experience which is reached through an ongoing evolutionary consciousness. Her dialectical positioning of the subject reveals a restless struggle towards a conciliation between self and others.

The thesis reflects a trajectory of Lessing's work from her earlier African novels to later writing, *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. The thesis begins by examining the structure of the family and mother-daughter relationships in the context of the historically specific political milieu of post-war apartheid in South Africa; it ends by examining the question of the availability of an ethics of care in Thatcherite Britain as reflected in the Ben novels. Melanie Klein's work and the later object-relations theory influenced by it, are adopted to provide a frame through which to try to illuminate Lessing's concern with the possibility of motivating positive interactions between self and others, and as an alternative to the tragic liberal view of the self as an anxious isolate proposed by Freud. In each chapter, the thesis focuses on the variety of Lessing's formal experiments in her attempt to develop a late ethics of care built on a foundation of intersubjectivity. This emergent vision of the self opens up the possibility of reconstituting new modes of interaction between the self and the outer world: Lessing uses her fictional worlds to posit visionary possibilities in the world outside the fiction. Often employing critical modes of the Utopian and Apocalyptic, Lessing envisions the possibility of a new and fluid community that is constituted on the foundation of a revised albeit fragile ethics of care. Her fiction suggests that the power of creation and imagination necessary to realise such a vision belongs not only to the artist, but is also available for development in the psychosocial journey towards a new democratic subjectivity that might realise a new public order.

## § Contents §

|                                                                                                                                            |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| List of Abbreviations                                                                                                                      | i   |
| Statement of Copyright                                                                                                                     | ii  |
| Acknowledgement                                                                                                                            | iii |
| <br>                                                                                                                                       |     |
| INTRODUCTION                                                                                                                               | 1   |
| <br>                                                                                                                                       |     |
| CHAPTERS                                                                                                                                   |     |
| <br>                                                                                                                                       |     |
| PART I. Intersubjectivity as the Inter-relative and Formal Transition                                                                      |     |
| <br>                                                                                                                                       |     |
| One. The Omitted, and Emitted Love Objects:                                                                                                |     |
| Unfinished Reparation in <i>The Grass Is Singing</i> : a Kleinian Study                                                                    | 34  |
| 1. The Lack of a Loved Object                                                                                                              | 40  |
| 2. A Split Self                                                                                                                            | 41  |
| 3. The Rise of Ambivalent Feelings as an Immigrant                                                                                         | 44  |
| 4. Self-integration Through Recognition                                                                                                    | 52  |
| 5. Unfinished Reparation                                                                                                                   | 58  |
| <br>                                                                                                                                       |     |
| Two. The Bodies of Otherness:                                                                                                              |     |
| <i>Martha Quest</i> —Identity and Otherness: from the Perspective of Simone de<br>Beauvoir’s Intersubjectivity                             | 63  |
| 1. Self as otherness                                                                                                                       | 64  |
| 2. Embodied Consciousness                                                                                                                  | 69  |
| 3. Self and Otherness                                                                                                                      | 81  |
| 4. The Ambiguity of Free Choice                                                                                                            | 85  |
| <br>                                                                                                                                       |     |
| Three. A City in the Golden Age—“Where? What is it? How? What’s next? Where is<br>the man or woman who...”                                 |     |
| A Modernist Flâneuse’s Wandering, Searching and Remembering in<br><i>The Four-Gated City</i>                                               | 90  |
| 1. A Flâneuse’s Crossing Boundaries in post-war London                                                                                     | 92  |
| 2. Hysterical mothers, Traumatic Children, Emotional Reparation and<br>the Collective History                                              | 101 |
| 3. Intersubjectivity through Differentiation, Recognition, and Connecting<br>with the Collective, from the perspective of Jessica Benjamin | 111 |
| 4. Imagination through the Naked Eye and Eye of the Heart: Sufism and<br>Phenomenology                                                     | 118 |

Four. The Inter-relative/ Inter-Creating Forms of Writing:

in the Process of Becoming... *The Golden Notebook*

1. A Female Writer's Conflict with the Male Tradition \_\_\_\_\_ 132
2. Writing as a kind of Everyday Performance in Every Small Personal Voice \_\_\_\_ 148
3. When the Malicious Old man Encounters the Spiteful Old woman:  
Working out the Pattern as a way of Breaking Through \_\_\_\_\_ 158
4. Intersubjectivity in Free Women, as a Story-teller and also a Protagonist \_\_\_\_\_ 166

PART II. The Intersubjectivity of Mutual Creativity

Five. Recreation through Blanking Briefing:

The Journey of I.I.I.I.I...in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*

1. A Postmodern Subjectivity with the Symptom of Amnesia \_\_\_\_\_ 173
2. Self's encounter with the Archetypal Collective \_\_\_\_\_ 177
3. In Search of the True Self in the Archaic Maternal Moment \_\_\_\_\_ 183
4. From Abjection to Acceptance --Encounter with the Feminine Eros \_\_\_\_\_ 186
5. Microcosm as Macrocosm in the Union with the Crystal \_\_\_\_\_ 192
6. A Mosaic Self \_\_\_\_\_ 197

Six. Creating an Iron Egg: Resurrection through Recurrence:

Relational Caring Positions in Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor*

1. The Encounter of Personal and Impersonal Worlds Through Winnicott's  
Transitional Space \_\_\_\_\_ 203
2. Futile Care in the Dystopia World \_\_\_\_\_ 212
3. Beyond "Good Enough Care," Relational Caring Positions as a way of  
Reparation \_\_\_\_\_ 215
4. The Fabular Ending as the Transformation of Cultural Space \_\_\_\_\_ 218

Seven. The Transformation of a Body, Created in Different Positions:

The Position of a Body in *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in The World*

1. The Challenge to the Normalcy through the Body of the Other \_\_\_\_\_ 222
2. A Failed Family Romance: a Monster Mother, a Grotesque Child \_\_\_\_\_ 226
3. A Disciplined, Transformed Body: a Space for Cultural Inscription and  
Psychological Interaction \_\_\_\_\_ 238
4. The "Relational Positionality" of the Different Bodies \_\_\_\_\_ 245

|             |       |     |
|-------------|-------|-----|
| CONCLUSION  | _____ | 255 |
| WORKS CITED | _____ | 265 |

§ List of Abbreviations §

- BF* Doris Lessing. *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*
- FC* Doris Lessing. *The Fifth Child*
- FGC* Doris Lessing. *The Four-Gated City*
- GN* Doris Lessing. *The Golden Notebook*
- GS* Doris Lessing. *The Grass Is Singing*
- MQ* Doris Lessing. *Martha Quest*
- MS* Doris Lessing. *The Memoirs of a Survivor*
- SPV* Doris Lessing. *A Small Personal Voice*
- UM* Doris Lessing. *Under My Skin: Volume One of My  
Autobiography, to 1949*

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## Introduction

In Lessing's work, the individual's relationship with the collective is always her concern, though she presents the subject as always struggling to find a balance between her/his own needs and those of the collective. Lessing's work articulates a humanistic concern for the individual whilst trying to reconcile this with the pursuit of the harmony of the collective. The aim of the thesis is to examine Lessing's *oeuvre* by approaching her fiction as an attempt to understand the subject as an effect of intersubjectivity. In this view, the subject is not only a socially-constructed being, but is part of a dialectic process of "becoming," through interaction with others. This thesis traces a trajectory of Lessing's work from her earliest African novel, *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), to *The Fifth Child* (1988), and *Ben, in the World* (2000). Lessing not only transfers the geographical location of her fiction from South Africa to post-war London, but she also reconfigures her mode of realism to incorporate science fiction, fantasy, Gothic and modernist modes of writing. In *A Small Personal Voice*, Lessing mentions that the series of novels, "Children of Violence," is "a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective" (14). Lessing insists, in an interview of 1980, that she always writes about "the individual and that which surrounds him."<sup>1</sup> But Gayle Greene and other critics have emphasised Lessing's role as a "chronicler of our time," since her work records the historical events of contemporary social and political movements, "from the cold war of the fifties through the social revolutions of the sixties, the retrenchments of the seventies and eighties" and to "Armageddon at the end of the century" (*Doris Lessing: the Poetics of Change* 13). Betsy Draine explains further that in this dialectic of the individual and the collective, "Lessing is fascinated with the dynamics of this relation and with the evolution of human consciousness through this dynamic" (xiii). Many critics emphasise the dialogic logic of Lessing's work, her preoccupation with the relation of self and others, individual and collective, inner

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<sup>1</sup> See Nissa Torrents 64-69.

and outer worlds. In *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking Forms of Consciousness*, Roberta Rubenstein views three thinkers—Hegel, Marx and Jung—as Lessing’s philosophical, political, and psychological mentors but sees the primary infrastructure of her thinking underpinned by the classical Hegelian dialectical model which seeks to reconcile, through dialectics, these fundamental oppositions (2). Roxanne J. Fand directly flags up Lessing’s “dialogic self,” which consists of states of “transpersonal and impersonal subjectivities that are not locked into personal ego” (101). Her argument is that Lessing’s concept of selfhood is similar to the “Sufi ideal of selfhood”: her “panoptic narrator is *in* the text, but not *of* it” (Fand 102). Although these thinkers all engage divergent concepts of the self, their concern, like Lessing’s, is with the question of how to arrive at a dialogic relation between self and collective through the dialectical transformation of both sides. This is also the main focus of Lessing’s work throughout her various generic and formal transformations, and this is the subject of this thesis.

### **1.1. Realism and Humanism**

Lessing initially engaged the question of the relation between self and the collective, by reflecting on her attitude towards humanism and preference for realism and her admiration for nineteenth-century realism in her writing. In 1957, Lessing’s “The Small Personal Voice” appeared in *Declaration*, an essay in which Lessing clearly intended to establish her sense of responsibility as a writer, who wanted to show the “warmth, the compassion, the humanity, the love of people” that appeared in nineteenth-century literature (*A Small Personal Voice* 6). The essay engages with Cold War politics, including a political repudiation of the decision of the British government to continue to develop the hydrogen bomb, but the essay also proposes that literature should provide an oppositional voice to “the Establishment” in order to express a sense of care and concern for the future of society. Emerging later as a problematic voice of the counterculture in the 1960s, Lessing was loosely associated by the mid-fifties with the energy of the social protest of The Angry Young Men, but as a humanist she feels she inherits from the nineteenth century the responsibility of a writer to “become a humanist” in the

sense that a humanist is “a human being for the other human beings he influences” (SPV 6). But time changes and humanism must be rethought a hundred years on. There cannot simply be an unreconstructed “reaffirmation of old ethical values,” and one of the crucial issues for the writer must be to reflect upon the problem of language; realism has lost its innocence as words require self-reflexive examination: for words “have become so inadequate to express the richness of our experience” (SPV 5). Despite this, she is never an advocate of the avant-garde, for she believes that her writing should be close to the lives of ordinary people. Jenny Taylor illuminates Lessing’s situation as a post-war writer facing conflicts around modernism and realism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Bertholt Brecht’s debates with Georg Lukács about the question of politics and modes of realism and modernism in the 1930s provide the context for Lessing’s essay of 1957. Her political commitment makes the question of form more than one of simply aesthetic preference. Taylor suggests that Lessing’s “Children of Violence” sequence makes a conscious choice to work within and extend “conventions of nineteenth-century realism, a mode which Lessing herself linked both with political commitment and the ‘world-view’ of liberal humanism in the 1950s” (5). For Lessing though, the process of searching for an authentic self within the terms of a specifically liberal humanism, separates the personal from the political, and ultimately produces a split between the demands of personal freedom and questions around public commitment and belonging that liberalism—and the nineteenth-century mode of the realist novel—could no longer resolve. Lessing is conscious of the effects of mass society, threatening new technologies and totalitarian forces that bear on the “small personal voice” in ways that were not known to the nineteenth century. The novelist must address the discontinuity, the chasm that is waiting to be crossed between the individual’s freedom and the impasse of the demands of the collective. In traditional humanism, personal freedom is established as a human right without reference to social and political circumstances so that, as Tony Davies suggests, “the human predicament figured in nineteenth-century writing is as pervasive and unchanging as the ‘eternal note of sadness’” (31-32) and is universalised, for all time. He explains further that

“humanity, the humanistic ‘Man’ (always singular, always in the present tense), inhabits not a time or a place but a condition, timeless and unlocalised” (Davies 32). This version of humanism (liberal) is in conflict with Lessing’s desire to pursue her collectivist political ideals and “to enter those areas of life” that are different from her own way of living, those of “education, sex, politics, class” (Lessing, *GN* 59). So Taylor goes on to suggest that *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is “the stage where the formal and ideological contradictions of both realism and liberal humanism are most explicitly acted out and the position of the self-conscious, angst-ridden, isolated woman artist debated” (7).

Lessing proposes that the responsibility of the writer is to fill the gap “between the public and the private conscience” at a historical moment when Marxist and Communist literature seems unconcerned with the personal and the affective life, viewed as bourgeois sentimentalism; but Western literary texts equally seem often to constitute “despairing statements of emotional anarchy” (*SPV* 11). In *The Golden Notebook*, the protagonist Anna shows her eagerness “to create a new way of looking at life” (59). Rachel Blau DuPlessis also suggests that Lessing appears to desire to enunciate a third way between these two broad Cold War ideological and political poles: “the bourgeois, capitalist West, with its literature of psychic despair, and the antibourgeois, Communist East, with its literature of banal optimism” (187). Lessing sets out to expose the unhelpful polarisation of individualism<sup>2</sup> and the kind of totality represented by communism, committing herself to the discovery of a dialectical relationship between the “isolated individual” and the “collective man with a collective conscience” (*SPV* 12). DuPlessis suggests that separated from each other, these polarities “are innocent, limited, and escapist, parallel in their narrowness of focus on either the ‘helpless and solitary’ individual or the saccharine collective” (187). What is required is the pursuit of an emergent reality, where the concern with “totality” and “wholeness” might be reconciled with the inclusion of the significance of the individual history within that of the social collective. Taylor discusses how radical communists, like

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<sup>2</sup> Lessing proposes Camus, Sartre, Genet, and Beckett to represent the most vital works of Western literature work at that time (*SPV* 11).

Jack Lindsay and Ralph Fox, tried to create a “unity” which included an individual, personal history within their focus on social history. Lindsay also committed himself to develop a new consciousness as the current social formation became more disintegrated. For him too, it was necessary “to revitalize realism as part of the humanist project of constructing a totality, transcending fragmentation” (Taylor 29). In *After the ‘Thirties: the Novel in Britain and its Future*, Lindsay mentions that “human unity” becomes possible only when “man holds the universe in his hands,” and it is therefore necessary to create “a new consciousness” to “see each separate aspect in relation to the whole—and the whole is the whole of human life in its struggle, its unity with the whole of nature” (82-84). Lindsay seems to embrace the humanistic belief that man is able to be a free agent and to master the world since humans are developing ever more power over nature, able to transform society and history.<sup>3</sup> Lessing also seems to reflect this belief in the possibility of being a “free agent,” through historical change, because “to imagine free man, leisured man, is to step outside what we are” (SPV 8). Therefore, the question of how to achieve this “change” and how to realise the individual consciousness as part of a collectivity of human beings is an important one for the politically committed writer.

Lessing’s concept of “wholeness” is that people are “made kin with each other and with everything in the world because of the kinship of possible destruction” (SPV 9). Lessing’s way forward, as for many feminists in the years after 1950, was to propose a more relational concept of self as an alternative to the autonomous individual of humanism handed down through Locke, Kant and John Stuart Mill. Lessing makes the recognition of wholeness as interrelatedness a more responsible act than the kind of arrogance implicit in Kant’s notion of autonomy.<sup>4</sup> She says that “we are all of us, at times, this madman” or even “the people is me”

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Sheehan explains that humanism implicitly suggests “the idea of autonomy, the belief that ‘man is the measure of all things and the maker of all meanings; and mastery, that he has domination over himself and his world” (6). See Sheehan.

<sup>4</sup> Sheehan explains that “Descartes considered the soul to be the seat of reason, the *âme raisonnable*, famously located in the pineal gland. In the Kantian component of the humanist tradition this becomes ‘free will’, the capacity to choose to be a moral being, in keeping with one’s inbuilt sense of virtue” (7).

(SPV 10). Throughout her writing, Lessing would suggest many ways of achieving this recognition. In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), the protagonist's search for the transcendental crystal which represents the wholeness is more than a journey that is about individual responsibility in the world: it involves a "recognition" through others that echoes Hegel's idea in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel argues that "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (*Phenomenology* 111). However, as in Lessing, recognition is not achieved through the navigation towards others through the mechanism of a slave and master relationship.

## 1.2 Realism and Feminism

For Lessing, "Women's Liberation" is part of the movement where "the whole world is being shaken into a new pattern" (*GN* xii). Lessing's feminine concern is also apparent in her adoption of realism almost as if realism is a necessary phase for the feminist writer to work through. Ann Barr Snitow notes that "the realist novel has always been the novel of such first phases. Since the inception of the form, novels have been 'how-to' manuals for groups to gather their identity through self-description" (705). Elaine Showalter argued in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1978) that the contemporary women's novel "observes the traditional forms of nineteenth-century realism," but also operates "in the context of twentieth century Freudian and Marxist analysis" (35). While Lessing tried to connect the experience of the individual and the collective, it was almost inevitable that she would express the problem of being a woman writer too. Showalter went on to argue the existence of a new "renaissance in women's writing that responds to the demands of Lewes and Mill for an authentically female literature, providing 'woman's view of life, woman's experience'" (*Literature* 35). There is something like the experience of an evolutionary process for women writers in adopting realism. In *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (1989), Patricia Waugh also argued of the first appearance of second wave feminist writing that such writers as Margaret Drabble

and Doris Lessing seemed to begin by adopting the “traditional realist mode of the romantic plot” as if in an attempt to discover “the self as an essence which might be ‘discovered’ or as a unity which might be ‘willed’ into existence” (23). Through the realisation that a subject is in many ways socially and culturally constructed, the “quest” or “picaresque” journey of a female protagonist in these novels of the 1960s and into the 1970s still appeared to be one to discover an underlying or essential or true self, “covered” over by existing ideologies. Although Lessing adopts the traditional *Bildungsroman*, her heroines experience a different process from male heroes. Rita Felski explains that “the traditional *Bildungsroman* is clearly gender determined” and “the hero is free to journey into the world in his quest for self-knowledge” (137). However, the female heroine “has to struggle painfully towards freeing herself from the subordinate role she has occupied in the heterosexual relationship” (Felski 137). Lessing’s “Children of Violence” series seems to reflect this plot, from its beginning with *Martha Quest* (1952). Escaping from a traditional school education, Martha still depends on her male friends to supply her sources of knowledge. Her self-quest starts from her pursuit of romance and she wanders between different collectives in an effort to find a position for herself. However, what Martha experiences is not the “unified self and a universal human nature” that traditional humanism suggests. Instead, she suffers from the prejudiced sexual, racial and class ideologies within those different collectives. Martha’s experiences of self-identity might be understood by drawing on Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of intersubjectivity. Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook explain that de Beauvoir’s concept of intersubjectivity is the “rejection of the idea of the Absolute Subject,” and “the situated subject” is “intrinsically intersubjective and embodied, thus always ‘interdependent’ and permeable rather than walled” (125). When Martha passively accepts marriage because of social pressure, Lessing represents a similar attitude as reflected in de Beauvoir’s concept of cultural and social constructionism.

*The Golden Notebook*, however, moves beyond realism and Lessing uses its experimental form actually to question and interrogate realism. Showalter suggests that women writers hesitate “whether to devote themselves to the forging of

female mythologies and epics, or to move beyond the female tradition into a seamless participation in the literary mainstream" (*Literature* 35-36). Jeannette King too analyses Lessing's "formal experiments," but suggests that she reveals her ambition of diverging from traditional realism even as early as *The Grass Is Singing*. According to King, the shifting narrators reveal how there can be no "closed reading" in Lessing's adoption of realism (4). In her questioning of the authority of narrative omnipotence, Lessing is also subverting the authenticity of narrative impersonality. It seems that there is a gap between "the protagonist's consciousness" and "the omniscient narrative persona speaking the 'truth' from the standpoint of wisdom" (Taylor 5). In *The Golden Notebook*, her writer's block is also her way of rebelling against and debating with the "objective truth" proposed by socialist realists, to show that complete overcoming of subjectivity is impossible. Anna's attempt to represent herself in different notebooks seems to reflect the kind of hesitation she experiences around the question of female identity in relation to orthodox left political concerns that exclude such gender issues. While the socialist realist emphasises "wholeness" as well as "objectivity," her personal concerns might seem too subjective or selfish to be considered worthy of "political" analysis. But as Showalter insists, Lessing's issues around "sensibility" are "political rather than aesthetic" (*Literature* 311). When Anna feels she is struggling to stretch herself and to live "as fully as" she can in her writing, she is also adapting herself to this "new sensibility" (GN 60). Lynn Sukenick suggests that "the personal is by definition a private possession and may represent for the former communist a form of selfishness, a capitalist hoarding of emotional territory" (115). For Showalter, while Anna gradually accepts that the "personal is political," Lessing's feminine ego is merged into "a transmitter for the collective consciousness" (*Literature* 311). She seems to be one of those who are eager to write, to express, like a party member "who has not written, half-written, or is planning to write a novel, short stories, or a play" (GN 147). Greene enthrones Lessing as the most important writerly influence on feminism, especially Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. She pinpoints how Lessing's work represents a kind of "feminine" sensibility which was concerned with "dramatizing the malaise that produced the second wave of feminism, but also in



presenting it in political terms" (*Poetics* 15). She also suggests that it "took the rest of the sixties for the women's movement to emerge with the ideology and visibility of an international movement" (19). She describes the evolution of her writing style as a kind of "textual feminism" that is not only "deconstructive but reconstructive, participatory in a way that is also liberatory" (Greene, *Poetics* 29). The multiple genres in *The Golden Notebook* subvert the traditional definition of each singular literary form. They perform an effect of parody which reflects Anna's self-contradictory feelings and her expectations of literature. In *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, Waugh proposes that "*Free women*," is a "realistic" novel which is based on the experiences of the notebook and the whole book suggests that "truth" resides "in muddle and breaks out of this constricting outer frame" (75).

Lessing invents a new kind of "collectivist protagonist" that reflects a more relational subjectivity, as opposed to a purely autonomous or independent individuality. But this kind of female experience is a pervasive representation in the work of feminist writers after the 1970s. Marge Piercy suggested that there already existed a kind of "sisterhood" concerned to protest against the ways in which women are excluded from male political movements. But this was never a straightforward relationship because of the kinds of political constraint shaping it. Lessing's female protagonists often appear in ambivalent relationships with other female characters and this ambivalence is also often evident in their attitudes towards motherhood. But "it is this mediating structure of the female community" that began to shape the "cautiously positive conclusion of the feminist *Bildungsroman*" (Felski 139). Lessing's protagonists expand or examine their female experience within the terms of collective life. DuPlessis proposes that Lessing's protagonist is more like "the collective protagonist in speculative fiction" (179). In these fictions, the individual heroes or sealed couples are replaced by "groups," and there is "a sense of purpose and identity, whose growth occurs in mutual collaboration" (DuPlessis 179). In the series, "*Children of Violence*," Martha reflects a kind of self-maturation through her experience of living with others in a collective. Martha's conflictual relationship with her mother is retrieved by relations with

other older women of her mother's generation, such as Mrs. Van Rensberg. Her sisterhood with Stella, a Jew, with a "woman-of-the-world look" offers her the opportunity to explore another kind of feminine power which she feels to be exploitative in public life. Felski mentions that "the model of female community provides a means of access into society by linking the protagonist to a broader social group" (139). As an outsider in London, she is able to immerse herself in the life of London because of the assistance of her female friends, especially those from the working class. Actually, at the beginning, Martha tries to avoid such a female community in order to distance herself from the established identity, but she cannot help putting her brain "together with the other million brains, women's brains" in her exploration of the history of London (*The Four-Gated City* 21). Lessing here reflects her own ambition to depict London, the capital of imperialistic history, from a feminine perspective. Christine Wick Sizemore mentions that "if Dickens created Victorian London, London now exists, in Doris Lessing's words, in women's brains" (1). In her later experiences of madness with Lynda, through developing telepathic ability, she even learns to communicate with the collective unconsciousness of the city. Felski explains that this female community opens up a space for "non-exploitative relationships" which "inspires activism" and "makes it possible to project a visionary hope of future change" (139). Lessing's depiction of the potential evolution of feminine identity conforms to the movement, current at that moment, of feminists struggling to recognise "differences" and their emphasis on "relationship" as well as fluid ego boundaries, and this was most emphatically formalised in the object relations theorist feminists of the 1970s and 1980s: like Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Carol Gilligan, Jane Flax, Jean Baker Miller and Sara Ruddick.

While traditional humanism develops Kantian moral affiliations of "responsibility, duty, respect, self-sovereignty, agency" (Sheehan 6), Lessing's female protagonists, however, develop another kind of female morality, based on care and relational interaction with others that are traditionally assigned to women. Carol Gilligan has proclaimed this impetus as the "different voice" of women. Waugh suggests, however, that the existence of female qualities of "co-

operativeness, nurturance, an awareness of self-in-relationship” may be understood not in essentialist but social and cultural terms (*Feminine Fictions* 13). By recognising fields of knowledge and totalising systems that “attempt to systematize individual and concrete human actions,” women have had to develop their experience in what appear to be “‘humanist’ or ‘personal’ qualities” (Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 14-15). Gilligan’s ethics of care, however, often raised the criticism that it neglects a more austere and Kantian notion of “justice” as fairness that feminism set out to pursue. But other critics such as Judith Evans have argued that many feminists have turned away from traditional concepts of “justice” because they assume them to be flawed. Instead of an impersonal equality, an ethics of care is built on the “capacity to care very deeply and very strongly indeed, characteristically, interestingly enough, about fairness and justice” (Evans 104). The concept of “care” is performed in various situations in many parts of Lessing’s works, like *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), and *The Fifth Child* (1988), and *Ben, in the World* (2000). It appears as a kind of “relational positionality” that is developed by post-structuralists, like Susan S. Friedman, as a kind of permeable boundary, among genders, races and ethnicities.

Lessing’s exploration of “myth, symbol, and archetype,” is more oriented to the breaking down of those constructed patterns than to the celebration of “the essential differences” of a woman writer (Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 24).<sup>5</sup> In *The Golden Notebook*, Anna refuses to play ancient female roles while she comes to realise her personal chaotic feelings in the face of such ancient figures. In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), the male protagonist experiences psychological archetypes, in which he realises his own destructive as well as fetishistic attitudes towards female and maternal roles. In *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Lessing engages “critical realism” with “allegory.” The allegory at the end is a way for the individual to realise the unconscious collective through the mythic relationship. It is revealed that the process of the pursuit of the “liberal myth of the naturally free individual” is ambiguous, not necessarily finding realisation when encountering impasses

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<sup>5</sup> Waugh proposes that some women writers quest for female “unity” in their “exploration of myth, symbol, and archetype” (*Feminine Fictions* 24).

presented by “social-historical forces of violence and power” and the forces of nature, like sexuality (Taylor 5). Waugh also proposes that for this generation of feminists “the gradual recognition of the naïvety of such an imagined ‘unity’ reinforced their growing awareness of the heterogeneity of women (in terms of class, race, sexuality) and the intransigence of desire at unconscious levels” (*Feminine Fictions* 24). The question of how to realise such utopian and “fantastic realities” is always a difficult one so that Lessing and other writers draw increasingly on explicit forms of “fabulation and manifestations of unreason and transgression—dream, visions, a gamut of disturbed or violent psychic state—press up against the realistic narrative” (Taylor 6).

## **2. Searching for Spiritual Breaking Through in the Mundane Life**

Lessing’s adoption of Sufism is one of the most important elements in her allegories in order to search for spiritual breakthrough, otherwise difficult to obtain in a world largely conceived in materialist terms. The evidence of Sufism in many of her works, *The Four-Gated City*, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, all suggest Lessing’s ambition to surpass the limitations of an exclusively material personal and collective consciousness. However, DuPlessis also suggests that Lessing’s identification of Sufism in *The Four-Gated City* is an “‘intensification’ of ideas she has always held about a material evolution of humanity, a ‘conscious self-development’ that will ‘serve mankind in its path of planned evolution’” (196). Catherine R. Stimpson also mentions Lessing’s use of Sufism as a kind of “evolutionary theory” and “both tropes and theory reinforced the sense that growth has the force of natural law. It transcends individual choice” (190-191). However, Lessing focuses more on the individual awareness through the interdependent life with the outer world. Müge Galin mentions that, Sufism, “when followed and carried out with careful attention to all of one’s self, can lead to the transformation of individuals and to the betterment of humankind” (39). The “careful attention to one’s self” is examined in the long process of Martha’s quest, from South Africa to Post-war London, towards an emergent self, connected to the life of the collective. Stimpson mentions that “the development in the novel has

become “an encyclopedic life, as if the relations between conscience and its collective were part of a complex, lengthy process” (192). However, this process is necessary because, according to the Sufi, “true knowledge cannot be attained through books” but comes from “experience” (Galín 40). After the pursuit of and disillusion with the political ideal of Communism, Martha begins to transfer her attention away from the outer world to the inner world, in a process that suggests a new dialectical relationship between conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind. Susan Watkins mentions that for Lessing and many other writers and thinkers in that period, “changing the thinking process means taking seriously the possibilities occasioned by extraordinary psychic phenomena” (77).

Lessing’s protagonists develop their special transcendental experiences to reconsider their situations in the world. However, rather than achieving individual unity, Lessing seems to reconnect the individual’s new conception of nature along with the capacity to develop her own bodily nature. There are many moments where the protagonists experience a merging with nature and the emergence of a new selfhood. Martha even develops different physical sensations in her psychological journey. One is her different capacity for visual perspective, a capacity akin to William Blake’s use of vision. He applies “eyes” to the observation of both “objective, empirical information” and also “the whole of infinity that is disclosed to a spiritually inclined ardent seeker” (Galín 162). In addition, Martha transforms her sexual experience from a kind of physical entrapment to become the source of a new evolution of selfhood that emerges out of a collective energy. Fand proposes that “sexual union is only one form of nature’s process of merging, dissolving the old, to reformulate the new” (114). Martha’s self-exploration leads to her schizophrenic type experience with Lynda.

### **3.1. Madness and Collectivity**

Lessing’s exploration of madness is her way of examining the individual as reflected in and through the collective and vice versa. Madness becomes an important route for Lessing to get close to the unconscious since it interrupts the paralysis of ordinary life. Lessing’s analysis of madness breaks down the dualism

between rationality and irrationality, as well as body and spirituality. The theme of madness reflects different aspects of the outer world, including the political condition of the Cold War in the 1950s and the reaction to it of the counter-culture in psychiatry in the 1960s. The Cold War was at its height in 1955, and the “Russell-Einstein Manifesto” was issued then. “Mutually Assured Destruction” was announced in 1956, whose initial “M.A.D.” reflected the potential destruction that human civilisation brings through global thermonuclear conflict. Maria Manuel Lisboa describes the irony that “nuclear deterrence” was “promoted as the best guarantee of peace” (23). In 1966, Susan Sontag proposed the idea of a kind of collective psychological persecution evident in human history, that “every person would spend his individual life under the threat of something almost insupportable psychologically—collective incineration and extinction which could come at any time, virtually without warning” (224). In *The Four-Gated City*, the Cold War is embodied in the claustrophobic atmosphere of the family, who undergo tragic emotions because of the defecting Communist father, the wife committing suicide, and the orphans left behind as the children of violence. Watkins suggests that Lessing’s description of post-war London in *The Four-Gated City* and *The Golden Notebook*, expresses a kind of “melancholy cosmopolitanism” as a way to challenge “the closed-off, paranoid legacy of the Cold War in the 1950s” (54). The apocalypse at the end of *The Four-Gated City* appears to imply “the certainty of a new beginning” and also “the possibility of life (or the end of it) imitating art has found its clearer manifestation in events surrounding the unfolding of the Cold War in the second half of the twentieth century” (Lisbao 20-21).

Meanwhile, Lessing’s fiction of the 1960s echoes R. D. Laing’s anti-psychiatry movement that interprets schizophrenia as an intelligible and potentially healing response to destructive social demands. Both Laing and Lessing represent part of a wider protest about the threat of nuclear power<sup>6</sup> and a view of madness as a form of rebellion: the schizophrenic as the sane performer in a mad society. In *The*

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<sup>6</sup> Showalter proposes that “the fear of nuclear war, a powerful political force in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Aldermaston peace marches, shows up in Laing’s writing of the 1960s, along with protests against American involvement in Vietnam” (*Female Malady* 228-229).

*Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980*, Showalter proposes that many of Laing's ideas are reflected in Lessing's work: he too saw himself as "one of the symptoms of the times" (*Female Malady* 222). Most of all, Laing insisted that it is society that is insane instead of people. His anti-psychiatry movement was actually part of a wider international movement of the early to mid-sixties that also included Michael Foucault's *Histoire de la folie* in Paris and Erving Goffman's *Asylums* in the United States, and "the new views of madness as a social construct and of the asylum as a 'total institution'" becomes a way to break the rules and labels in cultures (Showalter, *Female Malady* 222).<sup>7</sup> One of the basic concerns of anti-psychiatry was to be against traditional psychiatric institutions which emphasised drugs and other physical forms of treatment, especially William Sargant's advocacy of "brain surgery" in his *Battle for the Mind* (1957). In *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968*, Elizabeth Wilson mentions that Sargant's "brainwashing" tried to create a "totalitarian" society (114). There is the impression that "the individual was at the mercy of physical and mental techniques of manipulation," so it "made liberal ideas of the 'personality', 'free' will', and 'human dignity' somewhat meaningless" (Wilson, *Only Halfway* 113). In the description of some psychiatric hospitals in Lessing's work, in *The Four-Gated City*, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, and *Ben, in the World*, it is evident how mental hospitals had become institutions set up as part of the social mechanism.

### **3.2. Madness and Women**

On the one hand, Lessing's description of madness picks up a tradition of women's writing that uses madness as a kind of physical symptom or rebellion. Showalter mentions that "'anti-psychiatry" offers a new way of "looking at female insanity as the violation of sex-role expectations" (*Female Malady* 222). In *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*, she suggests that "throughout history, hysteria has served as a form of expression, a body language for people

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<sup>7</sup> Showalter proposes that American sociologist Thomas Scheff's "labeling theory of deviance", which indicates that "the symptoms of mental illness were primarily 'offenses against implicit understandings of particular cultures,' forms of 'residual rule-breaking' that, in being labeled as madness, were stabilized and fixed" (*Female Malady* 222).

who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel” (Showalter 7). Therefore, some symptoms became “bodily metaphors” because of “the lack of a public voice to articulate their economic and sexual oppression” in the nineteenth century (Showalter, *Hystories* 55).<sup>8</sup> While the social movements focus on the political revolution, family, as the more basic unit in a society, seems to be increasingly neglected. Juliet Mitchell, as a member of the New Left, noted that the women’s movement had been therefore excluded from the social movements of the 1960s since traditional socialists tried to create societies on a basis other than that of the family.<sup>9</sup> In *Women: the Longest Revolution*, she suggests that socialism “should properly mean not the abolition of the family, but the diversification of the socially acknowledged relationships which are today forcibly and rigidly compressed into it” (*Wemen* 54).

The paradox of production and reproduction and the female myth is represented by Lessing’s “matrophobia”<sup>10</sup> in her work. Laing’s analysis of individual and family in his *Sanity, Madness, and the Family*, suggests that the feelings of oppression experienced by women in the nuclear family motivated the rise of the women’s liberation movement. In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Mitchell therefore looks to Laing’s early work in that it “helped to introduce a new phase of radical humanism to which the women’s movement is heir” (29). Evans explains that the claims of reproduction, “have kept women from the productive sphere, and so from the road to freedom” and “the ‘family’, had remained an untheorized entity that appeared to legitimize, make inevitable, women’s subordination” (73). As Mitchell suggests, “the social cult of maternity is matched by the real socio-economic powerlessness of the mother” and “her capacity for maternity is a definition of woman” (*Women* 33-34). Women’s reproduction is part of the capitalist mode of production, an economic process, and so women are always confined in the domestic sphere. Dorothy Brewster points out that some of Anna’s nightmares and

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<sup>8</sup> Showalter explains further that “their symptoms—mutism, paralysis, self-starvation, spasmodic seizures—seemed like bodily metaphors for the silence, immobility, denial of appetite, and hyper femininity imposed on them by their societies” (*Hystories* 55).

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell mentions Peter Townsend’s statement as the “locus classicus” of this socialist attitude (*Women* 18).

<sup>10</sup> Lynn Sukenick detects Lessing’s “matrophobia” in her works (98-118).



obsessions are also Martha's, that is the fear of "being part of the cycle," of "repeating the experience of generation after generation" (36). In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, the mother is even recognised as a witch who eats babies in the inner journey of the male protagonist. Until *The Fifth Child*, the maternal role emerges from the unconscious and is embodied as a monster, giving birth to an animal rather than a child. These mother images seem hostile, but they often betoken the first steps towards reparation with the mother. Greene also suggests that there is a "longing for a reconciliation" on the daughter's part ("Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory" 296). In her autobiography, *Under My Skin*, Lessing proposes that *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is "an Attempt at an Autobiography" (28). While her mother is educated that a child should be governed by love, however, she has no "experience of love" (Lessing, *UM* 25). Breaking down the ideal image of motherhood, Lessing also puts her focus on the social and cultural construction and expectation of motherhood. Emily, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, is too young to take all the burdens as a "carer" in the new community that is established by her lover. In *Ben, in the World*, the old lady, Mrs Biggs is represented as one whose extreme age reflects the physical limitations on the kind of love she can offer. Lessing implies that "care" should be a freely given and shared responsibility in society but she also examines the broader function of the family and the pressure on it. Family is an "emotional wasteland" for Lessing even though the family remains a space of hope for security and love in a world of war, famines, violence and epidemics (Lessing, *UM* 26).

The changing genres and different writing forms all reflect Lessing's self-reflexivity as a writer and her variety of attempts to change the human situation in the world. Since she chooses to be "an architect of the soul," she "must have a vision to build towards, and that vision must spring from the nature of the world we live in" (Lessing, *SPV* 7). Many critics focus on Lessing's innovative forms and the evolution of her changing genres. In *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*, Betsy Draine tries to analyse Lessing's "change of form" as a way to effect "change in the mode of perception," as well as "a change in the way that the 'substance' of life is apprehended" (xiii).

Many critics also represent Lessing's construction of subjectivity in its relation with the collective. Claire Sprague tries to explore pattern and doubleness in Lessing's work, to analyse Lessing's dealing with the splitting or polarising selves. In "Multipersonal and Dialogic Modes in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Notebook*," Sprague proposes that Erich Auerbach's "multiple method" and Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination" suggest a way to display the dialectic process of Lessing's use of multiple and splitting selves in *The Golden Notebook*. In her *Rereading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition*, Sprague explores the explicit dialectic process in the "profoundly dialectical consciousness" that Rubenstein proposes. She believes that it is the legacy of the dialectic from Hegel and Marxism that is most influential "on Lessing's thinking and on the shape of her narrative strategies" (Sprague, *Narrative Patterns* 4). Meanwhile, she also suggests that Freudian and Jungian theories provide a kind of psychoanalytic dialectic, while Freud's mental conflict and Jung's "paired opposites" from "mystical, alchemical, religious, and mythical lore" are what Lessing tries to examine and anguish over (Sprague, *Narrative Patterns* 4). Sprague further proposes that "Lessing's 'profound dialectic consciousness' sees double and multiple forces in constant interaction" and this vision of "doubleness and multiplicity is embodied in what used to be called a set of objective correlatives" (*Narrative Patterns* 4). Lessing's extension of doubling from her characters to the environment is therefore her way to see "the individual in constant juxtaposition with the collective" (Sprague, *Narrative Patterns* 8). Watkins too mentions that "feminist readings of Lessing's work exemplify transitions that have been important in feminist criticism and theory more widely" (171). What Watkins proposes here is that feminist criticism has proceeded from a more straightforward "concern with the gendered body, gendered forms of expression and feminist politics" in the second wave feminism towards the third wave's preoccupation "with the interesting intersections and overlaps between gender and class, sexuality, 'race,' nation and age" (171).

#### 4.1. Melanie Klein's Psychoanalysis

As mentioned above, Lessing's concern with the individual and the collective is demonstrated not only in the historical and social backgrounds to her fiction, but also in the understanding of the collective (un)conscious that is revealed through them. This thesis starts from Melanie Klein's psychoanalysis with the idea, central to her work, of the importance of analysing "intersubjectivity," to understand the self's internalisation of and projection on to the outer world as making available a more creative interactive relationship between the individual and the collective. The concept of "intersubjectivity" is central to this. Lessing's examination of the maternal role seems to reflect the developing trend of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century, away from the patriarchal and phallicentric to the "mother-centred." The rise of neo-Freudianisms around 1930 initiated a period of questioning of Freud's version of female psychosexual development. Mari Jo Buhle mentions that neo-Freudianism "involved from the first conflict between feminist principles and Freudian tenets" because Freud begins to be criticised "for overestimating biological factors in the shaping of personality" (10). Freud's aphorism that "Anatomy is Destiny" is based on the superiority of the penis and the assumption that girls have to accept their anatomical inferiority.<sup>11</sup> The girl transfers from identifying with her mother to hating her mother for bringing her into the world "so insufficiently equipped" (Buhle 73). The girl's anger towards her mother seems to be an impasse and is transferred to her pursuit of other substitutions, like a child. Karen Horney and other neo-Freudians started to object to Freud's phallic-centred theory. Horney considers that femininity does not come from this kind of lack or self-disappointment but "the envy leads to a revulsion from the subject's own sexual role" (53). Neo-Freudians thus transferred their attention to the analysis of environmental and interpersonal influences, including childrearing and ideological systems, not determined by instincts. Buhle proposes that they therefore sharpen the two important opposing poles in both feminism and

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<sup>11</sup> See Sigmund Freud.

psychoanalytic theory: “biology and culture, nature and nurture” (10). Through identification with the patriarchal symbol, women could achieve separation from mothers in order to enter the world. In some discussions, later feminists refuse the view, however, that Freud devalues women as passive objects. This view often asserts that the maternal role is as crucial to the Oedipus complex as the identification with the father. Mitchell suggests that Freud’s emphasis has more to do with the physical and psychological differences between males and females than about devaluing one or the other. Rosalind Minsky also argues that “anatomy is destiny” is a slogan for those “who conform to cultural demands” and it may not be true for those “whose Oedipal crisis is not resolved ideally” (61). She indicates further that “most girls never give up their mother completely and unconsciously yearn for her for the rest of their lives” (Minsky 63). However, “unconscious rejection of ‘femininity’” by both sexes in early childhood seems to “lie at the heart of the patriarchal domination of women (Minsky 66).

Separation from the mother is necessary in Freudian theory for boys and girls to achieve independence. In *Practising Postmodernism, Reading Modernism*, Waugh proposes that Freud supports “separation and objectivity rather than relation and connection” and maturity is achieved and maintained through “patrolling of the boundaries” (133). Minsky argues that “Freudian theory sees identity as always divided, unstable and made precarious by a potentially subversive unconscious” (20). However, while Martha wanders in the city, she is more in a kind of state of nomadic searching in order to make up the gap between her sense of the world inside and what she encounters in the outer world. In Lessing’s work, it is shown that the denial of the mother is never engaged as a possible way to resolve this conflict.

Lessing’s emphasis on people as relational beings echoes Melanie Klein’s earlier and D.W. Winnicott’s mid-century idea of infants’ “object-seeking” in the pre-Oedipal period. Samuel Slipp proposes that “the most significant departure by Klein was her belief that the *relationship of the infant’s bonding to the mother and later separating* from her is the central issue in infant development” (15). Jay R.

Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell explain that “Drives for Klein, are relationships” (136-7). The Freudian model of psychological development posits a conflict between an inherent and biological mode of atavistic “*pleasure-seeking*,” and the necessity of conforming ultimately to a social “reality principle” and the learning of cultural codes. As a follower of Freud, Klein analyses the pre-Oedipal period that Freud had abandoned with little close examination. Kleinian infants develop their Oedipal phantasies and even superegos in the first three years of life while in Freud’s scheme, the superego is developed after the resolution of the Oedipal complex, which does not occur until after five or six years of age. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges propose that “by emphasizing the primacy of the mother, Klein is led to correspondingly diminish the importance of castration anxiety, which is so crucial a turning point in Freud” (11). It is in the process of feeding that the infant re-experiences the secure and safe feeling of oneness with the mother, but this also causes the infant to project anxiety on to the breast or the mother as “part-object.” In a consequence of imagining the breast as part-object, the infant develops a series of psychological interactions with the outer world, which develop the capacity to deal with the emotions of love, hate, loss and reparation. Although Klein does not examine it, the interactive nature of her view of the subject presumably may incorporate cultural and social constructions of the maternal role if it is developed. In *The Psycho-analysis of Children*, Klein proposes that “phantasy activity underlies the mechanisms of introjections and projection which enable the ego to perform one of the basic functions mentioned above, namely to establish object-relations” (58). There are formulations of “positions” in the mind of the infant that are interrelated and dynamic. The infant experiences first the “paranoid-schizoid position” and then “depressive anxiety” and finally is able to move towards “reparation” always with the proviso that any position is hard earned and precarious and the earlier positions reappear when the individual encounters conflict and difficulty.

In the paranoid-schizoid position, Klein proposes that “the recurrent experience of gratification and frustration are powerful stimuli for libidinal and destructive impulses, for love and hatred” (“Some Theoretical Conclusions

Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant” 199). Because of the lack, at this stage, of an integrated ego, the infant might internalise the good and bad image of the breast, and has the experience of self-splitting in order to project (expel) the bad feeling from itself or to attach the libido as the good object through projection of loving feelings onto itself. These internalisations and projections reinforce and stimulate each action and form a kind of continuous dynamic interaction between the internal and external worlds. Klein proposes that “splitting, omnipotence, idealization, denial and control of internal and external objects are dominant at that stage” (“Theoretical Conclusions” 209). The integration relies on “love-impulses predominating temporarily over destructive impulses” and ego can synthesize feelings of love and destructive impulses towards one object” (Klein, “Theoretical Conclusions” 208). The ego gradually learns to mitigate the fear and anxiety of the annihilation of itself and to trust the loved object. Weininger explains that it is important that the development of this “unconscious drama” is allowed so that the child’s inner world is able to express itself “in the form of imaginative play” and “the resulting creativity seems itself a reparative enactment of the good” (32). The ego gradually develops the capacity for integration, consciousness, intellectual capacities and a relation to the external world. The ego is increasingly able to recognise the mother or father as a whole person so that it can synthesise and overcome the discrepancy between “the external and internal world, or rather, the discrepancy between external and internal figures”(Klein, “Theoretical Conclusions” 211). Love and hate are brought towards integration and synthesis and the infant moves to the next position.

The ego might develop the capacity for making reparation in the depressive position because “the ego experiences guilt for demands and aggression towards the loved object, along with the desire to repair any damage that might have been done to it” (Weininger 64). Janet Sayers explains that unlike Freud’s conception, which defines depression as the result of “self-love,” Klein, however, deems that depression arises from “concern for others” (234). While he realises that his new development and new achievements bring pleasure to people around him, the infant thus “in this way expresses his love, counter-balanced, or undoes the harm

done by his aggressive impulses” (Klein, “Theoretical Conclusions” 214-215). Besides the fear of his destructiveness, or the dependency on the object, and also the gratitude or goodness that the child receives from the mother, there is also the anxiety that arises to “make the object whole again through love” (Doane and Hodges 10).

Klein emphasises more the “restoration” of the goodness of the self as well as “reparation” for damage to relationships in its development. It is part of a process that might involve the continuous recreation of those feelings, especially of “love,” in order to recreate the loving image. In Freudian Oedipal development, however, the individual has to overcome the trauma caused by the recognition of his or her inferiority, in the eyes of the patriarchal order, through “achievements” and autonomy. Klein’s concept of the mother is “the plenitude of objects and feeling which the story relies on when it comes to construct itself, to fill its gaps” (Mitchell, *Women* 312). This subjectivity is constructed through the creative and reparation interaction with others. The process of identifying with others, as well as realising the harm that one has done, is part of the process of creating more positive relations with the outer world. Waugh proposes that in Klein’s theory, “the elements of co-operation and care are more positive than Freudian’s competition and fear” (*Feminine Fictions* 64). Sayers proposes that psychoanalysis has shifted via a Kleinian perspective “to the present and interpersonal issues concerning maternal care and its vicissitudes—identification, idealization and envy, deprivation and loss, love and hate, introjections and projection” (3).

Showalter agrees with Juliet Mitchell’s notion that “although Klein drew attention to the importance of the mother-daughter relation and the pre-Oedipal phase, the Kleinian school avoided “contributing anything really new or specific to the understanding of feminine psychology” (*Female Malady* 201). Sayers also criticises Klein’s instinct-based account of psychology, that it “fails to provide a means of expanding women’s psychological resistance to that inequality because it does not take sufficient account of the way social factors like sex inequality shape women’s psychology” (63). However, it is arguable that Klein avoids describing the

social context so as not to reinscribe the conventional maternal image. Doane and Hodges propose that Klein, as a woman, realises that it is impossible to construct the mother-child relationship outside of cultural construction, so her emphasis on the child seems distant from social reality. Klein does not confine womanhood as “selfless motherhood” and even questions the “idealized views of the mother-child relationship” (Doane and Hodges 18).

#### **4.2. The Possibilities of the Development of Culture through Imagination**

In Klein’s theory, the phantasies produced in the process seem to create kinds of imaginative possibility in the relations between the self and the outer world. Through phantasies, infants are able to restore the love and good feelings whilst also accompanying them with fears and anxieties of being devoured and devouring. Julia Segal mentions that the ego therefore seeks the information in the outer world as “some kind of confirmation or refutation of anxiety-filled phantasies” (54). In consequence, “symbolism develops out of the search for representatives in the external world of objects in the internal one” (Segal 54). Doane and Hodges mention that “ultimately, the work of symbol formation, art and culture themselves, can be attributed to our attempts to make reparation, to generate the mother” (12).<sup>12</sup> For Kristeva, Klein’s innovation “emerged as a *psychoanalysis of the capacity to think*” (Melanie Klein 43). Her emphasis on the pre-Oedipal period that returns to the “archaic maternal” moment offers a different insight into the difficulties of the subject and proposes the “inversion of the process of symbolization” (Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* 394). Since Klein’s “fantasy” is “bound up with motivation, taste and food aversions, the sharpness of perceptions (particularly the visual perception)...of the primal scene” (Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* 140-1), it is not surprising to see Lessing’s illustration of psychological persecution as portrayed through physical symptoms, like hunger and sexuality—the primal needs. Sylvie Gambaudo explains further that Kristeva understands “a certain form of art, montage of bodily fluid upon which fantastic words and images

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12 Doane and Hodges propose Hanna Segal’s description that the infant’s idealisation of the mother “makes him see her as the container of everything desirable, breasts, babies, penises” (Segal 107). See Hanna Segal.



are placed or the violence of the televisual discourse (video games, cartoons) upon which children project themselves” (101). In *Ben, in the World*, television is represented as a media form that transmits the family’s fear of the intrusion of the outer world. Ben’s imitation of his brother’s watching TV, and his later image captured on the TV news embodies his being as part of the violent world.

Winnicott, following Klein, develops her ideas on the mother-infant relationship. While Klein focuses on the infant’s phantasies, Winnicott starts to emphasise “social interactions and relationship, specially the give and take of the mother’s exchange with her infant” (Doane and Hodges 7). He starts to pay more attention to external reality, for example, to features such as the mother’s nursing quality and the baby’s own symbolic imagery. In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott argues that Klein fails to develop the idea of “the subject of creativity.” Winnicott proposes the idea of “transitional objects and transitional phenomena” as a way to mediate desire and anxiety in the process of making a difference between me and “not me.” For Winnicott, the breast becomes the object in relation to which the infant develops the “capacity to love” out of need (*Playing and Reality* 11) and he thus develops the idea of the “good enough mother” as facilitating the infant’s development from the pleasure principle to the reality principle or towards and beyond primary identification (*Playing and Reality* 10). However, Winnicott does not mean the good enough mother has to be the infant’s own mother (although he indicates that the infant’s own mother may be more adaptable in showing the kind of “devotion” that might answer the infant’s needs).

Meanwhile, the illusion created in the “intermediate area” allows the infant, “between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality-testing” to develop the mechanisms of interjection and projection (*Playing and Reality* 11). In his theory of playing, Winnicott even develops it into the “potential space,” a “third area,” where cultural experience “is a derivative of play” (*Playing and Reality* 102). He proposes that the “good enough environment” provides the appropriate opportunity for the infant to “cope with the immense shock of loss of omnipotence” through its negotiations with the transitional phenomena (*Playing*

*and Reality* 71). It is from the experience of fusion and separation in the potential space that the infant develops the trust towards the outer environment. He says, “the potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust” (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* 103). It is in the context of the dependability of the environment that the infant’s play can develop creative symbols that supply human beings with a positive and imaginative source for their later lives. What Winnicott is proposing here, is a dependent and trustful relationship, between the I and not I.

### **4.3. The Reformation of Maternal Role**

While the maternal role is discussed at the centre of the psychoanalytic process, dealing with the maternal role also raises the problem of repositioning women’s nature. On the one hand, although Winnicott emphasises the importance of the mother’s role, on the other it might be seen that “his restaging of the mother’s place in child’s development is hardly liberating for women” (Doane and Hodges 8). Although the subjectivity of the maternal role is acknowledged by emphasising her role as a nurturer, she is also objectified in being treated as the agent in the discourse. However, in his theory, it seems that mothers are endowed with the obligations of maternal roles when the nurturing environment and outer reality are given more emphasis than the internal phantasies proposed by Klein. John Bowlby proposes his attachment theory, which defines “attachment” as “an innate drive to establish a loving, ongoing relationship with an empathic mother” (qtd. in Buhle 197). Adapting Darwin’s ideas, Bowlby describes the infant’s attachment to the mother as an “instinct primary” not only among humans but throughout the animal kingdom. His article “The Nature of the Child’s Tie to the Mother” published in 1957, was even influential on welfare state policies of the 1950s. His emphasis on assigned gender roles and divided labours—the homemaker and breadwinner, in the nuclear family, pushed women back to the domestic field. Juliet Flower MacCannell also discusses this kind of idealisation of the maternal role during the 1950s, influenced by the atmosphere of the Cold War. She proposes that the Cold War, creates “imaginary identifications with the stable

family” (MacCannell 157). The full-time mother is invented during this period and assigned the mother role: a kind of “extracultural power that served to make her both a scapegoat and an alibi for denying her political voice” (MacCannell 159).

Even though Winnicott was influential on post-Freudian psychoanalysis, the move has largely been away from sexual and libido aggression and towards a focus on intersubjectivity, on relationships with others, based on the motivation of attachment to “objects.” For the emphasis on socialisation and internalisation of cultural influence, there must emerge a clear distinction between sex and gender. These post-Freudians propose that “gender” emerges “*within a relationship, specially a relationship central to the infant during the first moment of life*” (Bule 245). One argument here is that the infant confronts sexual differences during the first year of life and gains a sense of gender in the process of differentiating from the mother. In the 1980s, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow drew on the spirit of post-Freudian theory and the focus on the mother-infant relationship, in order to demonstrate the process of sexual differentiation and constructed inequality. They start their argument from the idea that women as mothers are a kind of “gendered identity” (Buhle 251).

Dinnerstein adopts Klein’s concept of introjections and projections of a good and a bad breast. The physical connectedness between mother and infant becomes “the tie to life” but “the pain in it, and the fear of being cut off from it, are prototypes of the pain of life and the fear of death” (Dinnerstein 24). Since women often have to take up the maternal role, women are often deemed as “representative of Nature,” bearing a “mystic continuity with non-human processes like rain and the fertility of plants” (Dinnerstein 105). Meanwhile, since the boundary with the mother in early life is not distinctive, the mother is merged with the imagination of the baby, who might therefore tend to represent her in quasi-personal and naturalistic ways. Dinnerstein suggests that “our over-personification of nature, then, is inseparable from our under-personification of women,” so she suggests that both sexes carry, from the beginning, the emotional aura of the parent (108).

In Lessing's work, in addition to the dialogic consciousness, intersubjectivity appears in a more relational mode that predates cultural feminism. Cynthia Burack mentions that "one important mainstream account of the self-in-relation that has been the focus of feminist attention is derived from communitarian political theory" (5). The kind of relation emphasised here is not only that which is informed by the influence of history and culture, but also the personal experience of humans, living and interacting with each other. Dinnerstein also mentions the influence of the catastrophe of the Second World War that brought human beings into a new kind of consciousness of the world (261). Lessing suggests that hers and our spiritual progenitors suffer a kind of moral shock and withdraw their attention from history, turning their focus inwards and towards the personal life: this was also of course, the heyday of psychoanalysis and the development of the therapy culture.

### **5. Intersubjectivity in the Fiction of Doris Lessing**

A major objective of this thesis is to interrogate the meanings and performance of the concept and practice of "intersubjectivity" as it is engaged in Lessing's experiments with fictional writing, in which she attempts to find a way to cross the boundaries between inside and outside, truth and imagination. As Lyndsey Stonebridge and Marina MacKay suggest: to think about mid-century fiction is also "an attempt to get beyond the formalist distinction between experimental and realistic fiction" (3). Therefore, "intersubjectivity" in Lessing's fiction, appears with the characteristics of mobility and variation. This thesis consists of two parts. In the first "Intersubjectivity as the Inter-relative and Formal Transition," "intersubjectivity" is represented through the representation of various physical, and non-physical forms that correspond to inner and outer worlds and which undergo a kind of unremitting process of transformation. The innovative formal arrangement in her best known novel, *The Golden Notebook*, for example, performs the process of "intersubjectivity" through its complex and suggestively correlative relationships set up between each part of the novel. The shifting narratives set up a multi-perspectival method intended to blur unitary and singular or atomistic definitions of truth. The process of breaking down the forms of fiction

within and between the notebooks embodies Lessing's ongoing concern with connecting inner and outer worlds. The process of becoming *The Golden Notebook* as a complete artistic entity is offered as an example and experience of the changing processes of "intersubjectivity." Even in her first work, *The Grass Is Singing*, a broadly realistic novel, Lessing "uses metaphor to suggest the implications and effects of the social structure under analysis" (King 3). She uses metaphor in realistic descriptions of the outer or material world in order to depict inner conflict: the bush around Mary's house, for example, appears as a vehicle signifying the emotional experience of threat associated with the black people; the iron roof in her house similarly is used to suggest Mary's fragile but consistent endurance of the intolerable environment of the colonial society. Through the quest motif, Lessing also represents "intersubjectivity" and, in particular, Martha's own quest in the world. Martha's pursuit of an ideal world, leads her to a surreal psychological breakthrough and physical evolution: her experiences can be seen to reflect Lessing's eagerness to achieve an enhanced condition of "intersubjectivity" that recognizes the importance of the relations between individuals in the formation of and dialectical interaction with the collective.

The second part, "Intersubjectivity of Mutual Creativity," discusses Lessing's later works, whose forms are more experimental. The quest in the worlds of her previous protagonists always turned into an imaginative inner journey that had the effect of blurring boundaries between inner and outer worlds. In her later fictions, such as *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Lessing more specifically engages the object relational psychological mechanisms of Melanie Klein, developed by Winnicott and Kristeva, to provide a kind of creative transformation of "intersubjectivity," through the exploration of the psychological world. Reminiscent of the title of "Children of Violence" series, *The Fifth Child*, published almost twenty years later, continues to analyze "intersubjectivity" from the angle of vulnerable children. Unlike Martha, who manages to escape the restriction of constituted cultural formations, even those of family, Ben wishes only for a "home"- like place and this reflects Lessing's long lasting concern about how "care" might ideally be expressed and enacted in the world. Unable to

communicate with others in the world through language and normal expression, Ben can only react to others through his grotesque “body,” whose transformation embodies his need for engagement with others. “Intersubjectivity” thus represents a kind of relational position between self and other, but where the self is constituted out of relations with the other. Ben’s primary physical reaction towards people around him is comparable to Mary’s inner emotional relation with the outer world. Ben’s body physically registers and acts out the psychological needs of all humans in their reactions to and engagements with the world: needs that are normally internalized or psychologised and therefore partly hidden.

In my first chapter, “The Omitted, and Emitted Love Objects: Unfinished Reparation of the Heroine in *The Grass Is Singing*: a Kleinian Study,” I analyse the formation of “intersubjectivity” through the psychological interaction of the central protagonist, Mary, with a world saturated by tensions of class, race and gender. The aim is to explore whether the female protagonist might achieve emotional reparation even though she has internalised those persecuting feelings from the environment and the lack of loving feeling in her life. Burack proposes that in Kleinian moral theory “the capacity to make reparation is not only a developmental achievement but also ‘a fundamental element in love and in all human relationships’” (67). Mary’s husband, Dick’s, stubbornness and concrete selfhood, in R. D. Laing’s sense, is also a way to petrify Mary, producing her fundamental and ambivalent sense of love and hate, later raised by Moses, the shadow figure that motivates the process of integration with her consciousness. However, Mary is doomed to have no escape or outlet from her feelings or the situation when her consciousness is awoken by the intrusion of outsiders into her inner object-relational world.

In my second chapter, “The Bodies of Otherness: *Martha Quest*—Identity and Otherness, from the Perspective of Simone de Beauvoir’s Intersubjectivity,” I examine the concepts of self and otherness as Lessing presents them in *Martha Quest*. In her quest for independence and autonomy, the young protagonist, Martha, is full of unresolved conflicts, arising out of her internalisations of acceptable femininity in the settler milieu. I will also argue that the novel was

influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's idea of "intersubjectivity," which is a way to refuse "absolute subjectivity." Recognising her selfhood, through her body, Martha develops her "embodied consciousness," and experiences herself as an "otherness," in the depths of her being, as well as witnessing those treated as "othernesses" in this colony society. It is through this process that Martha comprehends herself as an "ambiguous being," whose freedom needs the reciprocal recognition of the other.

In my third chapter, "A City in the Golden Age—'Where? What is it? How? What's next? Where is the man or woman who...': a Modernist Flâneuse's Wandering, Searching and Remembering ~ Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*," I consider the significance of the construction of post-war London through the eyes of the white South African, Martha Quest, a female *flâneuse* who serves also to resituate this modernist figure in terms of the sexual politics of the post-war period through Martha's double perspective of the insider and outsider. The novel traces its protagonist's disillusionment with post-war political retrenchments and Lessing's own disaffection with organised forms of radical politics. Martha's female subjectivity is always that of an outsider, no matter whether she is in Africa or London. Drawing on Laing's phenomenological-existential account of madness as protest, I analyse how Martha experiments with modes of self-induced psychosis as a vehicle for Lessing's own interest in reconceiving a politics of the personal, which challenges conventional models of agency and consciousness.

In my fourth chapter, "The Inter-relative/ Inter-Creating Forms of Writing: in the Process of Becoming...*The Golden Notebook*," Anna's writer's block is an important theme, which serves as a narrative vehicle to develop Lessing's preoccupation with the limitations of language as a means of expressing the self. In this most postmodern of her novels, "intersubjectivity" is performed through the juxtaposition of different genres. Her hesitation in writing and her self-critical voice in the notebooks represent the confrontation with internalised outer pressures, but also echo Virginia Woolf's idea in *A Room of One's Own*, that a woman writer should "break the sequence—the expected order" in the constituted discourse (95).

Each notebook represents the search for an autonomous self, a sense of correlative “Annas,” who are finally condensed into one in the frame novel, “Free Women.”

In my fifth chapter, “Recreation through Blanking Briefing: the Journey of I.I.I.I.I...in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*,” “intersubjectivity” is demonstrated and analysed through the male protagonist, Watkins’s, inner journey as well as an individual mosaic image, patched together through the letters of his acquaintances. Watkins’s psychological journey is one undertaken in order to break down the fixed symbolic meanings in the real world of everyday life. His journey starts with Jungian archetypes, then he experiences the process of “abjection” that Julia Kristeva proposes so as to face his inner ambivalence, “a magnetic gratification and repulsion towards the female” (*Melanie Klein* 151). His amnesia symbolises the condition of most people who are, most of the time, locked in their “I,I,I,I,” and this is the madness of human beings because they do not realise that being microbes, they “are a whole, they form a unity, they have a single mind” (*BF* 103). More than emphasising the “totality,” Lessing tries to achieve reciprocal recognition between the self and the other. Watkins’s encounter with the Crystal might also be seen to represent his return to the “chora” where the symbolic order is unstable and he is able to achieve union with the collective.

In the sixth chapter, “Creating an Iron Egg: Resurrection through Recurrence: Relational Caring Positions in Doris Lessing’s *The Memoirs of a Survivor*,” my aim is to explore how Winnicott’s “potential space” is opened up in order to cultivate imagination and culture through Carol Gilligan’s idea of an “ethics of care,” so as to bridge the gap between inner and outer worlds, present and past. More than Winnicott’s idea of “good enough care,” care is relational but not necessarily relativistic and contrasted with a Kantian “ethic of justice.” “Intersubjectivity” here is presented as a more dynamic and changeable process, instead of the repetitive construction of archetypal pattern.

The seventh chapter is “The Transformation of a Body, Created in Different Positions: The Position of a Body in Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*.” This chapter analyses “intersubjectivity,” from the physical construction



and transformation of the protagonist Ben, being an outsider because of his distinctive physical figure. The monster-like mother in *The Fifth Child* also indicates how the maternal role is mystified and is burdened with the responsibility of care. Ben has to figure out his selfhood primarily through his bodily existence in the world. In *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz proposes that the "subject's exterior is psychologically constructed" and also the "social inscription of the body's surface constructs a psychological interior" (381). Her idea that the human's body is constructed by the systematic power relations of civilisation, is remarkably close to that of Michel Foucault. However, as in Foucault's analysis, selfhood and subjectivity are more profoundly maintained through individual self-surveillance rather than physical constraint. Only when he meets those who really care for him and who accept his uniqueness, can Ben acquire a sense of "identity" and an ability to care for others. In this chapter, I will examine how the binaries of culture and nature, body and civilisation, are represented by Lessing in a mode that opens up the possibility of recognising their fundamental interrelationship. *Ben, in the world* is a representation and meditation on being in the world: the perception of the body as object and the subjective constitution of identity and selfhood through that gaze and its power to shape the fundamental experience of be(i)n(g) a bodily self.

## Part I. Intersubjectivity as the Inter-relative and Formal Transition

### Chapter One

#### The Omitted, and Emitted Love Objects: Unfinished Reparation in *The Grass Is Singing*: a Kleinian Study

*The Grass Is Singing*, the first novel of Doris Lessing, was first published in 1950. It is set in Rhodesia, South Africa, and concerns a white settler family. As her first novel, it resonates with some of her own autobiographical experience, including that of being an immigrant. Lessing's family moved to Southern Rhodesia when she was six years old (1927). Southern Rhodesia was named after Cecil Rhodes, who was one of the architects of the British Empire and it had become part of the empire in 1923. Like many British citizens at that time, Lessing's parents were lured by the golden dream of British Imperialism which planted the idea of becoming wealthy within five years by growing maize. In *Under My Skin*, Lessing describes how her parents experienced disappointment from this grand dream and how they struggled to maintain their pride as an English middle-class family even though they had to fight against the severe natural environment and poverty that they had never imagined. The cultural shock experienced by her mother meant that she "decided" to be ill and Lessing describes how she reconstructed her life from within as she could not obtain the "respectable life she had believed was her right" (Lessing, *UM* 64).

In the first chapter of the autobiography, Lessing talks of how the spiritual persecution of people as a consequence of the Great War hung like a dark grey cloud over her childhood. When she was born in 1919 in Iran, her parents were in a state of psychological and physical breakdown, since her father had lost a leg during the war and her mother had to leave for another country and abandon her career for marriage. The year that she was born was shrouded in a pessimistic mood "when half of Europe was a graveyard, and people were dying in millions all over the world" (*UM* 8). For Lessing, understanding the historical background of a moment is crucial unless "you believe that every little human being's mind is quite separate from every other, separate from the common human mind" (*UM* 8). This

chapter presents an analysis of the interactive pressures on the formation of psychopathology in the central protagonist, Mary, situated in the context of a world saturated by tensions of class, race and gender. The focus of the chapter will be to consider Lessing's presentation of love and hate in relation to questions of emotional reparation under these divided and conservative circumstances. In *The Grass Is Singing*, the murdered heroine, Mary Turner, is presented as a victim in several different ways. However, the story begins with a bizarre atmosphere surrounding her death. The story of the Turners, in the novel, begins with a short paragraph in the newspaper about the "murder mystery," which briefly mentions the crime committed by a black houseboy on a white woman, with minimal detail or explanation of the event. The novel proceeds to build its hermeneutics of suspicion through the narration of the untold truth, as if in collusion with a taboo which is not discussed, under a collective "silent, unconscious agreement" (GS 10). Any perspective on the event must be discerned from the short, vague description of the newspaper, Lessing's evocation of the strange atmosphere of the district in which Mary dwelt, and the contempt revealed through the contextual description of the scene of the crime. As murder victim, her corpse is not regarded with compassion by the policeman or her neighbours but is placed carelessly like an object of their indignation for breaking the *esprit de corps* of white middle-class South Africa. She is deemed "unpleasant and unclean" (GS 11) by them while her case is related with the black servant, and her dead body merely attracts the contemptuous gaze of those white males exhibiting an "almost hysterical look of hate and fear" (GS 28). Susan Watkins proposes that "Mary's dead body represents the crossing and overlapping of racial and gender boundaries" (46). The questions left for the reader are voiced through the outsider, Tony Marston, who, when enquiring about events, is simply told that he has to become used to the mores and ways of this country as if that is an explanation in itself. Watkins mentions that the "analeptic narrative structure" is designed to "encourage an examination of the *discursivity* of the events told in the novel" (45). The attitudes around apartheid are simply taken as matter-of-fact by the dwellers in the region, but as an outsider, Tony cannot help raising pity as well as rage "against circumstances," even though he does not know where to begin in either understanding or taking reparation

action. As Rubenstein suggests, Mary Turner's character "slowly emerges as a result of the dialectic between her personal situation and the larger social forces that create her personality" (*Novelistic Vision* 18). Mary's story is enveloped at the beginning and in the last two chapters, by the interpretations of outsiders, and her life is then related to these lives as well. From Franz Fanon's post-colonial perspective, her madness is closely related to the situation of colonisation so that any traditional or apolitical psychoanalytic interpretation will simply be deficient. Though Fanon was a psychiatrist, practising during the heyday of psychoanalysis, his attitude to orthodox psychoanalysis was deeply ambivalent. In *Fanon: the Postcolonial Imagination*, Nigel C. Gibson explains that Fanon's "clinical approach was sociotherapeutic, with an emphasis on the environment and interpersonal relations" (46).<sup>1</sup> Fanon's criticism of the Oedipal complex in Freudian theory is to suggest that it is flawed.<sup>2</sup> In Lessing too, in the case of Mary's relationship with her black servant, Moses, for example, it is understandable that Mary is drawn towards the masculine presence of Moses for her father and husband are shown to lack desirable masculine qualities. However, more than a simple replacement of that patriarchal figure, and acceptance of her passivity as a female, Mary's emotional conflict towards Moses is also accompanied with the living background in a colonial society.<sup>3</sup> Gibson explains that Mary's "sense of guilt and wrongdoing becomes entwined with the image of the native" in the colonial situation (45). Fanon's sociodiagnostic analysis explains more about the social impact on the family. On the other hand, Françoise Vergè proposes that although Fanon emphasised the influence of "social, cultural, and political conditions," he also desired "to act decisively on the structure of the individual's personality" while rejecting the

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson explains that Fanon's criticism on Freud and Lacan is "not only based on cultural relativism," but also his "phenomenological view of culture, as it reflects lived experience, underwrites his critique of the Oedipus complex" (45).

<sup>2</sup> In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon argues that since the black culture is based on matriarchal structure, "the Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes" (107). See Fanon.

<sup>3</sup> Fanon suggests that at the stage between five and nine, the girl's father, "who is now the pole of her libido, refuses in a way to take up the aggression that the little girl's unconscious demands of him" and because of his lack of support, "the black becomes the predestined depository of this aggression" since the girl at that age "begins to enter folklore and the culture along roads" (127). See Fanon.

psychoanalysis approach that “one’s structure cannot be changed, that one can only learn to accommodate the world” (94-95). In this essay, I will explore some of the ways in which Melanie Klein’s ideas might be extended within the terms of Fanon’s critique in order to engage the ways in which Lessing presents the emotional infrastructure that prevents or facilitates reparation in the novel. I will also explore how, given that the social and environmental confinements imprison Mary and people around her, there might be an alternative interaction between the individual and the outer world beyond the repression of the superego in Freudian theory. In Klein’s account, she emphasises the pre-Oedipal and relations between child and the object of nurturance and though she takes account of instincts and feelings, she relates them to environments and other people. The superego is performed in the mechanism of projection and introjection of the good and bad breasts. It is in this process that the infant is able to recognise the distance between itself and the outer world and therefore complete its self-integration. A self is built out of internalised relations with caregivers to lay down structures of effect – in the emotional frameworks with which we negotiate the world. Klein does not draw on social contexts or ideologies very much but her emphasis on intersubjectivity as the basis for the self allows for a social and cultural dimension to be brought into her consideration of the intersubjectivity. Klein reminds us of the fragile nature of the ego and its ongoing constitution of itself and its world and provides a very useful way into the emotional landscape of Lessing’s world and the sources of paranoia and fear in the racialised environment she depicts in this novel. While the outer world is the vehicle of prejudice, it is important for the individual to defeat feelings of persecution. Robert Rogers explains that “Klein views self as effecting control, sustaining identity (a personal-oriented element), and resolving conflict” (34). Klein’s theory was highly influential within psychoanalysis and on psychotherapy, but her achievement is often neglected. Julia Segal proposes that Kleinian therapists trust in the ability of the individual to face and modify the fear and anxieties in their internal reality (106). It is believed that “perception is based on unconscious phantasy” and “reality-testing of such phantasies” is a way to dismiss “the primitive, scary and even monstrous phantasies which attach people to the unknown” (Segal 106). Judith M. Hughes links Klein’s ideas to those of Darwinian

“natural selection” (126). Hughes mentions that Klein believes that it is helpful if the therapist assists the patient to develop more freely and feel better in an actual environment. She sees the Kleinian as close to the Darwinian because of the emphasis on “the relation between the organism and its environment or, better, the fit between the two, with fitness or adaptedness a matter for the organism rather than the environment” (Hughes 126). Klein’s interpretation of the unconscious, however, is often criticised as less scientific than in Freudian theory. Secondly, Klein’s idea of the death instinct as part of phantasy, is “the most severe anxiety the child can feel,” but is “rationalized by Freud” according to Jacqueline Rose (148-9). Moreover, it is the paranoid mechanism that leads the infant to oscillate between “seeking, finding, obtaining, possessing with satisfaction” and “losing, lacking, missing, with fear and distress” (Rose 151). It seems to Klein that the “fundamental fear of loss of the loved object” is “psychologically well-founded” (Rose 153). Rose adopts Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*, to compare the similarities between “negativity”<sup>4</sup> in Klein’s theory and the black hole. Two kinds of anxiety are provoked by the black hole: if you get close, it will devour you, but if you stay safely outside, you know nothing that is happening inside. Similar to the unconscious, a black hole can be known only by its effects. Inside the black hole, knowledge is wiped out and people’s understanding and relationship with it disappear. Strikingly, the universe is explained as the consequence of the subject who should appear as its effect. Rose explains that “it is only through a fantasy of our being-in-the-world that we can theorize the fact that the world comes to be” (173). In addition, the negativity that enters the psychic structure slips from the realm of logic and sequence and any totalising grasp. But finally, it is proposed that the black hole also emits something positive and radiating. The good particle might be left by the bad one, and in consequence, might either fall into the black hole or escape as positive energy. It is suggested that “we could substitute this strange image of partnership for the dualism of the life and death principles—‘pairing’ as an alternative to the notions of ‘balance’ or ‘triumph of one principle over the other’” (Rose 175). She concludes that negativity is unavoidable so “we do not reify it, but

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<sup>4</sup>Rose proposes that “Negativity” is the key text for John Rivère, Susan Issacs and Paula Heimann (153).

recognize its place in the speculations which we cannot but chose to spin about the world and about ourselves” (Rose 176). Klein’s psychological formation from the pre-Oedipal period represents the picture of how one might set about repairing the feelings of loss and mourning in interaction with people in later life.

In *Love, Hate and Reparation*, Klein proposes that one’s reaction to the outer world is determined as “our great need develops for *security* and *safety* against these terrible risks and intolerable experiences of privation, insecurity and aggressions within and without” (10). Mary’s unconscious project might be seen as determined by the desire to build a sense of security that has been less than present in her childhood. But as well as demonstrating the crucial importance to development of early childhood, Klein focuses on the infant’s imagination as it develops through introjections and projections of and on to the outer world, shedding new light on the interactive nature of the relationship between self and others. Two factors, in particular, influence each individual’s pursuit of a life that might be satisfying: “the strength of the love and hate tendencies...and the influence of environment throughout life in each of us, these two factors being in constant interaction from birth till death” (Klein, *Love, Hate, Reparation* 4). Cynthia Burack suggests that Klein’s later thought on these positions is to suggest that they are “intrinsically related to moral feelings and interpretation concerning the self and other” (63). It seems that Mary is constantly in conflict between her own desires towards the world and internalised moral feelings arising from a repressive society that blocks the realisation of that desire. In Kleinian terms, her escaping from one place to another reflects her search for the feeling of love and emotional attachment that seems unavailable from her mother. Klein proposes that “this process of displacing love is of the greatest importance for the development of the personality and of human relationships” (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 91). But it is when Mary finally turns her attentive desires to Moses, the black servant boy, a prohibited relationship in this racist colonial society, that her quest for emotional reparation faces its ultimate impasse. Yet, though ultimately unrealisable, the fluctuating process of her desire is able to shake the dominant constitution and create all kinds of ramifications. Klein too, like Freud with reference to desire in his theory of the sublimation of the drives, suggests that this process of the

displacement of love is also crucial for “the development of culture and civilization as a whole” (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 91). In the following pages, I will argue that even though Mary seems to be a passive victim in this society - much like earlier nineteenth century victims of erotic repression, as in *Wuthering Heights* (1846), her death may be read more positively as encountered through her pursuit of the primary love of the world and her decision to confront Moses’s hatred towards her is a gesture of resistance towards the unchangeable outer world.

### **1. The Lack of a Loved Object**

The relationships between Mary and her family, her husband and their social world, appear to produce depressive and impotent feelings in all of the characters. In these relationships, Mary, in particular, struggles to escape her unloved past, but constantly experiences the negative effect of trying to resolve her problems. In *The Grass Is Singing*, the unhappy and racialised as well as class-obsessed colonialist environment ensures that Mary receives little goodness but largely continuing bad experiences from her loved object—“the mother.” Doane and Hodges elaborate Klein’s idea of the Mother as an Imago figure, a product of the phantasy of the dependent child:

“mother” is wonderfully difficult to place; she is both inside and outside, both male and female: she is a fluid construction of the child’s desires and anxieties...she is in phantasy, often combined with father, himself both an idealized and hated object. (16)

Therefore, “the mother” mentioned here is more than the individualised biological mother, for she is an imaginary construct of the entire environment that surrounds the child. Experiencing more hate than love, however, Mary comes to feel more deprivation than pleasure in her relationship with her parents and later with her husband, where the childhood pattern is repeated. Klein argues that “a feeling of security becomes an important component of the satisfaction whenever a person receives love” (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 58). Living among “conservative English settlers in South Africa,” however, Mary’s childhood is shaped within an environment saturated with racial issues and economic inequality. Her father apes the attitudes of white superiority even though he is presented as “a cipher” at



home, referring to visiting officers as “sir,” yet he always “shouted at the natives under him” (GS 35). Her mother is embittered by having to fight for economic survival and is full of “resentment” because her husband dissipates his salary on alcohol. Mary’s childhood memories are replete with dark and embarrassing images: economic difficulties weigh like a dark cloud over the meagre landscape, the “ugly building” in which she lives and the memories are as hollowed and empty and insecure as their “wooden house” which would be “shaken by passing trains” (GS 40). Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell elaborate Klein’s idea that a child has a tendency to see “good objects as absorbed from the outside, from the ameliorative effect of the parents’ ministrations” (135). The happiest time in Mary’s childhood is depicted in her memory as when her brother and sister died, for then her parents “were good friends” and her mother “had lost that terrible hard indifference” (GS 35).

## **2. A Split Self**

Mary identifies with her mother’s feelings of loathing, and also her attitude of indifference towards her father which is portrayed by Lessing in terms very close to Klein’s description of the primary paranoid-schizoid mechanism, in which the self first begins to build itself through a process of separation from the world and the mother, through the splitting mechanisms of projection and introjection. Otto Weininger argues that in projection, “the person projects aspects of the self onto another object (person)” so that the emergent self is “then experienced as being within the other” (3). Weininger explains further that the earliest form of “empathy” is formed here for in this process of projection the “projector may identify with the object who now contains these projected impulses and phantasies” (3). If it is hate projected on to another, “fear of retaliation and persecution may arise” (Weininger 3). However, if “persecutory fear is too strong,” the infant might depend too much on the idealised introjections of the object, and become “a shell for it” (Greenberg and Mitchell 184). When Mary’s mother dies, she feels “virtually alone in the world” since her father largely leaves her alone or ignores her (GS 36). Mary therefore feels, in turn, bitter towards him, and she

rejects and ignores him so that she feels “in some way to be avenging her mother’s sufferings” (GS 36). But Mary has also assimilated her mother’s anxiety concerning the maternal role. Her brother’s and sister’s deaths froze her mother’s heart; she remembers “her mother’s face at her children’s funeral—anguished, but as dry and as hard as a rock” (GS 40). This kind of harshness is similar to Martha C. Nussbaum’s explanation that a “mother’s anxiety” could “persecute and stifle her infant” (229) though the mother may appear contented on the surface. It would seem that intimate relations only remind her of her childhood home and the continuous need to comfort her mother’s misery and in effect to invert the mother-child role. This constant defensiveness means that Mary appears “impersonal,” with a sense of “stiffness” and “aloofness” with others (GS 38). She does not share her true feelings with friends or supposed intimates and indeed avoids “intimacies” especially appearing “feminine frigidity” in her relationships with men (GS 38). According to Michele Wender Zak’s explanation, her mother’s “indifference,” which “dismayed the child Mary” so much, “comes to be the defining quality of the adult Mary” (483). Klein also explains that for the young children, especially those “lack of happy and close contact with loved people,” they would “increase ambivalence, diminish trust and hope and confirm anxieties about inner annihilation and external persecution (Greenberg and Mitchell 150). Mary chooses to live in a girls’ club as an ideal family because she feels protected but does not need to negotiate the close intimacy of negative familial relations. Her reliance on a kind of distanced collective life stands in for intimacy and protects against the “ontological insecurity” which R. D. Laing proposes in *The Divided Self* as the mark of the individual who cannot “take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted” (44). She cannot assume her own personality or emotion, nor can she identify with an inner self of her own or of others. Her emotional and intimate life effectively remains fixated at the moment of being a schoolgirl, when she feels most independent in her life and after she has rid herself of the bounds of the “childhood she hated to remember” when her father dies (GS 42). However, while she gradually overcomes the persecutory anxiety, she again faces pressure from society about its expectations towards a thirty-year-old (still unmarried) woman.

However, her fragile outer shell in her relationship with society, quickly breaks down when this society fails to recognise her. She is vulnerable to the effects of the gossip about and around her and is conscious of “that impalpable, but steel-strong pressure” to conform as a woman, to get married, even though her single life is actually most appropriate for her personality structure and the kinds of defence she has built (GS 41). Her failed relationship with an older man quickly turns into a scandal and destroys her fragile equilibrium so that afterwards, she resolves “to remodel herself into a socially acceptable image of a marriageable thirty-year-old woman” (Zak 486). In order to recover her feeling of security, Mary can only abide by societal rules and there is no place to escape to or from them. As Laing says of the individual suffering from “ontological insecurity”:

External events no longer affect him in the same way as they do others; it is not that they affect him less; on the contrary, frequently they affect him more... (T)he world of his experience comes to be one he can no longer share with other people. (*Divided* 44-45)

As Mary Ann Singleton states, “Mary therefore decides to escape from the city, which is perceived to have made her “psychically warped” (20).

Mary is doomed to follow her mother’s path because she does not know how to love. Both Mary and Dick choose the “illusion” of marriage; Mary has “false expectations of farm life” and Dick holds “unrealistic dreams about family” (Singleton 82). Mary’s “abstraction,” her phantasy of “getting close to nature” is based on her memory of going out for picnics at weekends before (GS 53). This hypothetical idea is like her marriage; she has “no idea of the life she had to live” (GS 62). Her marriage to Dick is a way of getting back to the false balance of her past life: to try to recover the good memories she once obtained. She chooses Dick, not out of love, but because she needs him to “restore her feeling of superiority to men, which was really, at the bottom, what she had been living from all these years” (GS 42). For Dick, a family is like the pictures on his wall: “a chocolate-box lady with a rose in her hand” and “a child of about six, torn off a calendar” (GS 55). Since Mary has only a very negative impression of marriage from her parents, she is

actually overwhelmed again by the nightmare of her negative memories. On the first night of her marriage, she was unable to bear the idea that “her father, from his grave, had sent out his will and forced her back into the kind of life he had made her mother lead” (GS 57). In the house of her husband, she was “back with her mother” and did what her mother did before; she tried to “contrive and patch and mend” the house endlessly as a substitute for satisfaction in the relationship. Her marriage inevitably follows a similar pattern to that of her parents and she develops the same feelings of anxiety that grew up between them.

### **3. The Rise of Ambivalent Feelings as an Immigrant**

Mary has to pursue security while she changes her life suddenly, like an immigrant. Besides her inability to face the intimate relationship with her husband, she is forced to confront the even more threatening environment of the black servants and workers. She suffers from acute psychological and physical anxiety in this new environment. Leon Grinberg and Rebecca Grinberg propose that “persecutory, confusional, and depressive anxieties develop shortly after the initial period of migration” (160). Mary obtains temporary psychological satisfaction from Dick’s subservience to her and its effect in allowing her to overcome her fear of men, but she can only have the feeling of “endearment” when she is “victorious and forgiving,” responding to his “craving for forgiveness, and his abasement before her” (GS 69). However, this vicious cycle of abasement and expiation is disturbed by her relations with the natives. L. Grinberg and R. Grinberg mention that migration produces profound psychological effects and disturbance: “very primitive anxieties are stirred up, producing a state of panic in the newcomer, such as fearing being annihilated by the new culture” (163). When Mary perceives Dick’s intention to retrieve his masculinity, she gives vent to her anger by turning it on her servants so that this very quickly produces conflict between them and her as well as in her marriage. In the meantime, Mary is actually building up her own dominance in the house as a mistress, both towards her husband and also her servants. Pat Louw proposes that “in settler society, as in patriarchal societies in general, the home is the woman’s domain” (176). When invited to accompany Dick in the field, all she

can think about is “the native alone with *her* things” (GS 73). She needs to check the house on her return and examines her drawers to ensure they are untouched. The servants are experienced by her as a source of menace, “not only as men,” but also because they are felt to be “usurpers” who take over her only function in her house—“housekeeping” (Zak 487). Dick does not realise why Mary becomes a virago when she is with natives and the house servant soon becomes part of the power struggle between them. Klein proposes that “an unfulfilled desire within us can, if intense enough, create a similar sense of loss and pain, and so rouse aggression in exactly the same way as an attack” (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 6).<sup>5</sup> The problems with the servants and her complaints about the house become part of the projection of her insecure feelings about her female role in the family. Michael Rustin mentions that in the Kleinian tradition, the mechanism of projective identification operates when feelings “cannot be processed or tolerated within the mind” and are therefore “unconsciously perceived as aspects of another person” (114). Mary’s pitiful dignity as a mistress is easily destroyed during the Slatters’ visit. Louw explains that Mary’s identity is also threatened “by the poor standard of the dwelling, with its cramped space and lack of ceiling” (179). Therefore, while Mrs. Slatter mildly patronises her house, the irony is that for Mary the house is nothing better than “a pigsty.”

In addition to Mary’s personal concerns, her attitude towards the native is an extension of the grip of social conventions. Shadia S. Fahim proposes that Mary’s tense relationship with her servants and her inability to deal with them is due to the “racist society” and she inherits the legacy “from her mother and elders, based on a cultural definition of the natives as ‘dirty’ and ‘nasty’” (31). When she is an office worker, natives are “outside her orbit” and she hardly notices them in her life (GS 37). But alone in the rural environment of the Veldt, she is pushed back overtly into structures of experience built on naked racist assumptions. When she arrives at Dick’s house, she is immediately confronted with the need to embark on social

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<sup>5</sup> According to Klein’s idea, “when a baby feels frustrated at the breast, in his fantasies he attacks this breast” and he even “wishes to bite up and to tear up his mother and her breasts, and to destroy her also in other ways” (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 61). While at the same time, they also internalise those split-off parts.

relations with the black servants. Although she is “disposed to like Samson,” she could not understand Dick’s tolerance of them collectively. She is surprised and outraged by his superior and “casual stock market attitude” (GS 59), but she also feels upset that he shows his personal feelings when she asks if Samson can leave (GS 68). Language is the first barrier between herself and the servants. Many “native codes” expressed in order not to offend their masters are deemed to be of a “shifty and dishonest nature” by Mary (GS 72). She is brought back to the memory of her mother’s warning in the past, for she is forbidden to talk to the natives because they are “nasty” and “horrible,” and “every woman in South Africa is brought up to be” afraid of them (GS 61). She just accepts the conventional viewpoint that “the natives” are really “cheeky” (GS 37). Flora Veit-Wild illustrates these different kinds of stereotype imposed by white colonists on black people. She mentions that “the white settlers were most afraid of the African who refused to be the Other,” especially the “educated cheeky African” (Veit-Wild 15). Nevertheless, now, as a mistress in a house, even though she is “reluctant,” she is simply going to have to deal with the “native problem” already represented as “other women’s complaints of their servants at tea parties,” and she has to face the “business of struggling with the native” that is taken for granted (GS 70). Unlike Dick, who has developed existentially his way of communicating with the black people, she can only follow the rules in a “handbook” which teaches her how to train her servant and which encourages her to behave “with a cold, dispassionate justice” (GS 76). Actually, Mary’s “overweening hatred for the blacks” is a form of “social expression” (Zak 487) but this kind of expression is justified by men as an expression of the innate brutality of women. This is the view expressed by the police officer, Sergeant Denham, who appears at the very beginning and expresses the prejudice that women always treat natives badly. He says, “Oh well, women are pretty bad that way, in this country, very often...They have no idea how to deal with niggers” (GS 24). While Dick tries to assume his masculine power by taking the native’s part against her, the gap between them is intensified as Mary is blamed for the difficulties with the servants. Mary feels especially isolated and caged in the house, surrounded by what she experiences as the darkness and the “hated bush all around her” (GS 84). The darkness and wildness of the bush seem to symbolise the

unknown environment and the inchoate threat of male power and the black workers.

Dick's idea of running "a kaffir store" further encourages Mary to relive her memories of the "pinched childhood," full of the sense of shame at poverty and weakness and failure. Dick's idea seems to Mary "an omen and a warning, that the store, the ugly menacing store of her childhood, should follow her here, even to her home" (GS 97). The store is introduced at the very beginning of the novel, an iconic feature of the settlement, for the store is everywhere in South Africa and important to the everyday life of the people. Even for Mary, "the store was the real centre of her life" (GS 33). It is the place that is closely connected to her feelings for her parents. It contains all her fantasies towards the world, and also people, at the beginning. While she undertakes the missions for her mother, she would "linger there for hours, staring at the piles of sticky coloured sweets, letting the grain stored in the sacks round the walls trickle through her fingers, looking covertly at the Greek girl whom she was not allowed to play with" (GS 33). However, this sensual pleasure turns to nightmare later because "it was the place where her father brought his drink" (GS 33) and the store is "the powerful, implacable place that sent in bills at the end of the month" (GS 35). Unable to repel his request, she could not explain to him, either, for it is like "arguing with destiny itself" (GS 99). Besides her miserable memories of it, the store also forces Mary to get physically close to the black people and to interact personally with them. She seems to project the shameful feelings from her childhood as scorn on to the black people. According to Klein, feelings of persecution may be dealt with by projecting them on to others in order to preserve the good feelings, intact, within oneself. In spite of the racial prejudice that she learned from her parents, Mary is unaware that she projects bad memories of her female childhood on to the black women, her experience of being gossiped about and her own mother's tragedy as a woman. She knows that she loathes black women more than men, because their faces are "insolent and inquisitive" (GS 99). She is especially aroused to anger by the "exposed fleshiness," especially "the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil" (GS 99). The scene of breastfeeding

reminds her of her mother's self-blame about the death of her brother and sister but also the unashamed revealing of their black flesh is experienced as especially in conflict with the conservative English society that has been held up as Mary's ego-ideal. Veit-Wild mentions that "the unruliness of the black woman determines an incommensurable threat of a special kind," so "the objectification of the black woman's body" becomes one means of dealing with this threat (15). The children feeding from the women are described as "leeches" or "monkeys" (GS 99). Veit-Wild proposes that "the threat of the black body was, and has been to this day, linked to 'unclean matters': both the eating and excreting of food and sexuality—bodily functions that are seen as closely related" (10). Therefore, it brings a sense of horror and when she thinks of a child's lips on her breasts, "she would involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them from a violation" (GS 99). Like many white women who use bottles as a kind of solution in order to distance themselves from these black women, Mary could not bear to think about the "alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires" (GS 100). So as the store becomes Dick's great failure, it is also, emotionally, Mary's darkest shadow: "it was the store that finished Mary: the necessity for serving behind the counter, and the knowledge that it was there, always there, a burden on her" (GS 100-101). Dick's investment sacrifices any hope of improvement of her everyday life. She has the feeling of being stuck, repeating the tragedy of her parents. So her decision to run away is her way of escaping from what seems like her familial destiny.

Mary and Dick's different attitudes towards the farm reflect their ideas about their own relationship to the broader society. Africa is often represented as a "dark" continent, and a fetishistic landscape in modern Western literature as first engaged in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1900). Veit-Wild suggests that throughout European literary representations of Africa, madness and horror "do not remain ungendered" (17). The undeveloped landscape is often related to the black woman's body "which arouses in the white man suppressed fears and longings" (Veit-Wild 17). Robert Young also views colonialism as a desiring machine, "with its unlimited appetite for territorial expansion, for 'endless growth and self-



reproduction” (98).<sup>6</sup> However, Dick dissociates himself from the majority of the white settlers who try to make large profits from the land, by growing cash crops like tobacco. He is against the civilisation built on capitalism and colonialism “that had no relationship with the hard brown African soil and the arching blue sky” (GS 47). Dick’s idealised feelings towards the land are closer to Rousseau’s romanticism. He insists on his own individualism so he could “live his own life” and neither become the slave of another (GS 145) or become “another man’s servant” (GS190). However, it is proved that he is unable to live without others while he owes debts to others and needs help when he is ill. He attributes this failure to his bad luck, the impotence of the government and the laziness of the natives. Nevertheless, he barely understands the seasons of each crop so that his farm is like a “patch” of his indeterminate mind. His hold on the farm and his possession of it is motivated by the need to hang on to his dignity through the force of his labour.

His “attachment to his land” is a means to retain his sense of selfhood in Lockean possessive individualist terms even as he is despised by society and by his wife. Watkins proposes Robert Young’s idea that “inter-racial sexual desire is inseparable from the economic motive for colonialism” (48) and it is revealed as Dick actually internalises this colonial desire in his business, and in his anxiety as a man. In his business, he immerses himself in fantasies of making profit by expanding his business in different ways. He builds castles in the air and squanders almost all of his money and yet refuses to buy a new ceiling for the house that will keep away the severe heat in the hot season. In addition to the failure of his business, it seems that Mary, as another overt failure, is even more hated. When Mary withdraws from his farm and so leaves him to deal with his pride, she is “not realizing that she was his failure,” too (GS 134). Watkins mentions that the “white man admires the black man for one thing only—his imagined sexual control over black women—and that fantasy underpins the colonialist project” (48). His satisfaction in his hardworking, and hard life, seems to correspond to Klein’s idea of

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<sup>6</sup> Young proposes that “Colonialism was a machine: a machine of war, of bureaucracy and administration and above all, of power” and in addition, “a desiring machine.” He illustrates De Quincey’s idea of desire in colonialism that it makes “connections and disjunctions, continuously forced disparate territories, histories and people to be thrust together like foreign bodies in the night” (98).

“envy.” Klein explains that in order to deceive his or her feeling of greediness, the envious person has to “protest and declare that they have nothing” and “both the envy and the lack of success are proving to him that he is not actually taking from others” (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 29). According to C. Fred Alford, Klein even claims that “envy is the worst sin” because “envy is against all virtue and against all goodness” (189). His inability to change appears in his intention to ignore Mary’s needs and superior capacity. The relentless heat from the iron ceilings that he has refused to repair seems to “dissolve Mary in hopeless foreboding tears” (*GS* 98). The house is not a home that provides her with the feeling of protection and security but allows the intruding of the outer world, represented by natural power, uncontrollable by Dick. Mary is unable to resist, or even to escape from the iron roof which embodies Dick’s will and makes the heat even more severe. Mary dreams of getting back to the town, because “she felt safe there, and associated the country with her childhood, because of the little drops she has lived in” (*GS* 46). She feels imprisoned, in this farm, while her “body and mind were subservient to the slow movement of the seasons” (*GS* 74). As Singleton suggests:

[the] sterility of Mary and Dick’s life is mirrored in the dry heat of an African summer, made palpable by the sun’s beating on the tin roof. Mary’s feverish wish for water, for rain, is only partly a need for physical comfort; it is also a need to end her intolerable psychic tensions. (65)

She is conscious of “a gulf between what she now was, and that shy, aloof, yet adaptable girl with the crowds of acquaintances” (*GS* 102). Dick’s individual world is alienated from her. “The soil, the black labourers, always so close to their lives but also so cut off, Dick in his farm clothes with his hands stained with oil—these things did not belong to her” (*GS* 102). Lessing seems to transform the landscape into the masculine power of Dick, as well as the colonial world, that is “monstrous that they should have been imposed upon her” (*GS* 102). However, when she escapes from the house and tries to get back to her old office, she sees the “scandalized” look on the face of her old employer as he notes her shabby outfit; the look is the same as that of “the look of the woman at the club” when she first decided to leave this place (*GS* 105). It is still the society that visits on her the feeling of humiliation,

especially now that she is a married and impoverished woman. So when she returns, she learns to effect a reconciliation with the land. When the cooler season comes, she would “lean down to touch it,” and also “the rough brick of the house” (GS 109). However, this sense of “new tenderness” does not “grow strong enough to save both of them” (GS 111-112).

Mary is forced to cross the boundary from her domestic house to the outer farm when Dick is seriously ill. She therefore has to face the black natives who are experienced as her persecutors on their own territory. Looping the long sjambok on her waist, she empowers herself to face these black people in the field. Her “queer appearance” is laughed at and commented on crudely by the black women (GS 115). She also detects the hostile atmosphere when watching over the black labourers. She thinks that they “resented her, a woman, supervising them” (GS 116). Louw mentions, “for a man from a patriarchal tradition to submit to the authority of a white woman is to experience both racial and gender domination” (179). Trying to ignore her usual feelings of revulsion towards the naked black bodies, however, she begins to experience new “sensations” in this role, like the “sensation of pitting her will against the farm,” and also “the sensation of being boss over eight black workers” (GS 118). Mary gains “new confidence” in the role of keeping them under her will and making them do as she wanted” for she is now their paymaster in the monthly ritual of paying wages (GS 118). It takes Mary until this moment to realise why Dick could bear all the rigours of hard labour and sustain himself emotionally in this land day after day for he builds his dignity in front of these native labourers in his display of ownership of their bodies. As a woman, Mary has to battle with them, drawing on her strong will and the pride as a white which she inherits from her father. However, an accident brings her hatred and fear towards the black man to an extreme point when she is forced to have a directly physical encounter with a native. She cannot help whipping one of the natives who had no malicious feelings towards her but who has embarrassed her. Threatened by his masculine body and breaking the colony rules, she is reminded of the patriarchal power of society which is “‘They’—the law-makers and the Civil Service—who have the right to interfere with the natural right of a white farmer to treat his labour as he pleased” and that makes Mary feel angry (GS 148). However,

her courage wins her an overall battle, over “these natives, over herself and her repugnance of them, over Dick and his slow, foolish shiftlessness” (GS 127). When she crosses the border between the house and the farm, she also breaks down the illusion she has lived under, about Dick and the idea of the family. She realises Dick’s failings in the patriarchal role. She loses her last respect towards him, both as a husband and a landowner.

#### **4. Self-integration through Recognition**

Mary gradually integrates herself with the environment and gives up her fantasy of getting back to her old life. Grinberg mentions that immigrants might suffer from depressive anxieties “by a massive experience of loss of everything that was left behind, with the fear of never being able to recover it” (161). Dick’s “obstinacy” and insistence on his way to the land, in R. D. Laing’s sense, is a way to petrify Mary.<sup>7</sup> Besty Draine proposes that “Dick has first exploited her by bringing her to the harsh life of the farm and then failed her by stubbornly sticking her to his idealistic and unprofitable farming practice” (18). In addition, it is not only because of Dick’s individualism but also his internalisation of the inferior psychology of the native that means he cannot imagine again living with dignity in this society. Although he never humiliates Mary intentionally, he imprisons her because of his weakness. Mary is left to try to regain equilibrium between them. If Mary always demonstrates “her superior ability,” Dick’s “defensiveness would be provoked and he would refuse, in the end” (GS 134). There is even the “perpetual angry undercut of hate” when Mary is positioned as having no right to complain about the native (GS 147). Although Mary tries to figure out solutions for their farm, Dick shows no more capacity for taking risks and quickly reverts to his old ways. Mary is simply required to support his masculine self-image, rather than as a real help and companion. Dick’s individualism and negative attitude towards life empty out the future for Mary, like a kind of “soft rottenness” attacking “her bones” (GS 139).

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<sup>7</sup> R. D. Laing explains the danger in relationships of the “Petrification and depersonalization.” It is a risk if “one experiences the other as a free agent, one is open to the possibility of experiencing oneself as an object of his experience and thereby of feeling one’s own subjectivity drained away” (*Divided* 48).

Besides, Mary's hatred towards Dick's weakness becomes her hatred towards herself "for becoming tied to a failure" (GS 134). Fahim mentions that Mary loses all her strength in further fighting against her life, and she "withdraws from her social surroundings and is overcome by an 'immense fatigue'" (33). Mary finally can only "sit for hours at a time on the shabby sofa with the faded chintz curtains flapping above her head, as if she were in a stupor" (GS 141). It seems that something has "finally snapped inside of her, and she would gradually fade and sink into darkness" but ironically, her lifelessness is deemed by Dick as her getting "better" (GS 141). In this futile environment, Mary tries to reach her last hope by having a child. She shrinks into the last memory of love and passion that could acknowledge her situation. She wants to have a child, "a small daughter, comforting her as she had comforted her mother" (GS 142). She sees herself, "wandering in and out" and getting close to her mother, "wring simultaneously by love and pity for her, and by hatred for her father" (GS 142). The pitiful love her mother brought her, makes her want "a little girl as a companion" and she refuses to "consider that the child...might be a boy" (GS 142). However, Dick's sense of pride drives him to refuse to have a child who is going to live without dignity and in impoverishment, like himself and Mary. Mary recognises that he is all "to pieces" and he lacks "that thing in the centre that should hold him together" (GS 145). Dick is stuck in his predicament, as a man and also as a white man. He not only spends his time working aimlessly on his "own land" and he holds himself with the same regard as the natives, who are fixed in their split-off condition, propping up white dignity in their existence as objects of disgust. Losing one hope after another, Mary's integrating sense of self is eventually breaking down again for her endless reluctant obedience to Dick's will.

Mary's sense of persecution achieves its pinnacle when Dick sends in the native who was earlier whipped by Mary. Moses, whose noticeable appearance arouses her repressed desire towards men, while he also produces fear over the memory of the previous attack, still offers the possibility of a kind of relational interaction that stimulates the possibility of reparation of Mary's wound. Veit-Wilder mentions that the black native is represented as the white settler's "constant fear of being encroached upon by the 'bush' that surrounds him" and this threat is

“metonymically linked to the body of the white woman, which has to be protected against the black man’s gaze and his aggressive sexuality” (19). White settlers have to draw the border line in order to secure its existence, especially with respect to white women.<sup>8</sup> After dismissing several servants from her house, Mary is warned by Dick not to lose the best servant that they have ever had. Mary fails in her last attempt to resist. Draine mentions that “the certainties of social relationship have been disturbed by Mary’s failure to succeed as white boss in the incident in the fields and by Dick’s failure to achieve the white man’s success as farmer (and as husband)” (18).

However, Mary’s fundamental and ambivalent sense of love and hate, is raised by Moses, the shadow figure, motivating the process of integration with her consciousness. Fahim proposes that Moses “enters her life at this stage in Mary’s unacknowledged self-contempt” (33). It is a stage when “a touch would send her off balance into nothingness,” and a time “when any influence would have directed her into a new path,” as well as a time when her whole being is “waiting for something to propel her one way or another” (GS 148). Mary is in the shadow of being attacked by him at the beginning. Fahim also points out that “Moses, with the scar on his face, is a reminder of her past violence and racial frustrations” (33). Fahim and Rubenstein both mention that Moses represents the “shadow” which functions as the “opposite of the conscious self” in Jung’s sense (Fahim 22). Lessing elaborates on Jung’s concept of the shadow in *The Integration of the Personality*, “the dark realms of unconsciousness, the denied self, as the ‘self-hater’, the ‘shadow’ which is ‘Luciferian’ in the most proper unequivocal sense of the word” (Fahim 30). Mary tries to resume her pride as a mistress, and overcomes her dread of him as well as her antagonism towards the menace of masculinity. However, she is unconsciously attracted by his masculine appearance. Losing her usual dislike of black male bodies, this “powerful, broad-build body fascinated her” (GS 150). Unaware of her comparison between Dick and Moses, she is conscious of the “littleness of the house,” when Moses appears “even taller and broader” than he is,

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<sup>8</sup>Veit-Wild also mentions Stephen Clingman’s explanation that boundaries around white women are especially emphasised in the colony. See Clingman 231-54.

especially in the small uniform (GS 150). He stands “as the strong and secure man she had ambivalently wanted Dick to be” (Zak 488). However, she is aroused in her sense of shame and hatred once again when she sees by accident Moses taking a bath and senses “his body expressing his resentment of her presence there” (GS 151). She feels irritated since her existence as a watcher or voyeur might be deemed to be intentional. As well as the feeling of anger, something arising inside Mary is “nothing she could explain” (GS 152). “Remembering that thick black neck with the lather frothing white on it, the powerful back stooping over the bucket, was a goad to her” (GS 152). Draine explains that “what Mary has noticed in this scene is the black-white contrast (symbol of the racial conflict), the strength that could allow the black man to dominate her, and the phallic suggestive” of the “thick black neck” and the “white froth” (19). Veit-Wild mentions that “in the context of danger and pollution, she is particularly mesmerised by watching him wash” and the “dividing line separating the white woman from the black man dissolves more and more” (19). Meanwhile, the line between Mary and Dick is even more divided. While Dick appears in an attitude “like a superior to a subordinate,” he deprives Mary of her right as mistress over the servant. Mary remembers her unbearable feelings about sexuality— when looking at the bed, which reminds her “of the hated contact in the night with Dick’s weary muscular body” to which she is never able to accustom herself (GS 180). She therefore withdraws into an inner world where she can only expel the servant in fantasy. However, the intolerable pressure returns when the servant requests to leave. Within her impotent turmoil, with shame and fear, the gap between herself and the black man is crossed physically as Moses tries to push her down. She is full of nausea since “she had never, not once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native” (GS 159). However, this physical contact in her weakness does at least bring a sense of security experience as “fatherly kindness”. But from this moment on, Moses begins emotionally to take “power over her” (Rubenstein, *Novelistic Vision* 25).

Mary’s attempt at the reparation of loving feelings is only half completed in this country where love is absent. Moses tries to obtain Mary’s recognition and respect. He even pushes Mary to identify with him “as a human being” and to recognise his working abilities. Klein mentions that the “capacity for identification with another

person is a most important element in human relations in general, and is also a condition for real and strong feelings of love" (*Love, Hate, Reparation* 66). Mary is unable to "thrust him out of her mind like something unclean" as she had done before and he appears in her dream as "powerful and commanding, yet kind, but forcing her into a position where she had to touch him" (*GS* 164). It is in the dream that Mary can taste the sense of security in the contact between them. Victoria Hamilton explains the idea of identification from Kleinian theory: "identification presupposes some notion of *linking*. Linking depends upon a sense of continuity, of bridging, which arises in the context of holding" (66). Moses tries to take care of Mary and even takes over her responsibility as a wife. While he stays in the house overnight because Dick is ill, his presence in the room approaches her through a different dimension of sensuality. She senses his breathing and also his "warm odour," which arouses in her memory of her parents in the dreams. In one dream, she calls her father "the little man," while in the other, she dreams of the "unwashed masculine smell she always associated with him" (*GS* 171-172). Rubenstein mentions that Moses is the "embodiment of her self-hatred and need for punishment of her illicit desire" and only Moses "can bestow that upon her" (*Novelistic Vision* 30). However, this tabooed emotion also appears as an "obscene and powerful" image conflated with Mary's father who is "threatening to her" (*GS* 174). The incest image in her dream is rather like an untouchable taboo that has been passed on through her mother's resentment towards her father. Draine explains that these two perceptions "are linked with her personal Oedipal drama," and "the father and the native eventually are joined in one dream image of simultaneous fear and attraction" (20). Meanwhile, Mary is dreading having to face the "personal relation" between herself and Moses because of the prohibitions of a racist society. Mary gradually loses her poise, in the face of his challenging question about her fear toward him and she therefore answers in a way that "she might have done to a white man, with whom she was flirting" (*GS* 175). Watkins mentions that Mary's "attempt to 'prove' herself a sexual woman attaches to Moses because of his increasingly explicit refusal of the power she has over him as a member of a 'superior' race" (47). However, she eventually loses her last stand within this always unbalanced male-female relationship. It is at the beginning in the crime scene that



their neighbour, Charlie Slatter mentions that natives “keep their women in their right place” (GS 24). Mary therefore surrenders herself in another impotent situation. In their new relationship, she hears a “new tone” in his voice which is “bullying insolence” and “dominating” (GS 176-177). Moses becomes “powerful and sure of himself,” while Mary is “undermined with fear” (GS 177).

Mary has fallen into a kind of half schizoid state within this emotional predication. The ambiguous relationship between herself and Moses is revealed through the outsider, Charlie Slatter. She dresses herself in the same way as when she was a young girl, with a blue ribbon” on her head, a dress of “frilled raspberry-coloured cotton,” and “long red-ear-rings like boiled sweet” (GS 185-186). It seems that Mary is back in the situation of “narcissism” that is her way of preserving her last hope of living in the world while she does not dare to embrace the personal relationship with Moses and lose her last dignity as a white woman, who allows her houseboy to speak in an attitude of “offend rudeness.” It is revealed by Klein that in the way of reparation, “envy” might interrupt the integration of the ego and “narcissism is a way to defeat it.” Alford mentions that “narcissism” is a way that is “via phantasies of omnipotence and total control which in effect deny that there is any good outside oneself” (34). Narcissism “may protect the individual not just against envy, but against a total loss of goodness in the world” (Alford 34).<sup>9</sup> In front of Moses, she acts “with the gesture of a beautiful woman adoring her beauty” while she is treated by Moses in an attitude of “an indulgent uxoriousness” (GS 196). On the contrary, in front of Dick, she relapses into “a blank, staring silence” whilst Dick is obsessed by his concerns with the farm. As Fahim proposes, Mary is “petrified at the thought that she cherishes a feeling most violently condemned by her society” (34). However, even though she develops a kind of intimate relationship “unconsciously” with Moses, her behaviour is “emotionless”; she “categorizes and objectifies” Moses as “other,” and she depersonalises Moses “so completely in her conscious mind that he is only a machine who caters to her wishes” (Rubenstein, *Novelistic Vision* 26). Alford explains further that Klein

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<sup>9</sup> Alford explains that Klein replaces “Freud’s distinction between narcissistic and object libido with a distinction between internal and external object relations” and she therefore “puts object seeking at the centre of emotional life” (35).

connects narcissism to schizoid phenomena. The symptoms of narcissism include “feelings of fragmentation, diffusion, unreality, and emptiness” (Alford 36). This is quite similar to the situation in the house, in which everything is broken and patched up bit by bit, and “not a piece of crockery is whole” (GS 187).

## 5. Unfinished Reparation

Mary’s predicament is eventually brought to an end by Charlie, whose pride in the white race is challenged by the Turners. Charlie is irritated when he realises that she speaks to the houseboy “with exactly the same flirtatious coyness with which she had spoken to himself” (GS 187). His anger is even aroused while Moses speaks in a tone “with a note of self-satisfaction, of conscious power” (GS 188). Mary is reminded of the social code by Charlie’s contempt, and she has feelings of “fear,” and glances at him “guiltily” (GS 188). Charlie believes in the dignity of white people, even poor whites, like the Turners, who “are despised and hated for their betrayal of white standards” (GS 192). For although the Turners have chosen to live far away from crowds, they have not escaped the fate of being judged and disliked by others, and one of the reasons is precisely because of their intention to exclude themselves from their group (GS 10). The Turners would “feel astonished if they had known that for years they had provided the staple of gossip among the farmers around about” (GS 178). Mary’s tragedy continues the persecution even after her death as the mysterious story is told and retold and, “Mary was execrated; Dick exonerated” (GS 179).

Mary is doomed to have no escape from her feelings or from the situation once her consciousness is awakened by the intrusion of outsiders into her inner object-relational world. This includes Tony Marston, engaged by Charlie to manage Dick’s farm, who has just arrived in the country but has failed to conform to the institutions. He firstly sympathises with her suffering from the heat: “the heat in that house was so great that he could not understand how she stood it” (GS 194). Aware of Tony’s observation of the interaction between herself and Moses, Mary’s action “stopped dead” with fear and her “civilized self” returns. Mary’s behaviour in allowing her servant to see her nakedness is rationalised by him as a performance:

the “Empress of Russia,” who thinks “so little of her slaves, as human beings” (GS 198). But his bewildered and unfamiliar feelings about the country seem, as a cushion, to stop him judging Mary too quickly, especially when he realises the phrase “this country” means nothing to her. She has “shut out everything that conflicts with her actions that would revive the code she had been brought up to follow” (GS 198). She tries to explain her behaviour from her painful memory that “[t]hey said I was not like *that*” (GS 198). Furthermore, she even uses him “as a shield in a fight to get back a command she has lost” to send Moses away and to untie her psychological burdens (GS 199). Although Moses represents part of her emotional support, his very being also threatens Mary, especially in the presence of outsiders. So, Mary is full of conflict, as she sees him leave, and she is also “hysterical with relief” (GS 200) that she no longer needs to guard herself against this emotion.

Mary’s embracing of her death, in the end, is more like choosing emotional reparation through Moses, which is her way to ask for forgiveness. She says if “one could call such an inevitable thing a choice, between Dick and the other, and Dick was destroyed long ago” (GS 202). Mary is “vastly peaceful and rested” when she is all by herself (GS 201). She is filled with “a regretful, peaceful tenderness,” and in her imagination, she is “holding that immensely pitiful thing,” in the hollow of her hand, “which curved round it to shut out the gaze of the cruelly critical world” (GS 201). The image of “holding” echoes the primal contact between the infant and the world. She can only maintain her emotional connection with Moses, in her mind. Waugh explains Klein’s idea of “making reparation”: when the infant “believes it has destroyed both the external loved object and its own inner world, and thus begins the process of resolving such feelings through *love*—not *hate*” (*Feminine Fictions* 67). It is before sunrise, and everything is back to order as she is able to indulge herself in “this marvellous moment of peace and forgiveness granted her by a forgiving God” (GS 203). The increasing panoramic perspective allows Mary to transcend her personal conflict and welcome her real feelings. However, she is also aware of the perspective of others as the “evil” that she “had lived with it for many years” (GS 206). Fahim mentions that, it is “only when Mary vaguely retrieves memories from her past that she is able to discover the location

of her ailment" (38). She realises that judgment and punishment will arrive, and she asks herself: "against what had she sinned?" (GS 206). Draine mentions that "Mary's interpretation of her own actions turns the reader's attention away from the personal and towards the general, the social" (22). At this moment, her recognition of her whole life allows her to make her inner and outer world integrated, so that she is able to face the self-hater and also the one she had hurt, Moses. She has to plead for forgiveness for herself. As "a woman without will," the "wholeness of her vision" had been cracked by the "conflict between her judgment on herself, and her feeling of innocence, of having been propelled by something she didn't understand" (GS 206). Weininger explains that "reparation of the injured good internal object, at times by concrete representation externally, reduces guilt and anxiety" (56). She recovers the goodness inside herself that she had forgotten. She starts to understand that she has "been ill for years" and it is not only her own problems but also "everything wrong, somewhere" (GS 215). Fahim concludes that Mary's "destruction is the result of a psychological problem as much as the outcome of the neurosis of racial Africa" (49).

Since she gains strength for herself, she battles with the fear of the revenge of Moses, represented by the bush which will destroy the house. Whilst her fear is embodied by the bush outside the house, it is more that she is fighting against the hatred that disturbs her inside and outside. Weininger explains that reparation "leads to confidence and trust in oneself and helps to combat and overcome the feelings of fear of having bad figures within one and of being governed by one's uncontrollable hatred" (56). When she desperately walks across the bush to encounter her horror, it comes to her mind that she had confined herself in the house for a long time, and "she had never penetrated into the trees, had never gone off the paths" (GS 208). She is also the one who keeps herself within bounds of her fear of the land. Turning to Tony to ask for salvation again, she finally realises that she is repeating her mistakes from before. When she recognises that she should be responsible for herself, there is a sense of "dignity" arising from her instead of the "pity" that Tony used to address in her (GS 212). Then she learns the lesson that:

[s]he would walk out her road alone, she thought. That was the lesson she had to learn. If she had learned it, long ago, she would not be standing here now, having been betrayed for the second time by her weak reliance on a human being who should not be expected to take the responsibility for her. (GS 212)

Mary still has to become a “responsible individual able to understand and transcend their cultural limitation” (Fahim 38). She even deems herself to be the scapegoat of this society. Waiting for the “long vigil of her death,” she sits on the sofa “with deliberation and a stoical pride” (GS 213).

Mary’s personal emotion towards Moses crosses the boundary between herself and others as well as between races. Watkins mentions that “*The Grass is Singing* elaborates and deconstructs the workings of colonial desire in order to suggest how the society in which it functions will ultimately be rendered unstable” (49). Hamilton argues that “In the Greek myth, the death of Narcissus coincides with the failed grasp. He does not die because he falls in love with himself, but because he falls in love with a phantasm—his mirror-image which is ungraspable” (8). At the last moment, preparing for her encounter with Moses, Mary is actually fighting with the horror that has been imposed on her, a woman, and a white woman. In the house, she feels “alone” and “defenceless” and situated “in a trap” set to face his hatred (GS 215). But she knows that “she would have to go out and meet him” (GS 215). Walking out of her house, she also crosses her fear, though the trees “move nearer” and she has to press back “against the wall with all the strength” (GS 216). Facing Moses, “her emotions unexpectedly shifted” and “a feeling of guilt” is created which forces her to “move forward, to explain, to appeal, and the terror would be dissolved” (GS 216). The personal feelings between them seem to bring a glimpse of hope for her. However, the bush has “avenged itself” through the hand of Moses. Mary faces her death “hopelessly” but “from a forgiving distance” (GS 236). Through the moment of her death, death, ironically, she finally achieves recognition of her needs for emotional reparation between herself and Moses, and with this environment that is lack of love. Mary’s death, also dramatises Mary’s being as an “intersubjectivity,” which internalises and

projects her inside terrors, and imagination towards the outer world. However, her death also exposes the emotional and political sources of a condition of trauma, a wounded colonial society whose own reparational processes are barely underway and far from complete.

## Chapter Two

### **The Bodies of Otherness: *Martha Quest*—Identity and Otherness: from the Perspective of Simone de Beauvoir's Intersubjectivity**

In this chapter, I shall analyse *Martha Quest* (1952), the first novel of the series *Children of Violence*. In this novel Lessing, describes the experience of the young girl Martha as she develops into adolescence, including her attempt to break away from her white settler family to begin to shape an identity for herself. The novel is set at the end of the 1930s in South Africa. Lessing set out to portray a central female character who experiences intensely a sense of “otherness” in her interaction with those around her, while she also shows sympathy towards people who are treated as “others” in her environment. Meanwhile, her quest for self-realisation is full of unresolved conflicts between herself and other people and those arising out of her internalisation of ideas about acceptable femininity in the settler milieu. This chapter will draw on perceptions from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949, in order to provide a feminist-inflected analysis of Martha's struggle to become a “free” woman. De Beauvoir proposes that “woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming” (*The Second Sex* 61). The shared moment of the publication of these two books is reflected in their mutual concern with the family-oriented ideology of the 1950s. The question of how to situate Martha's feelings of “otherness” in relation to herself and others raises issues around interpersonal relationships as well as the politics of the body proposed in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir's meditation on the way that the “body is a situation” constituted by different institutions (*The Second Sex* 61) has been regarded as the landmark insight of second-wave feminism, though her existentialist sense of “freedom” will need to be complemented by considerations of race and transnationality as well as those of gender. Toril Moi suggests that de Beauvoir starts from the assumption that “women's social, political and historical circumstances are responsible for most—if not all—of their shortcomings,” so “women cannot automatically be accused of being in bad faith when they fail to

behave as authentically free beings” (151). Martha’s quest for selfhood starts from her recognition of her own body as an instrument for the mediation of her subjectivity as well as her otherness. Moi explains further that de Beauvoir suggests that “there is an ever-present tension—or even struggle—between the little girl’s transcendent subjectivity and her ambivalent alienation” (160). Martha’s sense of intersubjectivity is revealed through the depiction of her motivation to change and search for identifications through different social groups. The boundary between subject and object is constantly blurred or shifting through Martha’s observation of and her feelings of resistance towards her bodily performance. Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook suggest that de Beauvoir’s “intersubjectivity” is the “rejection of the idea of the Absolute Subject” (125). In “Gender and Subjectivity, Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism,” Sonia Kruks further suggests that “the situated subject” is an “interdependent subjectivity” and one that is “permeable of the subject” rather than an autonomous or walled being (100). Thus, Martha’s search for selfhood also echoes de Beauvoir’s reconsideration of internal subject and object relations which create fluctuations in the dualistic relations between subject and object, self and otherness, and within the construction of oppressor and oppressed.

### **1. Self as Otherness**

Growing up in a conservative and divided environment of white settlers in South Africa, Martha, as a young woman, is full of resentment and anger against this restrictive environment which only brings her a sense of deep “claustrophobia” (*MQ* 3). Martha’s antagonistic attitude towards her mother is an extension of her resistance to the atmosphere of “otherness” that is represented through the racial differences and the conflicts between younger and older generations. As Lorelei Cederstrom argues, “Mrs. Quest represents the first of the collective pressures with which Martha must deal,” and she not only exerts “all the pressure which a mother can do” on Martha, but also “social attitudinizing which passes for motherly wisdom” (36). When Mrs. Quest is chatting with Mrs. Van Rensberg, a Dutchwoman, they do not share “the memories of their behaviour,” but “the



phrases of their respective traditions” (MQ 5). The two conservative ladies stand as representatives of the conservative attitudes of their own cultures and mouth platitudes rather than articulating their own feelings or ideas about being female; in this sense they turn their backs on other women. They are each inheritors of patriarchal traditions, though they “dislike each other” (MQ 5). Martha is so “resentful of her surroundings and her parents that the resentment overflowed into everything near her” (MQ 3). Martha’s friendship with the Jewish Cohen brothers is similar to that between these two old women and is interrupted by her mother’s racial discrimination. In “Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege,” Kruks notes for de Beauvoir, becoming gendered is shown here as the work of a culture, for these “social ascriptions, usually acquired at birth itself, are instantiated over the course of one’s life history, and they become one’s integral way of being in the world” (197). For Martha, Mrs. Quest and Mrs. Van Rensberg are therefore to be excluded from her vision of the “golden city,” “because of their pettiness of vision and small understanding” (MQ 11).

Mrs. Quest’s domination of Martha reflects the mother’s own situation as a woman. De Beauvoir mentions in *The Second Sex* (1949) that, as a “being-the-other,” a girl is taught to “make herself an object,” and is “treated like a live doll and is refused liberty” (308). Mrs. Quest intentionally distances herself from uneducated Mrs. Van Rensberg, hoping that Martha might proceed beyond the cultural norm for women of getting married early and might instead have a proper “career” (MQ 4). However, she resists the admission to herself that her daughter is growing up and insists on clothing her in a “childish dress,” though Martha’s maturing body looks unnatural under the severely flat lines of the dress that her mother has made for her. Mrs. Quest seems to “smooth the childish dresses down over Martha’s body” and “press her back into childhood” (MQ 16-17). Fredrika Scarth explains that de Beauvoir recognises that “some groups of people—slaves, women, subjects of colonial regimes—have never, in a sense, experienced their own adolescence, because they have been confined in a child’s world” (12). Stimulated to a new self-recognition by the mature clothes and make up of her friend, Marnie, Martha is aware of her infantilised appearance. Adjusting her dress

in the act of cutting her skirt, Martha is also effectively cutting her mother's restrictions on her. When Martha is invited to the first party by Marnie, Mrs. Quest persists in seeing her daughter "as about twelve, with a ribbon in her hair" like "Alice-in-Wonderland" to shield Martha from the temptations of the world, but in effect protecting her own internalised and regressive picture of childhood innocence, for "this vision made the idea of Billy less dangerous" (MQ 63). Wilson mentions R.D Laing's description that in "abnormal families," "the mother by denial, the father by incompletely suppressed incestuous impulses, prevent the 'natural' flowering of their daughters into 'real women'" (*Only Halfway* 121). De Beauvoir also explains that "the mother is at once overweeningly affectionate and hostile towards her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it" (*The Second Sex* 309). Mrs. Quest projects her nostalgic dream of going back to England onto Martha. She expects her to act according to "the social life of England" (MQ 16), and can be a "'nice girl' in "'a well-regulated suburban London household,'" which Mrs. Quest recreates in the settler environment (MQ 59). However, she ignores the fact that Martha is growing up in an environment that is rural, economically deprived, full of class and racial tension, and with no social outlets. In "Yesterday's Heroines: on Rereading Lessing and de Beauvoir," Wilson mentions that "these white settlers, becalmed on their farm in the vastness of the veld, have in a sense lost touch with the reality" and their bourgeois life "runs into a crazy caricature of itself, based on nothing, not even comfortable" (59). Their sense of annihilation arises from the gap between reality and "the endless, dusty, empty spaces of the veld," but more profoundly from the mirage of their grand imperial dream, whose futile achievement causes Mr. Quest's imaginary illness (Wilson, "Yesterday's Heroines" 59). Martha's altercations with her mother over clothes (a classic site of identity struggle in relations between adolescent girls and their mothers), turn out to be vehicles for Mrs. Quest's own protestation against her deprived life, trapped in an unhappy marriage to a man also in flight from his situation and himself. Mr. Quest takes flight into illness and indulges himself in mourning as well as glorifying his role in the war. He is unable to respond to his daughter's maturing body and her need for education. Mrs. Quest's controlling,

hostile and aggressive attitude towards her daughter is a motif that will reappear in almost all of Lessing's novels, culminating in the punitive dominatrix mother of the world behind the wall in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. However, Martha is a different being from the superegoic ideal projected onto her by her mother. Her dress has "grass stains on it," her fingers are "stained with nicotine" from chain smoking, and her rifle is "lying carelessly across her lap" with a book on it (MQ 60). Mrs. Quest switches her anger about the disappointments of her life in general to turn it "against the girl herself" and is filled with such "violent and supplicating and angry thoughts that she could not sustain them" (MQ 59). Gerardine Meaney argues that Mrs. Quest hates Martha because Martha is not her brother, because she is a woman like herself" (24).

According to Meaney, Martha is not only haunted by the "spectre of motherhood," but her mother is also the source of her fear of "the nightmare of repetition" (23). Although Martha tries in every way to escape from repeating the life style of her mother, Martha unconsciously feels that she is doomed. Because of her "pink eye," she misses the exam, the "matric," and educational success, which is "a simple passport to the outside world" (MQ 23). She feels as if some kind of "spell" had been put on her (MQ 24). When she comes back home, her mother always asks her to rest and "Mrs. Quest's voice murmurs like the spells of a witch" (MQ 24). There seems to be no exit from the sorcerer's emotional web spun by her mother since the house is "saturated by it" (MQ 24). For Martha, Mrs. Quest stands as "the eternal mother, holding sleep and death in her twin hands like a sweet and poisonous cloud of forgetfulness" and Martha feels as though she is caught by this dark figure in a nightmare (MQ 24). Meaney explains that the mother is "a Medusa," who has the power to petrify her daughter (23).<sup>1</sup> Both all-powerful and impotent, she is both the "phallic mother" and the castrato in Freud's sense. Martha's mother represents to her the all-powerful Imago within the private sphere of the domestic, despite the fact that she is "castrated" within the broader political economy though her identity as a "wife" and "mother." Adapting Freud's concepts, Meaney explains that in her development towards "femininity," the daughter

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<sup>1</sup> Meaney adapts Freud's idea to explain the concept of "monstrous mother": "the mother who had seemed all-powerful, a guarantor of nature and safety, is not so" (23).

develops an “anti-narcissism” through the “rejection of one’s self as woman and acceptance of the blankness of ‘not-man’” (23-24). However, unlike her mother, Martha does not really accept the “blankness of not-man”; on the contrary, she sees the hollowness in the male world through her perspective on her father. Her father, a “dream-locked figure,” indulges in reminiscences of an honoured past in the war (MQ 24). When he speaks, she is afraid of “the power of these words, which affected her so strongly” although she feels she has “nothing to do with what they stood for” (MQ 25).

Martha’s escape from the school is also her way to reject the institutions of patriarchy but she finds no compensatory sense of belonging with the people she subsequently finds around her. From the books lent by the Cohens, Martha is given “a clear picture of herself, from the outside,” which indicates her self-doubt as an “adolescent,” as well as the racial problems in being “British,” and also her role as a female (MQ 8). However, she is aware of the changing world that seems to be waiting for her in the future, and recognises that her duty must be to “move on to something new” (MQ 9). She is reluctant, however, to fit herself into any patterns (already set by intellectuals and experts) of “how she should see herself” and she refuses the determinations of fashionable psychologies (MQ 9). When looking back over history, she finds “a gap between herself and the past,” so that she is forced to discard all of her former heroines (MQ 10). It is almost as if Lessing is re-approaching Virginia Woolf’s proposal in *A Room of One’s Own* that the modern woman writing “thinks back through her mothers” (146) but Martha discovers that the wisdom of the mothers available to her is irrelevant to her own cultural situation. Similarly, de Beauvoir proposes that women “have no past, no history, no religion of their own” (*The Second Sex* 19). Cederstrom suggests that the “expert” books given to Martha “represent an inherited and institutionalized body of knowledge,” and she rejects these “experts” with “the same violence with which she reject(s) her mother’s folk wisdom” (37). Again this echoes Woolf’s satiric portrait of patriarchal learning in the visit to the British Museum Reading Room in *A Room of One’s Own*. Both involve the same awareness of the conditioning influences that determine the patterns of female behaviour. Martha’s problems seem unanswerable from the perspective of male intellectuals. E. Fullbrook and F.

Fullbrook explain that women at this time suffered from a “lack of belonging to a recognizable social unit, which can define itself against a correlated but opposing social unit” and therefore provide a “group identity” (126). Although she begins to develop more confidence from her own self-education, Joss, her spiritual support, often makes her “feel deficient in proper feeling”, for women’s voices are muted in the representations of the male tradition (*MQ* 50). When she asks for the books about “the emancipation of women,” she is deemed “naïve” and treated as someone afflicted with “a hopeless self-exposure” and is given a book on “sexual problems” (*MQ* 56).

## **2. Embodied Consciousness**

Martha tries to redefine herself through her body within the terms of de Beauvoir’s existentialist idea of freedom. E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook mentions that de Beauvoir demonstrates that “whereas the empirical and Cartesian traditions attribute sense-data to the objective body and the data’s interpretation to the ‘mind’ or subject, de Beauvoir insists that there is only a single entity: embodied consciousness” (80-81). The body becomes “the instrument by which individuals have a hold on and a point of view on the world” (E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook 77). Ruth Whittaker suggests that Martha is aware of “the ritual transitions to womanhood as a possible way to a new life” (38). She expects people to start to call her “Miss Quest” and she proclaims her independence by going to the station alone to buy the materials for the new dress. On her way home, by choosing to walk, she makes a statement of independence. From this “savouring freedom,” she finds herself “on a slight rise, where the trees opened across a wide reach of country; and the sight of new one, caused her to forget everything else” (*MQ* 51). Her future seems to expand and she feels different, responding to the freshness of the scenery, and Martha’s own feelings “deepen” in response to her sense of the sublime in nature. But later, she recalls this feeling of sublime “revelation” as “a pain, not a happiness” and experiences the “difficult birth into a state of mind” (*MQ* 52). It seems that what is waiting for her to discover in the future is an arduous trail with no clear destination, rather than an instantaneous transformation into a

condition of liberated happiness. As in the romantic humanist tradition, in Lawrence or in Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, she experiences a version of his "spots of time" (288),<sup>2</sup> "a slow integration" of herself and the natural environment around her and they become "one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms" so that she feels, for one epiphanic moment, that she is part of nature (MQ 52). However, before the arrival of "ecstasy," her transformative experience is full of pain and pressure. Her veins are like "the rivers under the ground, forcing themselves painfully" and "swelling out in an unbearable pressure"; her flesh, similar to the earth, suffers growth "like a ferment;" and her eyes, are "fixed like the eye of the sun" (MQ 52). Rubenstein suggests that the "dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy between self and world, inner and outer, becomes the deepest expression of the unconventional consciousness in Lessing's fiction" (*Novelistic Vision* 40). "With a sudden movement forwards and out," Martha stops at a "moment," when in front of the sublimity of nature, Martha understands "quite finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity" (MQ 52-53). As if in a denial of the Kantian sublime,<sup>3</sup> Martha experiences nature as vast and herself and others as small. Experiencing part of the infinite universe, she gets beyond her narrow cultural confines. De Beauvoir explains adolescent girls' love of nature in what would appear to be uncompromisingly Kantian terms (suggesting the extent to which de Beauvoir and Sartre's existential concept of the will is dependent upon Kant's construction of subjectivity). The experience described by de Beauvoir, though, is more joyful: "unconquered, inhuman, Nature subsumes most clearly the totality of what exists...it is a kingdom as a whole; when

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<sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*:  
 There are in our existence spots of time  
 Which with distinct preeminence retain  
 A fructifying virtue, when, depressed  
 By trivial occupations and the round  
 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds—  
 Especially the imaginative power—  
 Are nourished and invisibly repaired; (288-294)

<sup>3</sup> Cornelia Klinger summarises Kant's idea and criticises that "all that distinguishes man from nature, makes him independent of and sets him above nature, is of itself noble or sublime and ennoble man. This valuation involves a gender hierarchy: the female principle is identified as immersion in nature whereas it is a male prerogative to surmount nature's confines and to attain the autonomous moral law" (196).

she takes possession of it, she also proudly takes possession of herself" (*The Second Sex* 358). In nature, getting rid of social constructions, the girl is "a subject, a free-being" and her being is "imperious and triumphant like that of the earth itself" (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 359-360). Wilson mentions that for Lessing and de Beauvoir, "each of these young women has a strong sense of her own individual identity, even in the face of this huge, senseless universe" ("Yesterday's Heroines" 60). For de Beauvoir, her body "no longer seems a blemish to be ashamed of" but means "joy and beauty" (*The Second Sex* 360). However, Martha's awaking consciousness is accompanied by the new recognition of her body. While space and time "kneaded her flesh," she knows "futility" which is "her own idea of herself and her place in the chaos of matter" and she feels a new "demanding conception, with her flesh as host" to "allow herself to dissolve and be formed by that necessity" (*MQ* 53). E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook mention de Beauvoir's "consciousness of the individual existent concretely situated—including the ambiguous unity between the body and subject—and not Kant's disembodied universal subject" (80). Martha too feels that she has the experience that is so different from what has been described, but also that she has to make a huge effort to achieve it. The force of nature resists her and she has to "try again". "The moment" becomes "a whole in her mind" but she feels the "falsity" of that "ecstasy" because it is "a longing for something that had never existed" (*MQ* 53). She not only experiences a union with nature, but also a feeling that transforms her own sense of her body. However, Martha is neither not called on to give herself up to the "immanent" forces of nature which de Beauvoir sees as the condition of a woman trapped in her (natural) female body, nor does she experience that complete transcendence proposed by the romantic poet (*MQ* 52). Arriving home, Martha, who has been affected by the "visions and decision," feels the old sense of resentment appearing again when she thinks of all those people in her life who only "borrow patterns" and do not try to make changes (*MQ* 53-54). Interestingly, the borrowing of patterns again alludes to the significance of clothing—the need to cover over the female body, to turn nature into culture: that a woman, as de Beauvoir famously put it, is made not born— – cut out like a dress pattern to fit a roll of cloth.

Subsequently, Martha says farewell to her parents, believing that she has embarked upon her liberation, but instead she unintentionally again embarks on a well-trodden and ancient route. Cederstrom mentions that “Martha has an even greater difficulty in asserting her sense of self against the collective when its pressures are psychological and archetypal rather than conventional and social” (41). Although she has a sense of triumph “directed against her mother” after finishing her party dress, she still feels abandoned because she cannot gain approval for her new self, from either her father or her mother (*MQ* 69) and fails to receive “her parents’ acknowledgement that she has grown up” (Whittaker 39).

It was in a role which went far beyond her, Martha Quest: it was timeless...it should have been a moment of abnegation, when she must be kissed, approved, and set free... In order to regain that freedom, where she was not so much herself as a creature buoyed on something that flooded into her as a knowledge that she was moving inescapably through an ancient role, she must leave her parents who destroyed her. (*MQ* 70)

After leaving home, the man waiting for her symbolises her woman’s fantasy-devotion to the timeless fairy-tale. Ellen I Rosen explains that “for women, the loss of the mother induces a feeling of psychic exile; it creates an unconscious longing for fusion with the original love object which the daughter is fated to give up” (56). So even though Martha has physically escaped from her mother’s domain, psychologically she feels adrift in the way that Woolf referred to as the difficulties of killing the “Angel in the House”: the death of the Angel leaves a gap that cries out to be filled. Therefore, Martha’s subsequent relationships with different men signify her attempt to replicate her maternal attachment and to project her need to fill the vacuum “in a heterosexual union with a lover” (Rosen 56).

Martha’s sense of selfhood grows with her increasing recognition of her own body. Scarth explains de Beauvoir’s idea that “it is as body we are both freedom and flesh” because, on the one hand, only through concrete projects that engage the body makes freedom and, on the other hand, “we are vulnerable to the



flesh itself and to the power of others to reduce us to flesh” (113). When attending the Van Rensbergs’ party, the first party in her life, her white dress is treated disdainfully in Billy Van Rensberg’s rude outburst. In front of a full-length mirror in Mrs. Van Rensberg’s room, she sees her whole figure and mature body for the first time, for at home the image is always fractured and has to be imaginatively reassembled: “she could see herself only in sections, because of the smallness of the mirror” (MQ 16). In the mirror, (in an almost textbook Lacanian moment), she sees “a vision of someone not herself,” or rather herself transfigured “to the measure of a burning insistent future” (MQ 78). As de Beauvoir mentions, when discovering “in the mirror an unknown figure: it is she-as object suddenly confronting herself” (*The Second Sex* 361). The strange figure is more like “a legend” she has known for a long time and could be “that image in which she recognizes her childhood dreams and which is herself” (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 361). E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook mention that “the looking-glass enchants by offering the illusion that consciousness crystallizes into the body before one’s eyes” (82). Martha tries to touch the “white naked girl with high small breasts that leaned forwards out of the mirror” who was “like a girl from a legend” (MQ 78). With the intention to protect her own body, she “fold(s) defensively across the breasts,” while “bitterly criticizing herself for allowing Billy, that imposter, to take possession of her at all” (MQ 78). By adoring her own body, a girl “seeks an affectionate possession of herself” (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 362). E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook explain further that “if the subject identifies strongly with their body, the individual may regard their reflection as an opening into their inner self” (82). Claudia Roth Pierpont mentions that Martha has become aware of the attractiveness of her body and begins to enjoy using her charm as a young woman and she is “filled with the proudly luxuriant pleasures of her own flesh” (228). When she starts to work in town and to live in her own room, she becomes used to looking at herself in the reflections of mirrors “large and small” (MQ 98). Soon, in response to this conspicuous and appraising eye of the city, Martha stops eating regularly in order not to “lose her figure” (MQ 110).

On the other hand, she becomes “the object” in de Beauvoir’s sense, “she sees herself as an object,” and “instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now

begins to exist *outside*" (*The Second Sex* 334). In adolescence, like other girls, she starts to feel alienated towards from her body and to create "a murky mixture of transcendence, thingness, and the alienated image of a body-ego" (Moi 160). Unlike boys, achieving transcendence through identification with the symbolic power of the penis, "the little girl alienates her transcendence in a 'thing' that remains ambiguously part of her own original transcendence" (Moi 160). At the beginning, Martha follows the "traditional exhibitionist role" that Laura Mulvey proposes, where "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (19). She starts to look at herself from others' perspectives and is aware of the interaction between her body and others. When she is asked out by Donovan, a son of her mother's friend, she is highly excited and dresses herself up out of a sense of "compulsion" which comes from "outside, as if Donovan's dark and languid eyes (are) dictating what she must do, even to the way her hair should lie on her shoulders" (MQ 98). She even experiences the exchange of personalities between herself and Donovan, because through his gaze, she has "an extraordinary sensation," and as if Donovan "were for the moment, herself and her clothing covered him, and he felt the shape and lines of her dress with the sympathy of his own flesh" (MQ 98). Martha is disturbed about being "possessed by another personality" (MQ 98). When Donovan brings Martha to the theatre for the first time, it is also her "debut" of "the new girls come to town" (MQ 104). Startled by the gaze of "this crowd under the new light of a unifying 'they'" and through glancing back, she sees that she is "being watched" by "dozens of pairs of eyes" (MQ 104). She feels resentful that she is "being displayed" (MQ 104).

De Beauvoir proposes that for a young woman, "there is a contradiction between her status as a real human being and her vocation as a female" (*The Second Sex* 332). As a "woman-to-be," there is a conflict "between her original claim to be subject, active, free, and on the other hand, her erotic urges and the social pressure to accept herself as passive object" (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 332). Joss reminds her of her pursuit of spiritual freedom as he leaves for university and mentions his plan of going abroad in the future. Under the "spell" of Joss, Martha repudiates Donovan immediately and resumes her intellectual quest.

Attending a Left Book Club at Joss's suggestion, she imagines that it will be "so adventurous, so free and unbounded" (MQ 114). However, her imagination of spiritual transcendence dramatises her fear of the entrapment of the female body. In her first meeting with the group, she is disturbed by the wives of the intellectuals because the maternal role is "a menace" to her sense of freedom (MQ 116). In Martha's eyes, these "intellectual ladies" are still confined to a world of cooking and domesticity and yet they "nevertheless expressed resentment against something (but what?) in every tone of their voices, every movement of their bodies, with the undemanding women of the district" (MQ 117). Martha's horror of female bodies is expressed early when seeing Mrs. Van Rensberg's legs, "large and shapeless, veined purple under the mask of sunburn" because of having too many children (MQ 3). The maternal body understood as a kind of constraint on Martha's spiritual freedom seems to reflect the similar dualism shown in de Beauvoir's account. De Beauvoir proposes that "to the adolescent girl maternity seems a threat to the integrity of her precious person, sometimes savagely repudiated" (*The Second Sex* 475). De Beauvoir is sometimes criticised for her "distinction between body and mind, in which consciousness and freedom are identified with mind, and a distinction between nature and culture, in which the body is consigned to nature" (Scarth 33). Her use of Sartrean existentialism, which suggests the identification of transcendence with mind, is criticised by Moira Gatens, as she suggests that de Beauvoir locates "the source of women's inferior status in female biology" (2). As to Martha, the idealistic ideology of the community makes her feel for a while "at home," and that she is "one of a brotherhood" (MQ 120). However, Martha's political naivety appears to Mr. Pycroft as that of "a stubborn child" while she is reluctant to assent to his sarcastic criticisms of the revolution in Spain (MQ 119). Martha is similarly struck by his private invitation to a dinner, that it does not include his wife. Although these people disappoint her, she dreams "of a large city" filled with other people who are "not at all false and cynical and disparaging, like the men she had met that afternoon, or fussy and aggressive, like the women" (MQ 120). In this wonderland, she would be no more an outsider and could discover a place where "people altogether, generous and warm, exchanged generous emotions" (MQ 120). Rosen suggests that Martha

“struggles for transcendence, and attempts to arrive at a new vision of womanhood” as when “traditional sex roles break down and women search for autonomy, potency, and wholeness outside their maternal role” (54).

Martha’s quest for selfhood turns into a kind of narcissism represented by her bodily display. As de Beauvoir observes, a girl feels confused since “she does not distinguish the desire of the man from the love of her own ego” (*The Second Sex* 362). At the beginning, Martha imagines the ritual of romance happening between herself and Donovan; she accepts Donovan’s “claim on her,” and she deems his kiss on her cheek “as the seal” she has been waiting for her whole life (*MQ* 107). Martha feels humiliated because of “her instinct” to see herself “through Donovan’s eyes” (*MQ* 129). Since she is used to seeing her “self” through others’ eyes, she is eager to represent her true self through her appearance and clothes, to receive others’ reactions to and perceptions of her. Meaney elaborates on Cixous’s idea of Medusa, about why women are “petrified” by the “gaze of the other”: Medusa’s power is denied and appropriated by the “mirror.”

(Perseus) fights and kills her by looking only in her reflection in the shield given him by Athene. Her glance is not deadly if it is mediated, if it is experienced only as a reflection. Control of her image, her reflection in his shield, allows Perseus to appropriate Medusa’s power. The live Medusa killed by seeing: the Medusa’s head kills when *seen*. She loses the power of the gaze: Perseus seizes the power of representation. Medusa’s image is controlled by Perseus. (Meaney 32)

“Perseus” could be regarded as anyone who tries to control a woman’s image, while men are afraid of Medusa’s power of petrifying<sup>4</sup>. Martha realises how often women conform to that image, “in the disguise of this other” in order to win admiring glances (*MQ* 141). However, Martha wants to reveal her true self through the creation of her own image. She dreams of buying an expensive dress, which

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<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous proposes in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” that women are riveted “between two horrifying myths: between Medusa and the abyss” (354). Beth Newman analyzes the idea of Medusa in “This Situation of the Looker-on’ gender, narration, and gaze in *Wuthering Heights*,” “Medusa defies the male gaze as Western culture has constructed it: as the privilege of a male subject, a means of relegating women (or “Woman”) to the status of object (of representation, discourse, desire, etc.)” (451).

though unaffordable would enable her “to use the charm, the almost stammering diffidence, which she knew she should banish from her personality here at work” (MQ 139). Even more, she hopes that she could use that dress to “destroy that false image” and reveal “something quite new, but deep inside herself” (MQ 141). De Beauvoir comments thus about women’s narcissism: “clothes and conversation will satisfy much of this feminine taste for display” (647). Moi explains that “for the narcissistic subject, her ego or self is nothing but an alienated and idealized *image* of herself, another *alter ego* or double in danger in the world” (161). Martha also adapts herself in the routine interaction between girls and boys in the Sports Club. She is “obsessed by the need to look at the eyes of these people” (MQ 155). In all these behaviours, women believe that to change their dress, their clothing, is an expression of sexual liberation, but Lessing suggests that Martha has simply exchanged one constricting uniform for another.

When Martha observes more of her “otherness” under Donovan’s masculine power, she tries to look at her otherness within. She feels excluded and irritated by Donovan’s insistence on his “personal supervision” and his masculine “pressure on her,” especially the ritualistic creation of her clothes, in which her appearance is under his construction. E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook propose, drawing on de Beauvoir’s ideas, that “the body’s organs of perception, and power of consciousness, are interlocked, indivisible, inseparable. The body is subjectified; the subject embodied” (80). The personal concern and care shown her by her landlady, Mrs. Gunn, modifies Martha’s usual dislike of and anger towards older women (MQ 141-142). Nonetheless, Martha quarrels with her in a way that functions as if it were an exchange between mother and daughter when Mrs. Gunn comes into her room to monitor her behaviour with Donovan. Donovan blames her for not exercising a sense of superior racial discrimination in her dealings with this landlady. His attitude seems to be one of constantly directing her. She feels “irritable and sad” and his harsh attitude reminds her of the dominant and discordant ideas of the society she thought she had left behind. She is also exhausted playing “this other person” who has to display submission all the time and feels like a “dummy” under his orders as well as those of others (MQ 144). However, in her bath, her sense of “self-adoration” comes back, and she falls into a

rite of self-love” by admiring her own body (MQ 144). She shifts her attention from that “otherness” but towards herself as an effectively objectified body. By joining in with their social gossip between Mrs. Gunn and her daughter, Martha feels suddenly in harmony with the atmosphere of womanhood that is different from the earlier experiences of her mother and Mrs. Van Rensberg, whose friendship is full of hidden racial conflict. Mrs. Gunn’s daughter, who has a new baby, becomes “delightfully simple and womanly” for Martha at that moment, although babies often arouse her revulsion (MQ 146). De Beauvoir suggests that “women do not say ‘We’” and that they need to learn to say speak and think collectively (*The Second Sex* 18). However, this easy feeling between women is disturbed when Donovan dresses her for the party. Again, she sees “not herself” in the mirror (MQ 146) and is “tacked,” literally pinned into, a dress that he “wants her to be” (MQ 149). Just as she had fought against her mother’s control over her, Martha again starts to ruin her clothes. She spoils her shoes by stepping into muddy water and mocks his carefulness towards the dress that he has made as a substitute for, instead of actually caring about her, and she grows to despise him “from the bottom of her heart” (MQ 148).

However, as Martha is absorbed into the milieu of different groups and initially enjoys their atmosphere of freedom, she further loses her sense of selfhood. In these various groups, she observes people from an outsider’s perspective and thereby discovers that she is herself an outsider. Martha immerses herself in the orgiastic atmosphere of “the larger collective at the Sports Club” which seems to permit everything (Cederstrom 44). The club, unlike traditional style clubs of this kind in England that are regarded as the privilege of wealthy and upper-class people, has “come into existence simply as a protest against everything Europe” stands for (MQ 139). Accordingly, the club is open to almost all citizens in the town, offering both low subscriptions and prestige, for there are “no divisions here, no barriers, or at least none that could be put into words” and it is full of the “irresistible flood of universal goodwill” (MQ 139). Brewster suggests that the members of The Sports Club “live a group life, very much in the public eye, very good examples of ‘togetherness’” (106). In this “togetherness,” Martha finds her sense of belonging, in some ways, but also feels lost under “the public eye” which is

mostly dominated by males. Martha's experience of "objectification" is like de Beauvoir's description that the sense of an individual's boundary feels as if it must "kaleidoscopically overlap with the boundaries of those people with whom one associates" (E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook 96). She is like other young women responding to the "obligatory" conversations, especially those between men and women who are expected to follow the stereotype of being "responsible for men" and "would instinctively assume an air of Madonna-like, all-experienced compassion" (MQ 137). On the other hand, within this impersonality, the bodies of everyone reflect a paralysis of the group will. Their bodies and faces "contorted into the poses required of them" as if they are possessed (MQ 156) and they are like "lolling marionettes" under that impersonal atmosphere (MQ 159). Martha is "resentful" because she is not accepted "as *herself*." Her bodily experiences that blur the boundary between herself and others also bring her the feeling of antagonism within. Martha feels "as if half a dozen entirely different people inhabited her body, and they violently disliked each other, bound together by only one thing, a strong pulse of longing; anonymous, impersonal, formless, like water" (MQ 143). Her body even becomes the battlefield of the young men, "different selves which insisted on claiming possession of her" (MQ 156) although they behave this way only in order to challenge Donovan (MQ 157). She discovers that she is still the object in the mirror: hurt by her fantasy of love, the girl who constitutes "her own idea of herself" is again destroyed.

That other veiled personage that waits, imprisoned, in every woman, to be released by love, that person she feels to be...what is real and enduring in her, was tremblingly insecure. She hated Donovan, with a pure, cool contempt; she looked at the young men, and despised them passionately. (MQ 157)

However, this battle between men is resolved by Martha's submission to these men's power. Her dress, tugged by Donovan, is finally stripped off. Donovan, who helps her stitch up her dress, makes up for the embarrassment, becomes "the master of the situation" (MQ 158).

Escaping from this performance at the club, they are welcomed by a smaller group, including the couple Stella and Andrew Mathews, who offer an escape from the claustrophobic pressures. When Martha enters their flat, she feels that she has been released into wonderland where no one claims her mood or asks her to submit to their emotional ambience. However, "there was nothing individual here to claim one's mood, there was no need to submit oneself. In this country, or in England, or in any other country, one enters this flat, is at home at once, with a feeling of peace" (MQ 161). The modern and bright flat which has not been despoiled by any previous inhabitants, symbolises a new place that carries no burdens of history. For a person within a society, like furniture in a room, is always fitted and arranged without choice into an environment.

There are enough claims on us as it is, tugging us this way and that without considering fittings and furniture: who used them before? What kind of people were they? What do they demand of us? (MQ161)

The flat symbolises a kind of freedom, a "home for nomads, who with no idea of where they are travelling must travel light, ready for anything" (MQ 161). However, this microcosmic world is based on adoration of its hostess, Stella, a Jewess; her "woman-of-the-world look," reflects her habituation to being used and shown off by her husband and admired for her beauty. Within the magnetism emitted by Stella's personality, with everyone adoring her, Martha and Donovan might still be friends despite the changes in their relationship. However, Martha begins to feel uneasy as she realises that Andrew is the accomplice there to "see his wife display herself thus to others" (MQ 163). The simple intimacy and warmth is the licence and taboo of this group, and Martha finds herself increasingly paralyzed as part of yet another orgiastic life which, she knows, deep down, repeats the same gendered patterns. She recovers her sense of "driving individualism" in the recognition that this collective life seems to have become so banal, but she cannot leave it. Cederstrom suggests that polarizing her experiences, Martha "sees only two alternatives: an isolated individuality or membership in one of the group" (44). Perceiving herself through "dispassionate cool eyes," she suffers from "the form of



moral exhaustion which is caused by seeing a great many facts without knowing the cause for them, by seeing oneself as an isolated person, without origin or destination" (MQ 165). Thinking of the support and consolation from the Left Book Club, Martha still feels caught between two negative choices, and the "terrific, restless force embodied in her was too powerful to be confined" in any of these forms (MQ 165-6). She is ambitious to do something special and to find for herself a position of freedom in this society. Witnessing the passing police and prisoners on the street, seeing them as an epitome of the racial discrimination and injustices occurring at the time, she realises, however, that personal freedom still needs the recognition of the group. Imagining herself as one of the prisoners, feeling "the oppression of a police," she is at the same time "conscious of the same moral exhaustion which had settled on her earlier" (MQ 166). Scarth explains that de Beauvoir describes the "human condition of being a freedom-in-situation" as ambiguity because as a "freedom/consciousness, we are solitary and separate, but since that freedom requires concrete expression and the recognition of others, we are also interdependent" (8). The superficial peace in this small and happy group lasts until Stella's personal consciousness is in conflict with Donovan's racist attitude. Stella's concern towards her Jewish people, such as Adolph King who is a musician in the bar, irritates Donovan. Stella could never obtain real freedom while she has to conform to the object position as a woman, as well as a Jew.

### **3. Self and Otherness**

Martha has further understanding of that moral exhaustion in her relationship with the Jew, Adolph King. At the beginning, Martha tries to reject his domination of her as she did with Donovan, but she feels under pressure to maintain the relationship because of her sense of guilt when reminded of his treatment as if he were of inferior status. She feels her own relationship with him distorted by his own self-degradation. As an outsider of the society, Adolph internalises those prejudices and he has "abased himself so thoroughly" that she starts to feel like a princess being kind to a ploughboy" (MQ 179). He is also quite aware of the public's view of him, an awareness famously captured in W.E. du Bois'

*The Souls of Black Folk*, “this double consciousness, this sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (17). Besides the views of other people that make Martha angry and uncomfortable, Martha feels more annoyed by his attitude in constantly asking for sympathy and provoking her sense of guilt. When they go to the best restaurant in town, she senses that the others are “colder, less welcoming” and their eyes follow “not her but Adolph” (MQ 179). Adolph’s intention to attract recognition through others eventually irritates Martha. When they go to the races, where Adolph usually spends his leisure time, Martha finds that he is used to “waiting to catch the great men’s eyes,” like “his game of stalking the great for recognition” (188-189).

Martha maintains the relationship partly as an act of rebellion against conventional society, even though Adolph tries to imprison Martha in his impasse. De Beauvoir proposes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that “the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbour into a prison” (91). E. Fullbrook and F. Fullbrook also explain that since people “rely on others for this justification and meaning and for the creation of cultural being; others can serve us in this way only to the extent that they are free; therefore, it is in our self-interest to guard and to promote the freedom of others (110). Stella’s antagonistic reaction to their relationship also reflects her negative racial reactions that actually imprison herself and Adolph in similar ways. Martha is reproached by Stella that she should not appear in public with him. Stella appears to be “sympathetic and self-righteous,” with a look of “scandalized delight” (MQ 181). While Stella represents herself as an “elder,” she reminds Martha of her mother who always expected Martha to follow her word. This becomes the “fatal argument” for Martha to rebel (MQ 181). Their relationship is broken up finally by Stella and Donovan’s deliberate disturbance. Although Stella and her husband remind Martha of “home,” they also bring her the confining pressure of a family. The fact of her “having sex with a Jewish man” is described as “disgusting” by them (MQ 193). Stella even plays the protector role as a substitute for Martha’s mother, blaming Adolph for seducing “an innocent British girl” (MQ 194). Even though Stella

herself is Jewish and married to a Scotsman, she follows the superior attitude of the British. She straightens herself with “dignity” and proclaims to Adolph that her marriage did not drag down her people “to be gossiped about” (*MQ* 194). Martha feels “ashamed” and sorry for this humiliating scene on the one hand; on the other, it is also a “relief” to be able to relinquish the pressure on her of Adolph’s self-pity and distrust.

It is through her sexual experience that Martha recognises further her alienated feelings towards her body. De Beauvoir writes “to *make* oneself an object, to *make* oneself passive, is a very different thing from being a passive object: a woman in love is neither asleep nor dead” (*The Second Sex* 372). Jo-Ann Pilardi proposes that “de Beauvoir suggests that the ‘situation’ of a certain group, women, is so impressed upon the individual as to hamper or prevent the use of freedom, that is, the individual’s transcendence of her facticity” (23). For Martha, “sex” is part of romantic love, and her concept of sex is an abstract one: the “love act from literature” and also the “scientific description from manuals of sex” (*MQ* 173). Her sexuality is always part of the achievement of her pursuit of love and she is prepared to devote her body to it. De Beauvoir proposes that a woman has to face a more dramatic conflict because “at first she feels herself to be object and does not at once realize a sure independence in sexual enjoyment” (*The Second Sex* 394). For the first time, confronting Perry’s dominating and direct sexuality, Martha is awakened to her intention to “dissolve” her own image. Martha rejects Perry’s request for sex as his “self-absorbed rite” and his frank pursuit of sexuality (*MQ* 173). De Beauvoir mentions that “the erotic experience is one that most poignantly discloses to human beings the ambiguity of their condition; in that they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject” (*The Second Sex* 394). When Martha is with Adolph, her conformity to him is because of his negative implication that a refusal of him would be about racial rejection, so she is “pulled down a current” which is mysterious to her knowledge. Facing Adolph’s aloof and experienced attitude, and his methodical preparation, the process is idealised as an impersonal business:

That ideal, the-thing-itself, that mirage, remained untouched,  
quivering exquisitely in front of her. Martha, final heir to the long

romantic tradition of love, demanded nothing less than that the quintessence of all experience, all love, all beauty, should explode suddenly in a drenching saturating moment of illumination.

(MQ 184)

Feeling the alienation towards her body, Martha “had swallowed the moment of disappointment whole, like a python” under her own persuasion that she loves him and “the man himself seemed positive irrelevant” (MQ 184). Her body is not really “desired” but is only an object for him to prove himself. Under the mirage of love, Adolph is fused with her imagination, “in the future” (MQ 184). De Beauvoir mentions that since woman recognises herself as an object, “she must regain her dignity as transcendent and free subject while assuming her carnal condition” (*The Second Sex* 394). Pilardi explains that “transcendence, the forward movement into the future of a willing subject, struggles with the urge towards immanence that also tempts the subject, the urge towards passivity, toward the being of a thing” (20). When she is with Douglas, whom she meets later in the Sports Club, she admires his intelligence and she could “be natural” and be “herself” (MQ 217) with him. Prostrate on Douglas’ bed, and adored by him in her body, she becomes an observer of the event: she “saw” herself “lying there half exposed on the bed; and half resentfully, half wearily partook, as he was demanding of her, in the feast of her beauty” (MQ 220). Through his eyes, she “scrutinizes” herself and sees herself as an “object.” Meanwhile, she feels “excluded” during his “rite” and fights against the sense of otherness while protesting in her mind because her body has become “*Them*—just as if they had nothing to do with me!” (MQ 220). Martha feels rejected and resentful while he withdraws from her and reclothes her body like “burying a corpse” (MQ 220). She now realises her position as a woman who has to fight all the time constantly against repeating the pattern and wishes that “men were not like this” (MQ 221). Her body seems to be “petrified” under his gaze as well as his aloof act, so she feels “ached, body and spirit, and hated him” (MQ 221). As Moi concludes, “the difference between the narcissistic and non-narcissistic woman is that the latter conserves a sense of ambiguity or contradiction, whereas the former persuades herself that she *is* the image projected by her alienation” (161).

#### 4. The Ambiguity of Free choice

Martha seems unable to avoid being affected by a sense of fatalism, for though she seems to make her own decisions, those decisions are subsequently exposed as thoroughly influenced or constructed by others. It actually reveals the ambiguity of being a woman. Relations might mean escape from solipsism or narcissism, but equally seem to represent a failure of the autonomous will: the tension between these seemingly impossible poles is at the centre of the Martha Quest novels. De Beauvoir proposes that the situation of woman is that she—"a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other" (*The Second Sex* 27). Moi proposes that the splitting and ambiguity is true for men as well as women; yet women are "more split and ambiguous than men" because according to de Beauvoir "women are fundamentally characterized by a doubled (ontological and social) ambiguity and conflict" (155). However, Judith Okely analyses de Beauvoir's belief in "individual free choice which existentialism emphasizes over all wider determinants" (105). Martha does everything in opposition to her mother who works to perpetuate patriarchal chains, but she is still shaped by patriarchal pressures after leaving home. Whittaker proposes that Martha "is both dependent upon, and reacts against, all these factions, constantly redefining herself through her relations with them" (37). Martha starts her independent life in town because of Joss's "momentous letter" that offers her a job and Martha seems to be "released from her imprisonment like the kiss of the prince in the fairy tales" (*MQ* 197). In the claustrophobic relationship with Adolph and the moral persecution of Stella, Martha recognises how she is influenced by these interpersonal relationships. She experiences the conflict that de Beauvoir proposes while painfully torn between "freedom and alienation, transcendence and immanence, subject being and object being" (Moi 155).

The life in the city seems so tumultuous that she feels the need to retreat into her self to the past, as she searches for a way to relate herself to the world. At first, Martha reminisces nostalgically about the order of nature, the organic life of the

farm where “life was kept properly defined,” but she gradually realises that it is not easy “to moor oneself safely, with words that meant one thing only” (*MQ* 197-98). This sense of ambiguity breaks down the premise of nature represented as regularity and order and seems to echo de Beauvoir’s concern about the biological definition of woman’s body. Scarth mentions that de Beauvoir uses “ambiguity” to “refer to the existentialist claim that the meaning of human life is never fixed or defined by nature but always remains open” (112). In the act of restoring her habit of collecting knowledge from the books of philosophers, which are quickly discarded by her, she is actually recovering “a sense of movement, of separate things interacting and finally becoming one, but greater” instead of accepting “the simplicity of perfect certainty” (*MQ* 200). Through this merging movement, she seems to reject those “absolute subjects” appearing in life and accept that “other” within herself. Only two authors remained with her after her life on the farm, Whitman and Thoreau who are “poets of sleep, and death and the heart” and they apply “a confirmation of some kind of exile” (*MQ* 201). Nature seems again a means of escape from the imprisonment and confinements of social reality, no matter whether at home or in the city and yet, paradoxically, it seems to be her “nature,” her biological woman’s body that keeps her imprisoned in a patriarchal society.

Martha eventually flees to personal relationship again where she believes she will be able to avoid the collective pressure. She decides to leave the Sports Club, when she witnesses the objectification of black people becoming a kind of entertainment. Perry tries to imitate an African Negro singing, forcing a black waiter to act with him, but he becomes furious at the black man’s action because his act looks like “a parody of Perry, a mockery” which makes Perry feel insulted (*MQ* 207). Lessing seems to anticipate later post-colonial ideas about mimicry and subversion. It is after this episode that Martha makes up her mind to be “finished with the Sports Club and everything it stood for” (*MQ* 208). However, her decision is soon disturbed when her old feelings of “violent anger, a feeling of being caged and imprisoned” are aroused in receiving her mother’s letter, and she simply again accepts Perry’s invitation to the party in the Sports Clubs to be “one of the girls” (*MQ* 213). That night, she meets Douglas, whose generous ideas about black people make her feel like “one who has at last come home” and who shares the same

“brotherhood” (MQ 217). Cederstrom says that unlike the other young males at the club, “Douglas is an intellectual; this coupled with the sexual urgency of her age, impels Martha towards him with a sense of inevitability” (46). However, she does not realise that this sense of “brotherhood” could not resolve her personal predicament. Moi explains that “ethical equality implies the mutual recognition of the other as a free, acting subject, and in *The Second Sex* this is usually called *reciprocity*, not *brotherhood*” (209). After his confession about his money problems, his engaged fiancée in England, and the failed sex between them, the “reciprocal interaction” is faintly achieved when Douglas asks for her understanding about his failure material and moral, and physical situations. She feels propelled towards him almost against her conscious will and agrees to marriage. Pilardi explains that the erotic passivity that a woman experiences within patriarchal culture is overcome “through creation,” of a “reciprocal relationship between female and male, in order that a woman’s subjectivity be permitted and acknowledged, as her body is desired” (27). When Martha wakes in a great panic and state of regret the next day, Douglas, however, has already publicly announced the coming event and Martha finds herself helplessly “on the fatal slope towards marriage” (MQ 227). The decision that had seemed hers is again revealed as a social construction leaving her passive and defeated. It seems that every decision for her becomes “fatally limited” (MQ 230) and she can only follow the tide of people’s expectation, so that intimacy itself has somehow “mysteriously become mislaid in the publicity” (MQ 227). Cederstrom explains further that “Martha’s sense of self is too new to stave off either her sexual need or the social pressure, so she finds herself engaged, publicly, not only to Douglas, but to the collectives against which she had been struggling” (46). Lessing brilliantly reveals the pressures of biology and society seemingly conspiring to enframe Martha’s will to autonomy in a series of evermore iron-girded prisons. Martha and Douglas believe that their uncomfortable feelings will disappear after their marriage. For Martha, the marriage ceremony is only “an unimportant formula that must be gone through for the sake of society,” and then “the door which would enclose Douglas and herself safely within romantic love,” would open. However, it has all too soon becomes “a door closing firmly against her life in town which she was already regarding with puzzled loathing” (MQ 228).

Martha seems to deem marriage a way to escape from the outer pressure and hide in romantic love. Yet, she is only following another social construction provided in the institution of marriage.

Martha eventually needs to make her voice heard, not only to herself. De Beauvoir mentions that “There is only one way to employ her liberty authentically, and that is to project it through positive action into human society” (*The Second Sex* 640). Her personal conflict with her family is rendered impotent when this assertion of her independence in her decision to marry encounters no resistance. She attempts rebellion through pre-marital sex, thinking that “making love when and how they pleased was positively a flag of independence in itself, a red and defiant flag, waving in the faces of the older generation” (*MQ* 237). Yet Lessing signals the sense of deluded victory and returns to an image of nature evacuated of meaning and hollowed out. Martha attempts to commune for a final time with the landscape in order to establish her sense of self but discovers that “it was shut off from her, she could feel nothing. There was a barrier, and that barrier (she felt) was Douglas” (*MQ* 236). Effectively, what she has discovered, is that she is part of that nature which she had tried romantically to sublimate and, in accepting that such a nature is always already a construct, she feels alienated from what has been exposed as, in a sense, always an illusion, a part of childhood long departed. Martha’s longing for independence is also represented by the arrangement of the rooms in the house. Her brother’s room, situated at the end and disconnected from the rest of the house,” is like an independent world he is allowed to own. However, when she goes back to her room the next morning, she feels “the open door into her parents’ room which had the force now of a deliberate reproach” (*MQ* 238). Her determination to fight against the world sacrifices her last support within it while Douglas not only now stands in alignment with her parents but also appears disapproving as they pass an open-air meeting on their way home. This occasion of public protestation, however, represents her own situation. While Martha sees the Cohens in the crowd, she appears ashamed of her feelings towards Douglas’s conventional attitude and the idea of cancelling the wedding comes to her mind again. Observing her antagonistic attitude, Douglas gives Martha the chance to reassess her decision but Martha’s voice has no time “to make itself



heard before he turns to her, and asks again" (MQ 243). In the marriage ceremony, Mrs. Quest's hand grasps Martha's in order to catch the ring: for Martha has been "ringed" and caught like an animal. However, it is implied that it is not a "happy ending" when the registrar of their wedding, Mr. Maynard, appears cynical towards the easiness of marriages and divorces. The car accident too hovers like a bad omen. Still, Martha's future is not necessarily confined within this repetitive circle of her mother's life. As de Beauvoir concludes:

to emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist for him *also*: mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an *other*. The reciprocity of their relations will not do away with the miracles. (*The Second Sex* 686)

Martha's experience of intersubjectivity arises as a feeling of "otherness" or alienation in and throughout her body and through this she comes to feel and therefore realise the situation of those people around who are treated as an "otherness" or something alien from a normative conception of human functioning and being. Although her final decision to marry seems conservative and passive, de Beauvoir's conclusion seems to reflect that a woman's self development is not simply defined through her relationship with men. Her every oscillation between each choice also illustrates her consideration of herself as being a "subject" and also her recognition of the condition of subjectivity of those around her.

## Chapter Three

### A City in the Golden Age—

“Where? What is it? How? What’s next? Where is the man or woman who...”:

A Modernist Flâneuse’s Wandering, Searching and Remembering in

*The Four-Gated City*

*The Four-Gated City* (1969), published by Doris Lessing at the end of the 1960s, offers a view of the changing map of post-war London through the eyes of the white South African Martha Quest, a female flâneuse who serves also to resituate a modernist figure in terms of the sexual politics of the post-war period. As a white immigrant from South Africa, Martha, like Lessing herself, is both an insider and an outsider, both in South Africa and in England. Martha’s “quest” in England is about her search for an ideal world, or simply, her search for home. In *The Grass Is Singing*, to the female protagonist Mary, whose parents are South Africans and have never been to England, “the word ‘home’, spoken nostalgically, meant England” (Lessing, *GS* 33). Lessing’s autobiography, *In Pursuit of the English*, published in 1960, describes the period when she travelled from South Africa to London in 1949. Lessing describes herself as a “grail-chaser,” a term that could also describe her parents, who settle in the colony, in the spirit of “risking everything and damning the cost” (Lessing, *In Pursuit* 13). For the English in the colony, especially the immigrants, the idea of the “English,” as a term that represents the culture of their home country to which they may, or may not regret leaving, is always a source of conflict. Lessing mentions “while the word English is tricky and elusive enough in England, this is nothing to the variety of meaning it might bear in [the] Colony, self-governing or otherwise” (*In Pursuit* 6). At the time her parents decided to move to Rhodesia, they were actually looking for a “Shangri-La,” an idealised and anglicised place of the imagination. Like other immigrants, they have strong self-contradictory feelings towards the English because they yearn for England on the one hand but are unable to return to the home country because of

its “conservatism, narrowness and tradition” (Lessing, *In Pursuit* 12). However, they are also dissatisfied with their life in Southern Rhodesia because of its “newness, narrowness, lack of tradition” (Lessing, *In Pursuit* 12). Ironically, however, Lessing informs us that they often found themselves regarded as not real “English” in their English community abroad because of their lack of wealth and success. Thus influenced by her parents, England the country conjured up a “Shangri-La” for Lessing and became the “grail” that she will in turn pursue. Like those who left earlier for the colonies, Lessing headed for England, chasing the phantom promise of a new world and a renewed “liberal spirit.” The aim of this pursuit was to discover “the working class and the English” (Lessing, *In Pursuit* 10) as part of her idealist politics, where England seemed like “the mirage” of a dream where she imagines there might be a group of loving friends who have risen above the pettiness of the human condition, “its envy, jealousy, spite” and, at whatever cost, she and her comrades might devote themselves to producing “undying masterpieces,” and live communally, “with such warmth, brilliance, generosity of spirit” (Lessing, *In Pursuit* 16).

In *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Martha’s quest is not only about her own individuality, but also a search for a way to embrace the collective, a way too that she might transcend the confinement and constraints of individuality. Lessing notes at the end of the novel that this book is “what the Germans call a *Bildungsroman*” (FGC 711). But Lessing adapts the form of the genre so that it is made self-consciously to reflect her perspective as a female writer, by focussing on Martha’s journey in the city as well as her inner journey. The first part of her journey corresponds to what Rita Felski has described as “the novel of self-discovery” of female writers (133). Felski explains that while the male *Bildungsroman* is “in the form of a purely inward development which renounces all social activity,” the contemporary narrative of female self-discovery “describes a protagonist’s journey from the enclosed realm of the familial home into the social world” (133-134). In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing blurs the distinction between inside and outside, domestic and public, by first initiating Martha’s quest from the city, and developing

her inner journey when she engages in the life of the Coldridges' house; for it is here that she actually must face her conflictual feelings about her political beliefs as well as her personal struggles as a woman. Fand comments that "Martha's sojourn in various houses becomes symbolic of the still darkened compartments in herself that she must explore and open up to inner dialogue" (132). Her individual growth is gradually entwined with that of the generations of the Coldridges.

This chapter analyses Martha's intersubjective development from her experience as a female flâneuse in the city of London to her subsequent inner journey. Both experiences are developed in connection with the events in the Coldridge household so that her individual quest is placed in the context of family and political life in Britain. The chapter will also consider the view that women's writing in the twentieth century posits an individual "whose maturity will involve the recognition of her construction through the collective" (Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 32). The process, however, is shown to require the breaking down of boundaries between the one and the sustained spiritual search, as well as the effort to remember what collective living might become, for it is only through this process that Martha comes to acknowledge her particular individuality, so as to develop further the potential for a view of self where individuality is not seen to be at odds with the collective. Lessing suggests that the transformation of the personal is part of an evolutionarily significant transformation of the collective and in that way she set out to challenge sociobiological ideas of individualist Darwinian struggle.

### **1. A Modernist Flâneuse's Crossing Boundaries in Post-War London**

Martha's self-exile in post-war London presents her in the guise of a kind of late Modernist flâneuse. Janet Wolff argues that "the Flâneur is the modern hero; his experience, like that of Guys, is that of a freedom to move about in the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others" (39). However, Wolff also proposes that most flâneurs are male figures in the literature of modernity. Martha is unlike the male observers described by Richard Lehan as taking in the city "at a distance" and waiting "to be stimulated by the crowds" that contain the potentiality for full experience (74). Wolff proposes that earlier

flâneuses are still characterised with reference to the private space and men “retained the freedom to move in the crowd or to frequent cafes and pubs” (40). More than in the experience of the Salon, however, Martha’s adventures in the city seem to break through prescriptive gender lines. At the beginning of *The Four-Gated City*, Martha wanders from one place to another, not so much looking for a safe place to stay, as with earlier female wanderers, but a place where she might feel free. Since no one knows who she is, she gains a certain freedom through her anonymity and marginality: “all the pressures are off, no one cares, no need for the mask” (FGC 15). DuPlessis states that Martha “is an alien, outside of the rules, accents, and class codes that structure post-war English society” (192-193). Yet her life experiences and her journey of adventure from Africa to England make her exotically attractive to the other characters such as Iris, Jimmy and Stella, who are either conservative in their own outlook or represented as provincial in their experience. It is Martha’s “foreignness” as well as her “ordinary experience” (FGC 26) that appears to a character like Stella as offering a path to the imagination of a broader world, since Stella spends her whole life as “the wife, mother and daughter of dockers” (FGC 25). For Iris, Martha is even a “treasure”; Martha’s adventures rescue Iris from her bland life and Iris describes Martha as a valuable find like a “teaspoon found among rubble after a bomb had dropped” (FGC 31).<sup>1</sup> For them, London is not only the place they have lived in for years but the only place they know, whereas Martha has drifted through many places they would never visit, never know. Yet these are the characters who offer her a place to stay, a place to work.

But Martha continually reveals the need to adjust the distance between herself and the people around her when she starts feeling anxious. Lehan proposes that “modernism identified the awareness that the individual and the crowd were separate entities with separate modes of being” (71). The individual might get lost

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<sup>1</sup> One of the developments in the idea of the flâneur was in the surrealist idea of the “object trouve” when, wandering the city, the flâneur might find amongst the discarded and thrown-away, a treasured item, a work of art. Here, Martha herself is represented as an “object trouve” In a reversal of the surrealist image.

in mass society and “alienation is unavoidable”: the sense of threat is that if mass society is controlled, it is on the way to becoming a totalitarian society (Lehan 72). The intimacy and kindness of friends continually threaten Martha with the old anxiety concerning her family from her earlier days. Cederstrom argues that “Martha’s first problem is to establish a balance between her own needs and those of the collective” (96). Therefore, in order to be compatible with the people who are kind to her, Martha unintentionally resorts to the defence of ego-splitting: she discovers that her old self, Matty “was reborn” as an alter ego that had lain dormant for years. The role of Matty is like that of a clown or jester, a mimic and parodist and she “gained freedom from whatever other people must conform to, not so much by ignoring it, but when the point was reached when conformity might be expected, gaining exemption in an act of deliberate clumsiness—like a parody” (FGC 15). This role had been created by her in her childhood, “as an act of survival” (FGC 15) or as what Anna Freud regarded as an ego-defence. Although Anna Freud’s theory of ego-defences became the dominant framework for psychoanalysis in the United States from the 1940s and subtended much of the “therapy” culture created there after the war, Lessing herself was instead drawn to the more radical and anti-conformist anti-psychiatry movement and ideas of R. D. Laing which drew on continental philosophy, the Hegelian tradition, phenomenology and existentialist ideas.

Published in 1960, R. D. Laing’s *The Divided Self* examined the experience of psychosis, specifically schizophrenia, from an existentialist perspective; Laing was one of the first psychiatrists to argue for a phenomenological approach to treating mental illness whereby symptoms were read as a meaningful comment on an indefensible and unbearable existential experience of social reality. His argument was that when one’s existential totality is forced to split into fragments, as a form of defence, one experiences a kind of schizoid world, a world where affective relations are diminished and where the real appears as if screened off from the self, distorted and strange. In order to understand his patients, the therapist therefore needed to adjust himself to their perspective and to try to enter their worlds as a

place meaningful from within the space of the other. In that sense, to understand his patients was to “love” them (Laing, *Divided* 38). “Psychosis” is viewed as a consequence of a lack of congruity between self and others. The schizophrenic suffers the conflict of the “desire to reveal himself and his desire to conceal himself” (Laing, *Divided* 38). When he tries to live out the “truth” of his “existential position,” to claim his real situation, which is not accepted by common sense, he must pay the price of “being” mad (Laing, *Divided* 39). The self with a mask that is different from the inner self is the fundamental idea behind R. D. Laing’s idea of “a false-self,” which is “one way of not being oneself” (*Divided* 100). The schizoid person is “compulsively compliant to the will of others, it is partially autonomous and out of control” (Laing, *Divided* 102).<sup>2</sup> Laing, however, sees the mask of the false self as a way of superficially conforming to social expectation. Barbara Hill Rigney also argues that “Laing’s description of schizophrenia corresponds to Lessing’s: he sees it as, first, an alienation from the self, which leads to an alienation from other people as well” (70).

*The Four-Gated City*, begins with Martha sitting in the café, which is closed in the afternoon, clearly being observed by the café’s elderly owners, Iris and Jimmy, as they respond to the mood emanating from her: one of an unspoken secret in the air. The café begins to appear to Martha as a place of confinement since, within its boundaries, she is unable to represent or inhabit what she feels to be her true self. Frederick R. Karl proposes that “*The Four-Gated City* begins with suffocation and strangulation: the key images in the first pages are of grime, globules of wet, brownish-grey textures, oilcloth with spilled sugar, gritty smears, grease, thumb marks” (87). These “inside images” seem to represent the sense of “enclosure” and feeling of a closed society (Karl 87). Martha uses “Matty” to negotiate this world but then wonders if her true self could possibly be accepted

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<sup>2</sup> Marian Vlastos proposes in *Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy*, that Lessing shares a lot of ideas with Laing. Vlastos explains Laing’s idea: “A schizophrenic person is a split person, often split in more than two ways but usually maintaining two basic categories of self: a “true” or “inner” self and a “false self” or “false-self system” which he has created in order to deal with a world that, psychically, he repudiates” (246).

without the charming and easy-going alter ego: "Could they have been so kind to Martha, had she not offered them 'Matty'?" (FGC 22).

Martha experiences profound feelings of dislocation and conflict when she discovers fully how this greatest city in the world is vastly different from what she had understood it to be. Lehan suggests that two kinds of urban reality emerged from literary modernism, "the city constituted by the artist, whose inner feelings and impressions embody an urban vision, and the city as constituted by the crowd, which had a personality and urban meaning" (71). Through the different people she tries to contact, Martha realises that people are confined within the particularity of their lived experiences. From the perspective of an outsider, this country is "absorbed in myth, doped and dozing and dreaming" and nothing is as "it was described" since she sees "the simple fact that, in essence, nothing much had changed in the docks and in the café," the places of work and conviviality, the places where she meets her working class friends (FGC 28). But in the end, however, Martha rejects these romanticised images of a working class community just as she had rejected the conventional spaces of the middle classes which offer a different kind of confinement, where she has to "choose a slot" to fit herself into, and narrow herself down "for this stratum or that" (FGC 39). Free of both, she feels she has more opportunity to observe the city. In addition, she sees that people are defensive towards each other, probably as a consequence of the war, but also because of what she sees as something about the reserved character of the English. It is "not only she who had to fight paranoia" but also "so many visible rules there were to break, rules invisible to those who live by them" (FGC 35). When she meets an acquaintance from South Africa, Henry Martheson, who would like to offer her a decent job, she observes that society is clearly and starkly divided into classes. Inside this country, Iris and Stella are the types of individuals who "literate natives did not meet" (FGC 33). From the southern area of the city, "a world of black greasy hulls" (FGC 25) and bombed streets, she now arrives at the city centre, Piccadilly Circus, a name Martha was familiar with from her upbringing. It is a place that appeared to be a foreign country to Jimmy and Iris, unvisited since V.E. day, even



though it is only half an hour's bus ride from where they lived. These invisible lines, informed by dogmatism and myth-making organise the city invisibly into a patchwork of separate cells even though this is the city which is regarded and still regards itself as "the hub of the Empire" (FGC 35).<sup>3</sup> People in this city are written about (and divided) through their identifications with social class and ideology.

Through a disguise, Martha attempts to break out of the spaces with their invisible fences confining her as a young woman in the city. She wants to experience the exhilaration of surrendering her identity. Walking across each street, she seems to experience herself walking across visible and invisible "boundaries," living perpetually in such a demarcated world seems to Martha "a strain" (FGC 48). Wolff proposes that "the disguise made the life of the flâneur available" to the female writer George Sand in 1831 (41). Unlike Sand, who disguises herself as a man, however, Martha covers herself and is "protected by the thick ugliness of Mrs. Van's coat" which had encased this old woman during the war and the long winter in Zambia (FGC 17). Martha thus plays different roles in various situations until the division between her "self" and "not self" becomes blurred. Martha calls "strange identities into being with a switch of clothes or a change of voice—until one felt like an empty space without boundaries" (FGC 30). When stepping out of Iris's house, Martha is also in effect escaping from the protection of Iris's maternal love. But although she tries to reject their protection, she still aligns herself with her female companions. She started her journey "as if she were two people, herself and Iris"; Iris has lived in this area of London her whole life (FGC 21). Through Iris's familiarity with and love towards every small piece of her environment, Lessing suggests the existence of a feminine community built out of the domestic interiors presided over by women: "in such tiny loving anxious detail the histories of windowsills, skins of paint, replaced curtains and salvaged baulks of timber, there would be a recording instrument" (FGC 21). Although Iris seldom leaves the vicinity, she "put her brain together with the other million brains,

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<sup>3</sup> Lehan also proposes the examples in the work of Daniel Defoe such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tour of Great Britain: A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-27), where London is described as the center of the world (33).

women's brains" through this attention to domestic detail and to the objects of everyday life in order to create an alternative map of the city, one reflecting emotional attachment and cultures rather than any sociological or economic construction of class, a sort of "six-dimensional map which included the histories and lives and loves of people, London—a section map in depth" (FGC 21). This map includes places not normally included in official maps of the city: when Martha walks along Queensway, she sees prostitutes lining up on the pavement, waiting to be consumed, not only physically but also in men's fantasies. Yet Martha imagines, "perhaps in all this city it was only these girl's rooms where there was anything attractive, gay, rightly made?" (FGC 49). Like the narrator of *In Pursuit of the English*, Martha starts her journey feeling a connection with the life of women, including the marginalised and despised and consumed. Indeed, Watkins suggests that the narrator of *In Pursuit of the English* "never really finds the English working class that she is in pursuit of; instead she finds a community of women who are all, in their different ways, trying to negotiate different kinds of work: emotional, sexual and domestic" (3).

Besides these external stimulations, Martha turns inwards to look for the meaning beneath the disappointing surfaces of city life. Cederstrom suggests that her changing identities "bring Martha to the realization that her real self must exist somewhere beyond these social masks" (97). The moving river which crosses the city brings Martha a sense of connection to the city, and a sense of connecting to herself. When Martha looks down at the river, the "ebbing or racing or swelling or lurking waters," she remembers "what she had been before she had 'left home' to come 'home'" (FGC 29). She also sees her relationship with the world:

She was able to see herself as if from a hundred yards up, a coloured blob, among other blobs, on top of a bus, or in a street . . . 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. (FGC 29)

As Laing proposes, “existentially, the concretum is seen as a man’s existence, his being-in the world” (*Divided* 18). Martha’s inner self, which rejects the invitation by others to fit into their lives, seems to accord with Laing’s ideas. The self seeks by “being unembodied to transcend the world and hence to be safe” (Laing, *Divided* 84). In the passage quoted above, Martha seems to stand outside of and look down upon herself from a position outside of the picture, and then to resume a sense of being situated in her body within the frame of the picture. Therefore, as Martha keeps walking along the street, in this act of perambulation she looks for “a soft dark empty space” in her mind (*FGC* 51). By doing so, she “could move back in time, annulling time,” and she could be the real self who is beyond everyone’s expectation and who is not influenced by society. She sees Martha Quest as:

a young girl sitting under the tree where she could see a great hot landscape and a sky full of birds and clouds. But really, not in imagination—there she was . . . *she was*, nothing to do with Martha, or any other name she might have had attached to her, nothing to do with what she looked like, how she had been shaped. (*FGC* 52)

From Cederstrom’s perspective, “Martha’s ‘drive’ to remember who she really is” is a way “to free herself” (98). When Martha is alone, she is able to speak to herself and is able to pick up those pieces scattered in a world she had forgotten. Dagmar Barnouw suggests that when wandering alone in the street, Martha moves “towards the conscious recovery of that space with its pictures and voices” (120). After visiting her communist comrade, Phoebe, who appears also to be interested in social critique and in discovering the lives outside her own class, Martha realises that this country breaks into “fragments” because “people could not communicate across the dark that separated them” and she comes to realise that there is “something in the human mind that is separated, and divided” (*FGC* 99).

Martha also attempts to cross the boundaries of the body in her sexual relationships. Cederstrom proposes that Martha “attempts to find herself through a sexual relationship for she still feels that she needs a man to ‘bring her self to life’” (93). Unlike the men she encounters who were wounded in the war and therefore

developed a kind of solitary and narcissistic obsessional focus on their own bodies, Martha tries to bring back her own sense of her body through her relationships with these men. It is her participation in and appreciation of their strong feeling towards their own bodies that provides Martha with the existential feeling of her own self as “embodied,” an idea that Laing also developed from phenomenology.<sup>4</sup> Jack stimulates similar feelings in her with Thomas, a Jewish victim, whose “flesh breathed time and death; but his mind and his memory moved along another line parallel to it” (*FGC* 67). Bodies are engraved with the experiential traces of life’s experiences, but these go beyond normal frameworks. As for Jack, he realises his “madness” is a result of spending his whole life hating his father’s abuse of his family. After almost losing his life during the war and surviving, he has a renewed sense of his body, focusing his attention on the satisfaction of bodily needs, and thus has as a starting-point, “an experience of his body as a base from which he can be a person with other human beings” (Laing, *Divided* 69). Through sex, Jack tries to make his personal experience tune into a more general wavelength and realises that “hatred is simply part of the world, like one of the colours of the rainbow” (*FGC* 75). Here, sexuality is similar to Freud’s depiction of the libido; Robert Rogers explains that libido flows through “‘channels’ that are like ‘inter-communicating pipes’ . . . these ‘mental forces’ can be dammed up, and ‘diverted’” (7). However, the force of hatred is also as strong as that of the libido and is “like a thousand volts of electricity” (*FGC* 75). Jack seems consumed by such a force of hatred and indulges in it in his manipulative treatment of women who are also suffering in their life. Rigney suggests that through sex, Jack and his women were “locked into their purely subjective experiences, meeting needs that are solely individual, getting from each other a compensation for personal traumas of the past” (70). Fand also proposes that “through sex he overcame his enemies—Time and Death. But not his enemy Hatred” (132). As for Martha, Jack is the “instrument” for her to reach her previous experience of walking down the street in a high vibrating place (*FGC* 77).

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<sup>4</sup> Laing proposes that “in ordinary circumstances, to the extent that one feels one’s body to be alive, real, and substantial, one feels oneself alive, real and substantial. Most people feel they began when their bodies began and that they will end when their bodies die. We can say that such a person experiences himself as embodied” (*Divided* 68).

Martha's exploration of her body is more like her search for a new way to communicate with the world, to find a new self, to reach the "lit, alive space" through her "rehearsal" of hysteria (FGC 88) and in this, Lessing reflects a kind of Lawrentian vitalism. Martha says to Jack, "when you get to a new place in yourself, when you are going to break into something new, then it sometimes is presented to you like that; giggling and tears and hysteria" (FGC 88). However, Martha's "self-preservation" also warns her away from Jack's dangerous seductions because "he was paying too high a price for what he got" (FGC 54).

Martha struggles with the conflict between her yearning for freedom and the ideal rational self who should be "responsible to her fellow human beings" (FGC 30). Her responsibility as a mother always reminds her that she has left her daughter to come to this alien place, to set her daughter free, from her, and also from the family (FGC 85). Her conflict is reflected in her dreams. One dream appears as a picture of the golden age in which "a man and a woman, walking in a high place under a blue sky holding children by the hand, and with them all kinds of animals" (FGC 77-78). Another is a nightmare vision of a house, in which she saw herself, "with the face of a middle-aged woman, an anxious face, a face set to endure, to hold on—there was such pain in this vision, such hurt" (FGC 78). But she realises that she could never simply eschew her personal conflict by stepping into Jack's house where women are effectively slaves of his desire. She does not want this kind of living that would turn her "into a hypnotised animal" (FGC 116).

## **2. Hysterical Mothers, Traumatic Children, Emotional Reparation and the Collective History**

### **2.1. Hysterical Mothers in the House**

Martha firstly confronts her maternal conflict in the Coldridges' house, a place that makes her feel "unfree" (FGC 111). Her wandering in the city unexpectedly concludes with her arrival at the Coldridges where she prepares to work for a writer, Mark Coldridge, who is trying to realise a vision of an ideal city in the novel that he is writing. She wants to retain the freedom she has just

discovered for herself by managing to remove all attempts to label her identity. The house, though, reminds her of what she had escaped from in its pressure on her to adopt once more the mother role. She knows that as long as she lives in the house, she is “landing herself in this terrible situation which had already involved her: the child’s face haunted her” (FGC 111). Jean Pickering mentions that “the problems of motherhood from the perspectives of both parents and child still haunt her” (75). The house is “as sick and neurotic and hopeless as you can imagine . . . a dominating mamma over all, and a wife in a mental hospital, and a man just sitting, waiting for some sucker . . . to cope with everything” (FGC 115). Rozsika Parker explains this ambivalence from the perspective of the maternal persecutory anxiety. She proposes that “anxiety involves a mother’s phantasised experience of herself as punished and tormented by her infant” and she can feel “annihilated, devoured and devastated” by a child’s wilful determination (Parker 22). In addition, Juliet Flower MacCannell suggests that within the domestic politics of the Cold War, there was a heightening of the assumption that a woman’s place was in the home, with the home viewed again as a place of shelter and conflict – a freedom different from the chaotic outer world. As a consequence, there arises the “hysterical emphasis on the mother and the child throughout the ‘50s’ by means of which cultural anxiety was masked: anxiety about reproduction, change, and vulnerability” (MacCannell 159). In the Coldridges’ house, the hysterical mothers seem to resist their role in different ways and reflect a kind of collective maternal anxiety. Mark’s sister-in-law, Sally-Sarah, once a Jew refugee, is also as much of an “outsider” as Martha in this home and country (FGC 126). Her Jew identity is studiously ignored by the family, and they intentionally forget her original Jewish name, “Sarah,” so she simply becomes “Sally.” While her husband Colin Coldridge eventually leaves the family for his communist ideals, this final straw leads her to commit suicide. She is presented as a victim of the world of organised politics, which has deprived her first of her own family and then of her husband. Lynda, Mark’s wife, also shares much of Martha’s ambivalence about the maternal role and its enforced domestic dependencies. Lynda’s sense of turbulence is “close to Martha” because Lynda “could not stand being Mark’s wife, and Francis’ mother”

(FGC 133) and Lynda too senses that she is not cut out “for ordinary life” (FGC 142). But suffering from auditory hallucinations, Lynda is forced to remain in hospital until they would “abate” (FGC 143). For Martha, Mark’s mother, Margaret, is the enemy “she had got past . . . the capable middle-aged matron coping with everything by sheer force of long experience” (FGC 165). Martha even stands up to Margaret in a way that she could never manage with her own mother: “you seem to me like a little girl. You can’t always have your own way. You always have had it, haven’t you? You can’t stop people doing things just because you think it’s good for them” (FGC 167).

Mona Knapp argues that Martha’s commitment to the Coldridges is precisely “because her role in their house eludes conventional definition” (90). In the house of the Coldridges, as an outsider, Martha breaks down conventional and confining boundaries between people just as she did in her freewheeling around the city. Greene suggests that “paradoxically, she will find freedom by submerging herself in the pain and confusion of the Coldridges: this is the situation that becomes her growing point” (*Poetics* 75). When Martha helps each family member to work through their own turmoil and mental anguish, she also works through her own through the process of transference and counter transference. Gradually, Martha takes up those hysterical mothers’ responsibilities towards the children, first Francis, Mark and Lynda’s child, then Paul, Sally-Sarah’s child. That Martha is able to experience motherhood with children not her own is significant. Carol P. Christ suggests that “Lessing implies that motherhood can provide opportunities for insight only when the mother has a distance from her children” (61).

## **2.2. Traumatic Children**

Mark’s blueprint of an ideal city also draws Martha’s attention to stay. Lehan proposes that “the two major themes of modernism—the artist and the city—begin to emerge” (77). The artist tries to project an idealised city into the future and Lehan calls this “the ‘inward turn’, the modernists’ movement towards a subjective reality” (162). They build up a story together, *A City in the Desert*, about a mystic city, for there is “nothing static about this society” (FGC 161) according to

Mark. Their ideas about inner and outer cities also reflect their pursuit of a balance between self and the outer world. Lehan proposes that “intelligence turned inward—that is, intuition—accounted for the modernist belief in an inner, artistic reality inseparable from the realm of form” (80). In the second part of the fiction, however, it is suggested that emotional reparations between the different members are prior to that constitution of any form of ideal city. The alienated family is like the house, with “leaking roofs and plumbing” and Martha feels “as if an underground guerrilla war went on” (FGC 140). This inner and personal “guerrilla war” however, also reflects the Cold War atmosphere of the time. Beginning with Colin Coldridge’s perceived political betrayal of the British government, the family is surrounded by journalists and Paul, orphaned as a consequence of these events, becomes the child of violence. Paranoia about the external world invades the family, and invades relations between the children and the adults. Mark eventually suffers an emotional breakdown, complicated by the fact, as it is revealed, that not only is his mother spying on him, but so too are those who disguise themselves as their old acquaintances. He thus dramatically devotes himself to communist activity which reminds Martha of her previous experience and reveals again her different selves. Cederstrom offers a Jungian idea to explain Mark’s rapid shifts: “The snag about a radical conversion into one’s opposite is that one’s former life suffers repression and thus produces as unbalanced a state as existed before” (106). Watching Mark’s psychological transformation, Martha seems to look “at herself of the past: hot-eyed, angry, violent, unable to listen” (FGC 207) and Martha sees “her past had become fused with Mark’s present. Almost, or as if Mark was herself, or she Mark” (FGC 210). She and Mark trade the role of “The Defender”; she saves his manuscript from his irrational “critic,” and discovers an increasing emotion added to his writing that is different from the “cool abstract, detached” attitude in his previous war book (FGC 208). She recognises a new “clumsy hot emotionalism” that is similar to the emotion Thomas experienced when descending “into madness and to death” and she realises that Mark is also going through a process that is “new, an opening up, [that] had to be through a region of chaos, of conflict” (FGC 208). Mark splits himself into different selves “with perfect efficiency,” but none of them



recognise “the existence of the other” (FGC 211). Mark still plays his role as a good father and a patient husband; yet his new socialist self actually believes that “the family was doomed” (FGC 211).

### **2.3. Emotional Reparation**

Each person in the house searches for emotional reparation in their own way. Paul can only relate well to Lynda, who was deemed neurotic or even psychotic by society. Lynda’s resistance to physical intimacy reduces Paul’s over-reliance on his mother’s dependency. On the other hand, Francis suffers from the derisory attitude to communism displayed by his schoolmates and, like Martha earlier, turns himself into a “clown” in order to face bad times. Martha becomes Mark’s “deputy,” sometimes to help him resist the outer pressure, and sometimes to help him to communicate with people around him. For example, Martha can listen to what Lynda is “afraid of saying to Mark” and comfort her sorrow (FGC 222). Knapp proposes that “Martha is a buffer zone between the estranged couple, and their ménage à trois frees all three from the roles they would be forced to adopt in a twosome” (90).

Martha gradually realises that the house is an organic part of her own inner search which leads her towards a more collective experience. The house is symbolically divided into two worlds: one is that of Mark’s communist friends and the other is the superstitious world of Lynda in the basement. Martha gradually retreats into her inner life, while she sees her life has little development. Unlike the others, she refuses any external belief system, ideology or protocol, but in consequence at her worst moments, she feels a kind of misanthropic rage and hatred toward everyone else’s life as well as her own. But Martha is also waiting for something, as yet she knows not what form it might take, neither something with a destructive form, such as war, nor a kind of definite emotion, such as patriotism. Wilson notes that “psychiatric violence was the archetypal violence of the post-atomic world” (*Only Halfway* 114). Martha knows that the war would be “all slow spreading poisons and panic and hysteria and terror at the unknown” (FGC 225). She is haunted by nihilistic feelings, and “thoughts of death slowly filled the room.

When she came into it, it was to enter a region where death waited" (FGC 225). Pickering, however, argues that again Lessing is exploring the need for the experience of destruction and nihilism as a prelude to growth: "[a]bandoning the artificially constructed group based on ideology for one based on wholeness, Martha develops an organic process crucial to her future world view" (77). She finally recalls that Lynda had also been talking about "death," which would always be part of the house in the basement; so there appears to be a panoramic view, "a glimpse into a view of life where the house and the people in it could be seen as a whole, making a whole . . . They, in this house, had something in common, made up something . . ." (FGC 226). Her apprehension about death at this moment is quite similar to her apprehension about war in Mark's first book, describing that "humanity (the earth and its people) were a variety of living organism, a body, and war was a boil breaking out on it" (FGC 151). She comprehends that she is part of the house, as well as part of the outside world. When she becomes an observer of the family, and is thus involved less with personal feelings, she can also distance herself further from the idea of death as the negation of everything. Awakened from her dormancy, she is filled with many different kinds of emotions: "waves of vicious emotion washed in and out of her" (FGC 227). However, in Martha's dream, a warning voice says that if she continues to rage, she will be "made to do it again" (FGC 229). Martha's hatred is even embodied in her dream that "Patty Samuel, multiplied into an army, in the shape of a nation which was all sinister threatening power, encompassed Martha, threatened her with death" (FGC 229). It reveals that what she hates is neither Patty Samuel, nor the communism that she has abandoned, but a much greater horror of the unknown.

Martha is forced to face her own vulnerability when she receives Mrs. Quest's information about her forthcoming visit. Cederstrom argues that "Mrs. Quest's visit had provided the first weakening of Martha's façade, forcing her to deal with her past and its pain" (108). Martha's mask of the strong and calm middle-aged woman is dropped and when the "old antagonist, the competent middle-aged woman" disappears, she again becomes "Martha, a poor confused

helpless creature" (FGC 247). Although consulting Lynda about her breakdown, she would rather depend on her own rationality to figure things out by herself, since the basement is a territory belonging to "weak-minded fools" (FGC 248).

Through her own study of psychoanalysis and information from Lynda, Martha gradually understands that so-called "mental illness" is mostly a definition imposed on those who see the world differently, by those who have a single picture. Cederstrom proposes that "[b]reakdown, for Laing and Lessing, is an impetus to psychic growth, since descent involves a loosening of the hold of old values and ideas" (105). The psychiatric orthodoxy of the period presumed that schizophrenia was most likely hereditary, a consequence of faulty innate biological hard-wiring or defects in the neurological configuration of the brain. Wilson mentions that "orthodox psychiatrists explained mad behaviour as an effect of illness" and such views "individualised the patient past the point of moral responsibility" (*Only Halfway* 114-115). She also refers to the book *Battle for the Mind* (1957) which deals with the moral issue of "brain washing" and "gave the impression that the individual was at the mercy of physical and mental techniques of manipulation, which made liberal ideas of the 'personality,' 'free will,' and 'human dignity' somewhat meaningless" (114). Psychiatrists therefore mainly treated patients with "drugs and other physical forms of treatment" (Wilson, *Only Halfway* 114),<sup>5</sup> assuming that there could be no possibility of intelligible conversation or common ground of understanding between the sane and the insane. Martha comes to understand that she was once "blind" in this way. Her "strain, stress, neurosis" are "freely admitted, freely discussed" only because she is not labelled as having a mental breakdown (FGC 255). However, many people around her even suffer from self-guilt for their mental illness, such as the wife of a comrade, Patty Samuel, and Jimmy's wife.

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<sup>5</sup> Wilson proposes that an extreme traditional psychiatry is represented by William Sargan, a psychiatrist who advocated "brain surgery (leucotomy and lobotomy) for mental disorders"; Sargan's idea on "brainwashing," "similarly gave the impression that the individual was at the mercy of physical and mental techniques of manipulation" (Wilson, *Only Halfway* 114). Also see Sargan.

In the process of her breakdown, Martha realises how she had buried her repressed emotions towards her mother by “blocking of the pain” and also let go of her memory since she had also “blocked off half of her life with it” (FGC 243). Greene suggests that “her repression of the pain she had felt in relation to her mother has caused her to lose parts of her self and her past” (*Poetics* 85). While Martha can confront her embedded complex towards her mother, she also faces her real self. This sense of anxiety towards the maternal role could be explained from the perspective of Melanie Klein’s analysis of infants’ development from the early submerged and fragmentary experience: to recognise “the mother as a whole person who is the source of both good and bad experiences” is an important stage to process for a reparative position (Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 66). Instead of simply casting off one’s “unwanted ‘bad’ feelings,” one has to develop “the ability to tolerate ambivalence” (Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 66). Martha’s ambivalent emotion towards her mother is aroused again: “one was pity, strong, searing, unbearable” and “the other was a wild need to run—anywhere” (FGC 257). She remembers her mother’s self-pity towards women of her generation as they are unable to get what they want; she also recalls her own rebelliousness as a youth as a way to escape from her mother’s prejudice against her growing up into an adult. In her collapse, she painfully excavates her past and she even develops a different physical perception. Her unembodied feelings are expanded and it seems that “Martha” is only “a convenient label to attach to her sense of self” (FGC 253). She begins to see different selves in the mirror who might be “the one that watches” or “the one who is watched” and to have a new sensual relation to the outer world, “as if she had not lived in this room now, for four years, everything in it seemed extraordinary, and new” (FGC 254). Meanwhile, in order to transcend her painful feelings, she envisions herself in a different kind of physical appearance whereby she has “no sex” and transforms “into a different shape” (FGC 260). To be part of the world she must lose her name and identity. But when she returns to reality, she sees the sad Martha, a daughter who did not receive any feeling of love from her mother, a mother who abandoned her own daughter. Martha weeps while “a small girl wept with her mamma, mamma, why are you so cold, so unkind, why did you never love

me?" (FGC 261). Pickering suggests that "[t]his is Martha's first recognition that the very act of leaving by which she intended to free Caroline has in fact induced the nightmare repetition" (79). She wants Dr. Lamb to "give her back pity, the strength to hold it, and not be destroyed by it. She must be able, when her mother came, to pity her, to love her, to cherish her and not be destroyed" (FGC 261).

Like Martha, Mrs. Quest also wrestles with her anxieties about meeting Martha. For a long time, she not only suffers from the policy of "Apartheid" in Africa, but also "has been destroyed by her sexual, emotional, psychological repression" (Karl 92-93). In the society of the colony, Mrs. Quest once live in "a schizoid paranoiac routine in which blacks both serve and persecute her" (Karl 92). Mrs. Quest projects her own negative experiences and repressed feelings onto her family in her interaction with them though she acts like a strong-willed woman. Joan Riviere explains in "Love, Hate and Aggression" that the will to power "derives from the attempt to control the dangers in oneself more directly than by the methods of projection and of fight" (39). Her feelings of self-depreciation are similar to Lynda's "nothing but": "I'm nothing but an unpaid servant" (FGC 287). Forced to live alone, however, with only the company of the black servant, Steve, he becomes her consolation and allows her to break through the rigid rules of her society. Before he leaves, Steven tells her that "you have a black heart, missus, you are my mother," and it is the first time that she is appreciated by another in a maternal role (FGC 289). But the suggestion is that emotional reparation could be achieved beyond family. Mrs. Quest later develops a more intimate relationship with a black woman, Marie. This close relationship brings back Mrs. Quest's sense of dignity, and she "could talk like a human being" (FGC 283). When she is with Marie, she does not act like a mother by judging Marie's illegitimate children (FGC298). Mrs. Quest is then confident that she might have the ability to love Martha too, though Martha still seems to her, "selfish, inconsiderate, immoral" (FGC 282). However, Mrs. Quest actually curses her own fate that she is unlike her daughter who has choices and is "free" in her eyes, while she has little chance to execute her free will, except in the choice of her husband, "the brief moment

before her marriage” (FGC 282). Martha uses Mark’s love as a means to rebel against her mother, as she had done in her youth and in her marriage with Douglas. In this way she can escape from the pain of the outside world, “where the ordinary rules of life are put aside” (FGC 268). In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Nancy Chodorow proposes that girls often transfer the “object-relational experience” from their mother to others, especially in the relationship of “heterosexual love” (127). It is the first time that Martha relies on Mark’s comfort and kindness to her. However, there is an “observer” inside herself who stays awake and watches herself repeating what she had done in her adolescence—searching for freedom in romantic love. In Martha, she sees “the person who watched and waited” who is still awake when Martha escapes to Mark’s bed (FGC 268). Martha is tortured not only by her resentment but also her feeling of care and responsibility towards her mother, both of which she cannot escape from, nor let go. Martha asks Dr. Lamb: “are we just children, and not responsible at all, ever, for what we live in?” (FGC 317). Carol Gilligan proposes that for women an “ethics of care” presides over a more impersonal concept of rights and justice so that for them, “the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights” (19). Mrs. Quest and Martha fall into the old pattern of their antagonist attitude as they had before, since they are confined within their responsibilities of mother and daughter but could not reveal their real “care” towards each other. Mrs. Quest obtains no “‘real’ embrace” from Martha (FGC 315). Sprague proposes that “Martha has typically taunted her mother with her sexuality and her intellect and will do so again both wittingly and unwittingly, affronting her with capacities traditionally denied to women, capacities May rejects in her daughter and in other women” (*Narrative Patterns* 114). Martha finally accepts Dr. Lamb’s assistance to make her mother confront the fact that she and her daughter are “unable to break the patterns of their shared past” (Sprague, *Narrative Patterns* 114). They resist the kind of pre-oedipal pull towards intimacy proposed by Chodorow, and resolve the emotional impasse by separating in a repetition of life-long oscillations between attempted

intimacy, stand-off and hostility. They “kissed politely, exchanged looks of ironic desperation, smiled and parted” (FGC 321).

### **3. Intersubjectivity through Differentiating, Recognition and Connecting with the Collective, from the Perspective of Jessica Benjamin**

#### **3.1. The Growth of the Inner City**

Lessing presents the political and social world of the mid-fifties as a potentially new turning point, especially after the revolution in Hungary in 1956. Even the air in London seems to be different than it was before, becoming “cleared, lifted, lightened” compared with the atmosphere of surveillance experienced by Coldridges during the earlier Cold War, of being spied upon and monitored; the fear and the events that “affected them” have become memories and “a phrase or a set of words” (FGC 328). Now Martha also must confront the growing awareness of her inner voices, especially from her memory: “the past enveloped, seeped through the present” (FGC 333). She imagines scenes that she had experienced in the past reappearing in her present life. Then, she visits the regions of the “hatreds and resentments” from the past trauma and finds out how much she can withstand their revisitation (FGC 333). In the process of wrestling herself out of the dark, she discovers “doors she had not known existed” and she has “entered places in herself she had not known were there” (FGC 334). Cederstrom states that Martha is “more interested now in forging a permanent link with those parts of herself which are not dependent upon anyone else” (109).

Martha still looks for the ideal city beneath the changing improvement of its appearance, “a solid, slow-moving thing” that is expressed in Mark’s book. Cederstrom proposes that Martha contrasts “the survivor’s stable inner world with the world of time and history and its rapid cycles of growth and destruction” (109). When Martha walks onto the street again, the city is different from the one which was “dirty, ruinous war-soaked” when she had just arrived (FGC 335). With “that other one in her mind,” she realises that underneath the surface of freshness, there is “hiding weights of shoddiness that threatened to crumble and lean, like the house in Radlett Street” (FGC 336). In this new atmosphere, the city has grown up

so fast that the pain of the past is covered but unresolved. Lehan mentions that for many modern writers the idea of Enlightenment progress is undermined by a “mythic and symbolic reality” but this other reality cannot be reconciled with “a belief in linear evolution and mechanical progress” (79).

### **3.2. The Differences of Individualities**

Like the city, in a great movement, the members of the Coldridge family must face the nature of their own individuality. Paul’s search for individuality triggers the growth of every individual. Paul keeps stealing things as a substitute for “stealing love,” and he looks for endless tolerance from his school so that he can feel that he is loved (*FGC* 338). The moral crisis that Paul brings to the family is similar to what Gilligan proposes in her ethics of care. Instead of the “justice” sought by the male psychoanalyst, Lawrence A. Blum explains that Gilligan’s idea of care is “founded in a sense of concrete connection and direct response between persons, a direct sense of connection which exists prior to moral beliefs about what is right or wrong or which principle to accept” (52). Paul’s attempt to steal things also reveals his need to receive care through the direct interaction between people instead of the abstract moral concern of the society.

Confronting the transformation of the children, Lynda also tries to adjust herself in her role as a mother. When she decides to overcome her dependence on the drugs given to her in the hospital, it happens to be the time of “Francis’s determination to reclaim his mother and his home” (*FGC* 348). Knapp suggests that the “the necessity of guarding the future by nurturing the younger generation” as a motif “remains unchanged in Lessing’s work” (97). Their effort develops a kind of interaction which recognises the need of each other. Francis’s attempt to communicate makes Lynda feel that she and her basement are no longer “forbidden territory, unclean, like lepers,” so that Lynda could also “learn to be with him, not to feel ill, not to be upset” (*FGC* 347). Her battle is also with orthodox psychiatry which tries “to do away with the autonomy of the individual who was conceived of as an essentially passive entity conditioned, shaped and moulded by the environment” (Wilson, *Only Halfway* 115).



Lynda faces an even more arduous battle since she also must confront Dorothy and Paul's dependence on her and their anger towards her. Ironically, Dorothy and Paul are dependent on Lynda because their differences are not recognised by society. In *The Shadow of the Other Subject: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, Jessica Benjamin explains the concept of intersubjectivity from the perspective of object relations and proposes that "difference, hate, failure of love can be surmounted not because the self is unified, but because it can tolerate being divided" (105). Through recognition that the "other" is outside oneself, one might therefore come to accept the difference of each other, "not to be felt as a coercive command to 'become' the other, and therefore not be defended against by assimilating it to self" (Benjamin 95). However, Benjamin explains further that this kind of "externality" allows a "representation of the other as simultaneously outside control and nonthreatening—a form of negation that social relations of dominance enforced by violence intrinsically prevent" (96). As a matronly friend of Lynda, Dorothy tries to prove herself recovered by being competent, so she needs to demonstrate "her stability by mothering Lynda, and dealing with everyday necessities" (Knapp 96). She criticises Lynda for being "nothing-but-a child" because Lynda easily gets along with Paul (FGC 388). Dorothy uses drugs to urge Lynda back to her company since she herself is too weak to fight the prejudices of society for their difference. The big machine of the medical system, the rise of Big Pharma, forces Lynda to be included in the social system and to be "drugged to the eyeballs" (FGC 354). While Martha goes to Dr. Lamb for her inner voices and visions, such as her premonition of Dorothy slashing her wrists (FGC 356), she is irritated that society confers on Dr. Lamb such great power that could deprive others' freedom with "its inclusiveness, its arbitrariness, its freedom to behave as it wished" (FGC 357).

Meanwhile, like Lynda, who could not detach herself from others' expectations, Martha must struggle with her matron's role in the house to conduct "a holding operation," when "there seems no centre in the house, nothing to hold it together" (FGC 391). Pickering mentions that Martha has become "the matron, the

figure whom in the opening scene of *Martha's Quest* she most hated and feared" (81). According to Klein's idea, infants internalise what they perceive from the outer world.<sup>6</sup> It seems that although Martha tries to escape from her mother's influence, she is still playing the "old role" by creating a "forceful authoritarian" persona, like putting on a "new coat" (FGC 392). She needs to be watchful of everyone's needs and moods and use any kind of "tactics" to run things, keep things going. Gilligan proposes that "[s]ensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view" (16). Deluged with this need to take on the different trivia of everyone, she feels herself to be "a mass of fragments, or facets, or bits of mirror reflecting qualities embodied in other people" (FGC 391). In the matron role, she has to pick up these fragments and make them whole. However, Martha thus can break through her personal experience and from the perspective of impersonality, she is able to set her past free. "The rejuvenation a young girl gives her mother or an older woman is a setting free into impersonality, a setting free, also from her personal past" (FGC 429). While her day is "filled with a million details, fragments, reflected off the faceted mirror that was one's personality," she also seems to respond "all the time, every second, to these past selves" (FGC 395). Nevertheless, she must pay the price that her sense of selfhood is so stripped away that "of all the times in her life she had never been less Martha than now" and her "self had floated away and become part of that timeless and fluid creature" (FGC 428).

### **3.3 The Connection with the Shadow of the Other**

The boundary of her sense of self is so blurred that it leads her to hear others' thinking in their minds. The way Martha is affected by the others in her perceptions could be explained from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of "reversibility" of the perceiving subject in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968). In the intermundane spaces, people create the perceptible world that they enter into.

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<sup>6</sup> Juliet Mitchell explains in *The Selected Melanie Klein* that in introjections, the ego "takes into itself what it perceives or experiences of the object" (20).

Nick Crossley explains that subjects are enjoined to each other through the “meaningful behaviour of the other which counts” (30). Martha’s focus on the life of others means that she receives their reflections directly through her perceptions. The other bodily subject is animated and its animation communicates (Crossley 30). Martha starts to hear the ideas in everyone’s minds, such as Mark’s desire for Lynda, as well as Paul’s ideas. Cherry Clayton proposes that Martha’s ability to use telepathy

is not exalting irrationality or celebrating women as telepathic goddess, but is calling into question the whole Western enterprise of scientific rationality as a defining element in that feudal, patriarchal Eurocentric order which was transported to the colonies and which subordinates women by dividing them into separate functions that serve the male order: hostess, legal wife, sexual partner, biological mother. (56)

The desire to communicate and the search for the media to also communicate had already been represented at the beginning when Martha wandered around the city, eager to ring people from different telephone boxes. Now Martha seems to continue her pursuit of connecting herself with the city in a different way. Martha and Lynda “work” secretly and start to discover a “new sensation, or a glimmer of something” represented in all kinds of art (FGC 414). Reconstructing the representation of the world, they try to envision this different world for themselves. Breaking the conventional ways of thinking and discussion, they merely let “talk flow, since in the spaces between words, sentences, something else might come in” by gathering every kind of material and they “get glimpses of a new sort of understanding” (FGC 415). Since what they have discovered is so irrational in terms of the perceptions of organised society, “it comes out perverted, through madness” (FGC 415). Rigney proposes that Martha realises that “conscious madness, as opposed to the world’s *unconscious* madness, is the way to truth itself” (74). It is because “Lynda had been mad, had not tested certain limits,” that they are able to go beyond what might have previously seemed absurd or scary

(FGC 415).

Benjamin proposes that splitting can be transformed “in relation to the outside other or reduce the other to a locus of the self’s disowned parts” (97). In the relationship between Margaret and Mark, Mark’s individualisation is performed in their long term antagonist political positions while Margaret is always represented as the conservative tradition that Mark is eager to rebuff. The irony is made obvious after Mark visits Colin in Russia; the fact is disclosed that Colin left his family and country not for political ideals, but for his personal research development, whereby selfishness and lack of affection towards his past hurt his family but is not admitted by Mark. Another failed individual splitting is performed in the mother-daughter relationship between Phoebe and her daughters. Phoebe suffers a breakdown because her plan of second marriage to Jim Troyes is destroyed by her girls, who mock her “failure as a woman and as a mother” (FGC 433). When she visits a female psychotherapist, Mrs. Johns, she finds no support from her and she is effectively blamed for not being feminine enough and it is even suggested that the treatment fails because of her envy of Mrs. Johns’ femininity.

On the other hand, the sense of splitting opens the enclosed inner world and allows the existence of others outside. Benjamin explains that the source for this splitting is “not the self-enclosed unity of the subject, but the contradictions that our need for the other’s independent existence” create (98). Lynda’s madness exemplifies the allowance of splitting which connects each one in different but intersubjective ways. Lynda’s frank instruction makes Paul feel “a sense of morality” (FGC 430). Meanwhile, forcing Francis to confront with her illness, Lynda tries to put on more responsibility as a mother, “intermittently, but responsibly” (FGC 439) so that she is able to retreat into her own world. Mark also tries to take care of her and share Martha and Lynda’s stress, inside to outside, and “the three of them, Mark, Martha, Lynda, were in a tight knot together of shared tension, all ordinary life suspended” (FGC 439). However, Mark’s rationality prevents him from entering Lynda’s mad world. He is exhausted from “holding himself in one piece while Lynda

went to pieces" (FGC 439). Lynda's madness appears such a kind of immense energy that Mark can only vent his "psychic tension" through sex with Martha to resist the "charge or current that might shake him to bits" (FGC 440). Mark recognises that there is a "wavelength of madness" and anyone could hook into it (FGC 441). Martha feels irritated about being treated as an instrument of sex so she recalls Jack and her memory of sex with him, in which she looks for something permanent. But she finds Jack has become a person who is "cruel, hard, driving" and "all domination and hurt" (FGC 446). She sees clearly now that Jack's body has become a machine for him, and is "entirely a servant to a kind of cunning, which needed to get a woman under its will, in order to degrade her morally" (FGC 448). Seducing girls to work for his brothel, Jack indulges himself in manipulating girls who are "breaking down" (FGC 477). Barnouw suggests that "his body had been taken over by hatred, by a degraded mind that needs to possess the other completely by degrading her morally" (123).

But the Aldermaston march is crucial as a collective expression as it embodies people's fear of the madness of the world for using nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> The march gathers people from different political standpoints and is a demonstration of the life of different generations. Some are survivors of the war and have been "stripped" by the outer world (FGC 457). Some people are the young generation in a mood to change the world. This is the first time Martha, Mark and Lynda appear in public and they appear to be like any other group of people who walk in the march. Margaret and her gay husband form another special kind of couple. Barnouw proposes that Martha "fully understands the meaning of this fluidity in their relationship during one of the peace marches where she see variations of Lynda-Mark-Martha, Mark-Martha-Lynda pass by in the long line of Marchers" (121). The three of them could also be submerged by anyone, with "the permanent centre around which changing constellations of young and old people, lovers, friends, and enemies revolve" (Barnouw 121). While the individuals are part of the collective, Martha hears the voice of her daughter Caroline, still crying out

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<sup>7</sup> The Aldermaston march was first held in 1958 as an anti-nuclear weapon demonstration. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament organised marches from 1959-1965.

about what Martha used to refuse the world: “it matters if people, individuals said, no” (FGC 455).

Juxtaposed with the scene of the grand march, Mark’s study room appears as another inner reflection towards madness, so the distinction between the rational and the irrational, public and private is again blurred. After the march, the youths gather in Mark’s study room, exhibiting a different kind of madness, covered with notes and Mark’s statements. Lynda started the habitual decoration of the wall, with the notes of Dorothy who tried to “balance herself into normality,” even as “a way of letting off steam, like letters to herself” (FGC 478). Mark continued the decoration as a kind of serious ritual enacted with the purpose of finding out the development of things. The real significance is demonstrated in its layout, composed of the trivial events in the house, the news about the threats of war, even Lynda’s dreams which predict the future. Vlastos proposes that by “documenting areas of destruction and failure all over the earth, Mark is better able to see the world as a whole, to determine the true drift of man’s intensions by fitting one fact with another” (129). In answering an American youth’s doubts about the effect of the march, and his wonder if anything would be changed, Lynda proposes that a thought might cause “the impulse” in the mind which might breed the same or another thought (FGC 489). The impulse is similar to that wavelength created in the madness, which is able to break down the boundaries and connect people in different ways.

#### **4. Imagination through the Naked Eye and Eye of the Heart: Sufism and Phenomenology**

##### **4.1. The Harvest of the Generation**

The fourth part of the story starts with the stage of the new London along with the children. The narrative appears as a kind of inconsistent and floating movement picked up from one member to another, from the private life to the atmosphere of the changing city. It seems to represent how personal life interacts with the fluctuation of the outer world. Waugh proposes in *The Harvest of the*

*Sixties: English Literature and Its Background, 1960 to 1990*, that in the period of 1960-90, there had been “a pervasive preoccupation with the loss of any transcendent sphere” and that “personal consciousness and history too have come to be defined rather by metaphors of discontinuity and crisis than by those of unification and continuity” (2). Karl proposes that all relationships are symbiotic in *The Four-Gated City*: “no one stands without using another as crutch; no one is sick or well without influencing the sickness or well-being of another” (93). Martha, Mark, and Lynda realise that their life with the next generation is a process that involves understanding one’s self, one’s struggle, and might set themselves free from the past. They recognise that “to have worked through, to have stood firm in, that storm which was one’s adolescence was, after all, to have been made free of one’s own” (FGC 493). The children start to take responsibility for people around them and for the city. Francis reflects his early childhood experience of being “the clown” in his satirical play (FGC 494). Furthermore, he develops an eccentric relationship with his cousin Jill, who is incapable of “ordinary life” and has had similar failed relationships with different people and who also has children (FGC 498). On the other hand, Paul becomes a capitalist and takes care of Zena and her other friends, who are also waifs like him. Mark publishes another book, *The Way of a Tory Hostess*, about a Jewish man who turns his back on tradition but falls into the same pattern of his previous generation. The book seems to be a reflection about his antagonism towards his mother. Lynda tries to return to normal life as Mark’s wife, and even uses all her energy to show her ability to fit an “ordinary life” (FGC 517). The Coldridges become fully involved with the cultural and political activities represented by the narrator as a “sign of the time.” Besides the changing map of politics, culture is also in a kind of new phase. Television is the new media form reflecting and mediating the world, increasingly blurring the distinction between reality and imagination. The evolution of civilisation brings a kind of “dislocation and disconnection” between inner and outer worlds. It implies that Mark’s ideal city might appear in an unexpected way.

#### 4.2. Martha's Development of Telepathic Ability

At this moment when the outer world begins to move again, Martha searches for another inner breakthrough because she is now unable to gain further relief in her dreams, which were once a way to free Martha from the strains of the ordinary body. She experiences "a heaviness, a lack of flow" (FGC 507). Laing proposes that "madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breaking through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death" (45). When Mark decides to hold on to his ordinary life, instead of his explored experience with Lynda, Martha decides to "let go" and to "sink herself" (FGC 532). Clayton proposes that "the psychic experiments in the basement," are "the individual counterpart in the narrative of the broad socialist movement" as well as "its subterranean gender component" (58). Martha accompanies Lynda as her carer as she once was in ordinary life at the beginning, but she gradually learns from Lynda the knowledge in this extra-ordinary region. Lynda walks "between the two walls visible and invisible" (FGC 533). Martha slowly follows Lynda's communicative manner and she rids herself of those "controlling movement[s]" and "controlling words" that adhere to their ordinary life (FGC 538). She can begin to enter the world of Lynda, even to be "part of Lynda" (FGC 538). Vlastos proposes that because of her "long apprenticeship in psychic phenomena," she enters Lynda's world easily (132).<sup>8</sup>

For her ongoing focus on developing her consciousness, Martha now expands her consciousness to a broader world, in the process of working with Lynda. Christ proposes that "two parts of women's experience, mother and witch or madwoman, are joined" (67). Through Lynda's unusual flow of conversations, Martha realises that the words could be those of any woman on the street, or even Mrs. Quest. Martha realises that the common use of words has "a weight to it which compelled attention" and are usually used wrongly and lose their "real

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<sup>8</sup> Vlastos mentions that "Martha's ability to journey so successfully into inner space and time is not simply the effect of her humanness and intuitive grasp of those psychoanalytical principles that Laing had articulated, but also the log result of a long apprenticeship in psychic phenomena" (132).



sense" (*FGC* 539). Sydney Janet Kaplan explains that "words no longer enclose meaning but are used as initiators into the search for it" (543). Like sailing on a boat, they set off into the "human mind" the place she had visited in her childhood but is destroyed by the "machinery of ordinary life" (*FGC* 541). In the preface to this part, Lessing proposes a concept from Sufism that "there are a thousand other forms of Mind" (*FGC* 492). Now Martha begins the journey of finding out and relating to those different forms of mind. Vlastos proposes that "now Lynda's quest becomes Martha's quest: to relearn the awareness and the significance of the awareness of the child"; but the achievement "depends on the conscious psychic rebirth of the adult" (132).<sup>9</sup> The surrounding walls symbolise the walls that imprison them and hide them from their real minds. Testing the walls is actually Lynda's way of looking beyond the confinement and to "step outside, free" and also to break down the boundaries between one another (*FGC* 542). Kaplan also proposes that they "struggle to connect individual and communal consciousness—a process of communication" (544).<sup>10</sup> Lynda's movement creates a kind of energy which had "sent Mark up to Martha, to make love," then sent Martha to Jack in order to make the force "be dammed, contained, held," which is similar to Martha's previous sexual experience with Jack which allows her to reach the impersonal world (*FGC* 533-4). Draine proposes that the metaphors "point to a sort of Jungian panpsychism" and it seems as if "Jack brings to her a timeless range of sexual responses, and that she can connect these with a pool of universal energies he shares with others" (58). Now Martha confronts the unconscious world again, including the negative and positive parts. This force, from "the impersonal sea" could "become the thousand volts of hate as easily as it could become love" (*FGC* 544). Unfortunately, Jack's degraded mind attracts him to the power of hatred instead of love. Kaplan observes that "'Impersonal,' defines, at last, the relationship of human being to human being, and human being to nature" (548). Now Martha again experiences the "lightness and clarity" just as she had when she arrived in

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<sup>9</sup> Vlastos also proposes Laing's similar idea that "each child is a 'potential prophet'" (132).

<sup>10</sup> Draine also elaborates this idea that Martha is aware that "it is possible for individuals to share the same 'wavelength' or to tap into each other's stream of thought, these electrical images mix with images of electronic communication" (58).

London all those years ago (FGC 545). In *Sufism and Surrealism*, Adonis explains the vision and images seen by the naked eye and the eye of the heart. He explains that “mysticism” does not mean detaching oneself from the real world, “but only detaching oneself from its overt appearance, in order to attain its depths and plunge into its inner dimension, that which goes beyond the appearance to the concealed and from the ‘present’ to the ‘absent’” (172). The eye of the heart also echoes Merleau-Ponty’s concept that perceivers must go beyond themselves and perception “must be a dialectical process which is affected between the organism and its environment” (Crossley 27). Now Martha can hear what Lynda is saying in her mind, and even in her “human mind”; she also has to make a concerted (effort) “of discovery, of trying to understand, to link, to make sense” and they return to being like “a baby trying to walk, that was what she was” (FGC 546). Breaking the confined abilities and passages to communicate meanings that one was accustomed to, Martha then explores the way to “communicate through sound, or through the small moving pictures,” or in “dreams,” or by “water, the easiest channel through the lump of incomprehension” (FGC 548). They even develop their sensual abilities, such as special sight to see mood or capture what they have seen. Within the inner journey, Lynda once met a guru who brings her the love of God and informed her that she is the one who was chosen by the Great Mother and had been “freed from the tyrannies of the flesh” (FGC 549). However, Lynda’s “self-absorbed murmur” and visions are considered as “hallucination” by the hospital and staff institutions who “want machines, they don’t want people” (FGC 551).

Their exploration in the inner world is also a way to see through the external phenomena and remember their aboriginal abilities. Adonis mentions that artistic language is not there to “reproduce the world and imprison its known, external images, but so that they can free it, maintaining its internal dynamism, for infinity, and making it appear continually in new images” (169). In Martha’s dream, these three people emerge in a new world and Martha remembers that “beside her in a golden light, had walked Lynda, a smiling girl, and they went towards a man, whose face was still confidence and welcome. This is Mark” (FGC 553). Walking out of the

room and reliving her memory when she had just arrived, she feels that the sky is so beautiful and realises that her fantastic earlier experiences had become degenerated. Kaplan suggests that “the evolution towards a universal consciousness in Doris Lessing's novels appears to begin with an approach to reality centred in the physical body and its relationship with nature” (546). She also says,

Let me keep this, let me not lose it, oh how could I have borne it all these years, all this life, being dead and asleep and not seeing, seeing nothing; for now everything was so much there, present, existing in an effulgence of delight, offering themselves to her, till she felt they were extensions of her and she of them, or at least, their joy and hers sang together. (*FGC* 554)

Awakened from this hypnotised state, Martha now sees people on the street appearing to her as scary creatures with decayed organs and equipped with many artificial things. Martha expands her perception in the inner journey to her situation in the outer world and perceives that people live in a smelly and decayed environment and “in a condition of sleep-walking: they were not aware of themselves, of other people, of what went on around them” (*FGC* 555). Since their physical sensualities are numbed and “atrophied,” it is necessary that they were not able to turn on their antenna to tune into the ideas of other people. The insensitive physical feelings reflect their psychological restriction which is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s description of embodied consciousness. They are “essentially isolated, shut in, enclosed inside their hideously defective bodies, behind their dreaming drugged eyes, above all, inside a net of wants and needs that made it impossible for them to think of anything else” (*FGC* 556). And she realises that she was once one of these weird creatures who degenerate their own sensual feelings by being caged and paralysed by different kind of “machines,” “drugs” and “chemicals” (*FGC* 555). Draine posits that the “poisons, drugs, and hypnosis become images of all those processes by which society prevents the natural course of human evolution” (62). Martha even produces sounds of giggling instead of laughter and tries to “retreat away from a fact which needed to be faced” (*FGC* 559). Now Martha would rather

choose to be mad instead of being “a lump of lethargy” like everyone else, unaware of the real world. This kind of sensual experience could be found in childhood, but is neglected in education and development and in the process of “being well-ordered, well trained” (FGC 559).

Martha also turns to analyse those who develop their perceptions through expansion of the mind. However, the fortune-teller, Rosa Mellendip’s world, is imprisoned in a “cosy, self-satisfied, stagnant” state and therefore has the same quality of “lifelessness” (FGC 560). Jimmy, a scientist, who writes science fiction and studies everything “rejected by official culture and scholarship,” focuses on his mind as a contrary extreme of Jack. It is ironic that Jimmy adopts Mark’s avant-garde concepts and produces the machine which tries to stimulate the capacities of “telepathy” and “second sight,” but eventually would destroy the human brain and turn human beings into zombies, even “expendable human material” with no consideration of their wills (FGC 582). Mark, refusing to enter the alternative mystical world immerses himself in studying the “immediate future—of humanity” and ponders his “charts, his figures his maps, the pages torn from Dorothy’s diary and Thomas’s manuscript” (FGC 565). This work is reflected in his new work, *Memorandum of Myself*, stating the prophecy of catastrophe that is also proposed in Lynda’s dream.

The antagonists are the dangerous part of their inner worlds which are beyond their ability to control and might become stuck. At one point, Martha is almost overtaken by the sea of “hysteria” and “antagonism” (FGC 568). Knapp suggests that a “devilish force she calls the ‘hater’ . . . is responsible for much of humanity’s atrocious and self-destructive behaviour” (98). Lynda needed to face this kind of antagonist since she was a girl in a family full of tension and unhappiness, where she developed her “antenna for atmospheres and tensions and what was behind words” (FGC 570). But the truth Lynda revealed creates fear in others and leads to her incarceration in the hospital, where she is diagnosed as having hallucinations. Her natural talent gradually develops into a “self-hater” as if “she had an enemy who hated her in her head, who said she was wicked and bad

and disobedient and cruel to her father” (FGC 572). Draine explains that the self-hater is “the inner voice that echoes and amplifies the criticisms that come from the outside of the self” (59). This kind of negative voice might lead to self-denial and self-guilt. Rigney also suggests that the “self-hater” has the worst experience, “that evil in the schizophrenic self which balances or sometimes annihilates the good” (85). This self-hater is the source of Lynda’s defeating life and she is never free of the voice. Fortunately, the sisterhood and sharing between Martha and Lynda are important and “each is a guide and teacher for the other” (Christ 67). Believing in Martha’s strength to survive in this world, Lynda asks Martha to be a guide for her. Martha takes over Lynda’s request and is willing to be the one “who could have a responsibility for those who could not” (FGC 569).

Martha must complete the journey by herself and eventually she seeks to remember her “packed experience” as a flâneuse when she had just arrived in London. While Mark’s room offers Martha a place to face the conflicts embedded in her role as a mother or daughter and to begin to open up and merge herself with the collective life, Paul’s room allows her to look at her life “in reverse” (FGC 586). Karl proposes that the metaphor of “enclosure” accompanies the image of each room which “fixes the limits of sexuality, threatens and reassures within bounds, freeing as it limits” (82). In her world of solipsistic self-hatred, she now realises that she is “the Tortured and the Torturer. Am being both. Am just pain-maker” (FGC589). Martha understands that “the self is the microcosm and that it, like the world, is divided between victim and tormentor” (Rigney 85). Michael L. Magie mentions that Martha achieves her transcendent being in insanity, finds herself “in communication with other individual minds, and then moving mentally toward a universal human mind which contains all human impulses” (544). Like Anna in *The Golden Notebook*, to achieve forgiveness towards herself and others is to recognise that she should turn these negative feelings back to the world from where she had internalised them; therefore she uses “the languages and emotions of hatred of black people for white people, and of white people for black; of Germans and of Jews, and of Arabs and of the English” (FGC 590). Christ proposes that “the chaos

and violence Martha discovers in herself has also shaped the twentieth century” (68). She even expands her every opposing perspectives. Lessing states in her *A Small Personal Voice* that “all the great words like love, hate; life, death; loyalty, treachery; contain their opposite meanings and half a dozen shades of dubious implication” (5). From the perspective of Romanticism, it is in the entire cosmos, “the destructive and the creative, the good and evil— all the contraries that mystics have reconciled in a higher unity” (Magie 544). Martha starts to memorise her experience in the note and repeats that “I am the creation of my own mind” and she proposes that “If the words come, the reality will afterwards” (FGC 594). Magie explains that Martha is in the process of “collective self-creation” because “the individual artist is but a small part of this process: the voice which articulates, the expression” (546). On the one hand, individual self-hatred reflects part of the collective negativity but on the other hand, the individual is able to create and perform another voice in the collective.

If all these sub-human creatures are aspects of me, then I’m a gallery of freaks and nature’s rejects. See above. Fool. Don’t you ever learn. These things are there. Always. I can choose to be them or not. I can collect them the way dust gets collects on a magnetically treated duster. Or not. (FGC 603)

As for Mark, he concludes his study of Lynda and Dorothy’s madness and writes his prophecy about the destruction of the world in his Memorandum, As Magie proposes, Lessing’s fiction is “the prophetic myth arising into consciousness from this unconscious being” (547). The inner world that Martha and Lynda explore is now emerging with the world Mark perceives. Martha ends her personal voyage for her care towards the Coldridges again: she worries about Lynda a great deal (FGC 608).

#### **4.3. Breaking Down the Forms of the City**

The members of the family are all in pursuit of their own ideals after their mutual development in the house. It is evident that the previous structures of this

family will eventually break down. However, the family is also like the inner city that Mark describes in his book, alive and capable of reproducing a different kind of organic form. Mark is supported by an industrialist to build up his ideal city in Africa. Martha's function in the house, to "pull everything together" is over. They have merged and now they must separate. In the last dinner in Margaret's house, in reaction to her inquiry about their plan, "Lynda, Mark's and Martha's eyes enmeshed: this contact was a comfort to them. The three were infinitely apart from each other, and grieved that they were" (FGC 598). The eye contact is similar to the kiss that Mark gave to Lynda in the basement when Martha first joined Lynda's journey.

He kissed her. Lips, a slit in the flesh of a face, were pressed against a thin tissue of flesh that saved them from pressing a double row of teeth which had lumps of metal in them. Then these lips moved to touch her own slit through which she was equipped to insert food or liquid, or make sounds. (FGC 540)

The grotesque kiss represents a kind of "lost identity, of submergence in another, of rejection of self" (Karl 93). However, the observer, Martha, exhibits "protective compassion" for Mark and Lynda "these two ridiculous little creatures—as if invisible arms, as peaceful, maternal were stretched around them both, and rocked them like water" (FGC 540). Martha eventually restores her compassion towards her mother and incorporates it into her own being as a mother. Though at "a loose end," Martha knows that she must "take one step after another: this process in itself held the keys" (FGC 642). Draine suggests that "the condition of her growth has been a willingness to move in response to the rhythms of life, a fluid sort of patience" (65). Martha leaves the party by herself and walks along the river, and is reminded of the young Martha, wandering alone in the city at the beginning, alongside the Thames. However, this time, the images of nature accompany the progression of psychological development "from ruins to new growth" (Cederstrom 114).

She walked beside the river while the music thudded, feeling herself as a heavy, impervious, insensitive lump that, like a planet doomed always to be dark one side, had vision in front only, a myopic searchlight blind except for the tiny three-dimensional path open immediately before her eyes in which the outline of a tree, a rose, emerges then submerged in dark. (FGC 645)

That she is only allowed to look forwards indicated by the “tiny three-dimensional path” seems to reflect the questions she asks herself, “But *where*. How? Who?” (FGC 642). Even in the darkness, the aroma of the flowers implies hope. Draine concludes that Martha learns that “it is possible for her to live with dignity in harmony with the will of evolution” (65).

While the story in the Coldridges’ house represents how one expands their consciousness in the interaction of mundane life, the appendix breaks through the confinement of the reality and shows how imagination brings another path between the individual and the collective. Elizabeth Maslen proposes that “*The Four-Gated City* already shows Doris Lessing’s appreciation of the advantages and perils of using space fiction as a means of exploring social and cultural issues and the inner space of the mind” (26). It starts from reversing so-called truth and memory. The appendix is comprised of the private and official documents, from different members of the Coldridges. They have been requested to write down the memory of their personal experience of the catastrophe by the organisation of the Mongolian National area in order to preserve them for historical study. In Francis’ letters, he points out that people repeat the same mistake because they never learn from the memory of the past. The distinction between facts and fiction is blurred again while Francis describes that the “Memories” are neither the false facts written by the authority nor those consciousnesses existing before or in the time of the destruction, but they exist in some “carefully chosen, prepared and preserved human minds for careful transmission to similar minds” (FGC 65). The evolution of consciousness is needed in order to realise or accept this fact. Before the catastrophe, Francis develops a kind of independent community and a simple



life outside London with some pacifists, loose and without definite form, but where “a sense of community remained” even though they lived apart (FGC 652). But it is eventually defeated by negative opinions and suspicion from the outer world. The current of hatred is like that which Martha saw in her inner world, and causes things to go off track as “an electrician splicing a wire unconsciously cursed it out of a kind of hatred for what it stood for; it soon broke and burned out fuses and wiring” (FGC 657). The breakdown of a small part might cause a severe result, which is conceptualised in the trivialised description of Dorothy’s diary. It thus reveals that Lessing’s concern towards the individual is never submerged by the collective. The development of this community is a foretaste of what will happen in England later: things go wrong from one part to another and they fall into the illness of despair. The rising violence and riots in the country are like those described in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, part of the destruction in the evolution of civilisation. It is proposed that “the human race had driven itself mad, and these sudden outbreaks of senseless violence in individuals and communities were the early symptoms” (FGC 666). Away from those social organisations and confinements, Francis easily accepts Lynda and Martha’s idea that the “individual human conscience” should be developed in “a new form which was untouchable by any legal formulas” (FGC 677). They are now led by the Romantic poet, Blake’s concept, that “what now exists was once imagined” (FGC 677). Their special abilities in seeing the world allows them to warn about the disaster that is going to happen. Since they do not constitute any organisation, however, their prophecy of the catastrophe appears threatening and is dispersed by the government, ironically, executed by Phoebe, who later cancels the order. As they need to inform people orally about the disaster, they are forced to move to different places and Francis must remember those who assisted them in the process of the escape. Memory becomes a form that is fully intersubjective, consisting of one’s relationship with others.

The unavoidable holocaust which was foreseen by Lynda, breaks down the boundaries not only between the inner and outer worlds, but also between the

individual and the collective. It embodies those inner terrors that Lynda encounters in the collective unconsciousness in her inward journey, and also the outer madness produced in the development of civilisation. Intersubjectivity is performed by each individual in their own way to reflect how one is embraced by the collective and also how one confronts the collective. Eventually, people are forced to escape during the holocaust, threatened by the warplanes full of lethal nuclear devices. Mark, who conceptualises the city in the desert, maintains a rescue camp alone with Rita, while he loses contact with Lynda and Martha; he has deemed their prophecy to be paranoia and has been unable to develop his ESP like Francis. His rational thinking does not allow him to go beyond the ideal city that he built in his mind. Therefore, he could only reminisce of his old friends alone in his notes. Paralysed by the horror of the holocaust, Mark almost forgets that “there can be any conversation between the shape of a face and the spirit” but a (spirit like) Yemeni Arab youth appearing with the smile of Lynda, makes him remember Lynda’s pursuit and suffering in the “awful sick hole under our feet” (FGC 709). Thinking of Lynda always makes him remember his passion towards life which is the only thing that could lead him to transcend his rational world. Barnouw states that a *Bildungsroman*, in the nineteenth century, “usually ended with the protagonist making a meaningful choice” (117). However, Kaplan proposes that “[t]he basic powerlessness of individuals who are determined by their personal and cultural histories makes the kind of search for ‘freedom’ which characterizes the *Bildungsroman* difficult to achieve indeed” (538). Yet the development of Martha seems to imply the possibility that “freedom” could be reached through the mutual development of consciousness. While they escape to an island and are forced to abandon their original living, they even refuse to be rescued. The next generation develops special kinds of perception and they are more developed, not physically, “but mentally, emotionally” because they don’t have to be “shielded from the knowledge of what the human race is in this century” (FGC 703). The arrival of the child from Martha’s island to Francis’s camp represents another story of wandering, searching and remembering of the next generation in the world.

Intersubjectivity in *The Four-Gated City* is situated across a period stretching from post-war London to an apocalyptic future. While the individuals search for their own inner breakthrough in the city, personal growth is again shown to be closely related to the collective life and its possibilities outside of conventional politics, liberal, socialist or welfare capitalist. The breaking down of the form of an ideal city as well as the ongoing development of each individual seems to reflect the way that intersubjectivity is shown to be constituted not so much by specific exterior forms, but by the mature understanding of each individual and their contribution to the collective.

## Chapter Four

### The Inter-relative/ Inter-Creating Forms of Writing: In the Process of Becoming... *The Golden Notebook*

#### 1. A Female Writer's Conflict with the Tradition

In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Anna's writer's block is an important theme which serves as a narrative vehicle to develop Lessing's preoccupation with the limitations of language as a means of expressing the self. In this, the most postmodern of her novels, she is also searching for a contemporary and innovative way to write the self without entirely abandoning the moral capacity of the great nineteenth-century novels to create characters with depth. Lessing proposes that, in *A Small Personal Voice*, she "was looking for the warmth, the compassion, the humanity, the love of people which illuminates the literature of the nineteenth century and which makes all these old novels a statement of faith in man himself" (6). However, Lessing also points out that, for the changing values and standards of our time, it is difficult to use words, "simply and naturally," because words "have become so inadequate to express the richness of our experience" (SPV 5). The arrangement of *The Golden Notebook* reflects her conflicted attitude towards realism, especially that of the nineteenth century novel.

Anna's various relationships are used by Lessing to explore the possibility of an intersubjectivity that reveals Anna's struggle with liberal humanism as an orientation to the world bound up with individualism, and with her relationship with a Marxism that regards the individual as subordinated to the collective. Lessing proposes that what "Marxism at its best does is to look at the world as a whole and see the different parts of it interacting" (Thorpe 97). The Marxist idea of the dialectic seems to reflect the changing characteristics of the human subject in his or her relations with a world outside, regarded as an objective world. Seyla Benhabib proposes that Liberalism and Marxism both view mankind as appropriating "an essentially malleable nature, unfolding its talents and powers in

the process, and coming to change itself through the process of changing external reality” (69). Lessing’s concerns regarding individual subjectivity and its relations with the world seem to echo Marx’s insistence on the Hegelian dialectic of the active mind and objective reality.<sup>1</sup> This is the basis for most of the debates within aesthetics in Marxism, particularly those concerning the relative political efficacy of the realist novel of the nineteenth century set against modernist aestheticism and modernist fiction from the late nineteenth century. Anna’s conflict regarding her writing is often compared to the debate between realism and modernism, with an emphasis on either “subjectivity” or “objectivity” as reflected in the debates between George Lukács and Bertolt Brecht in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> Nick Bentley suggests that “Lessing’s experiment with different forms in *The Golden Notebook* corresponds more closely here to Brecht” (49). For his part, Brecht observes that “Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change” (82). Thus, the development of Anna’s writing is related to her questioning of her own ideas of selfhood and the ideological positions of Marxism.

Nonetheless, Lukács’s emphasis on “totality” and “objectivity” is exactly the conceptual framework rejected by Anna in her notebooks. Lukács too, though, experienced a similar process of doubt as he developed his aesthetic. In *Georg Lukács and his Generation 1900-1918*, Mary Gluck discusses the development of Lukács’s early attitudes towards the aesthetic of modernism alongside an examination of his personal relationships. He is attracted by the avant-garde attitude of modernism at first but rejects it finally as it is seen to carry a sense of “nihilistic destruction of all objective standards and moral values” because of its emphasis on individualism (Gluck 111). His observation of its “cold objectivity” is a consequence of the fact that he is unable to believe in modernism’s capacity for communication because of its emphasis on a solipsistic self and that “only that which is communal can be genuinely communicated” (Gluck 125). Gluck explains that Lukács “sensed, intuitively at first but with growing intellectual clarity as time

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Lunn analyses that, from 1770-1815, the common aim of the German Romantics, Idealists, and Humanists are against the Enlightenment (the objectivist perspectives) thought and insist upon “the moral autonomy, creative will, and self-expression of human beings” (28).

<sup>2</sup> See Taylor’s explanation of Lessing’s historical background with the new left.

went on, that his work as a scholar and cultural critic was intimately connected with his personal isolation" (125). Lunn also proposes that, in order to be "against the inescapable human isolation and fragmented experience of the present," the early Lukács "held up the 'whole man' fully alive in a unified community and natural world" in his *Theory of the Novel* (1914) (92).

At the beginning of the Black Notebook, Anna proposes that the novel has become oriented towards reportage and that this has become the way in which people strive for wholeness, knowing the "whole picture." Anna mentions that "human beings are so divided" that they reach out desperately "for their own wholeness, and the novel-report is a means towards it" (GN 59). However, while looking for knowledge from the outer world, they ignore the class division in their own nation. Lukács's "unified community" is a false consciousness without this recognition of class and other kinds of difference. On the other hand, Lukács's concern about "the necessary conflict and unbridgeable distinction between 'authentic life' and 'empirical reality'" (Lunn 92) seems to be Anna's concern, too, for she suffers "torments of dissatisfaction and incompleteness" because of her "inability to enter those areas of life" that her way of living, education, sex, politics, class, bar her from (GN 59). While Mother Sugar suggests that the artist writes "out of an incapacity to live," Anna refuses to be defined by the cliché about the artist and wants to explore the "new sensibility, a half unconscious attempt towards a new imaginative comprehension" (GN 60). She is eager to cover the gap by living "as fully as she can" instead of staying alienated from the world but she is also worried that this intention of stretching herself is regarded as "fatal to art" (GN 60).

In addition to her reflection on Marxism, Anna's writer's block might also be analysed from her standpoint as a woman writer in order to examine the struggle between "sense and sensibility" that she has inherited from her female predecessors. Sukenick proposes that "the division between emotion and reason has been apportioned not only to men and women but among kinds of women" (98). The complicated forms of *The Golden Notebook* seem to reflect Anna (or Lessing's) complex feelings, as a woman writer, towards a Marxist criticism that presumes form and content are interrelated and dialectical. Terry Eagleton, for instance, explains Marx's aesthetics as arising from his perception that "form is of

no value unless it is the form of its content” so that form is the product of the content and reacts back on the content as well (21). However, it seems that form often becomes the focus of Marxist aesthetics. In Lessing, though, form is intimately related to experience and its representation, including the way in which formal choices change the representation of experience. As a woman and as a woman writer, Anna, the protagonist of her novel, feels confused and overwhelmed by her sense of helplessness in the different roles in life, her sense of life’s formlessness. Although Lessing proclaims in the preface written after the publication of *The Golden Notebook* that it is not only a book for feminism, she has never denied that women writers have different perspectives from male writers. In one interview, she notes that “a woman sees certain things very differently from the way a man does.... But the reverse is difficult too...women act more instinctively than men....they approach psychological subjects not scientifically but instinctively” (Schwarzkopf 103).<sup>3</sup>

Anna’s disappointment about her inability to “write a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life” is because she is “too diffused” (GN 59). The “strong moral sense” which she connects to a “man’s faith in himself” and that Lessing associates with the nineteenth-century novel is seen as no longer available to women who are forced to repress feelings and are paralysed in their efforts at self-development. Waugh suggests that “the identification of self with an impossible ideal of autonomy ... can be seen to produce the failure of love and relationship in so many texts by male modernist and postmodernist writers” (*Practising* 132). Meanwhile, she also (like other contemporary women writers, such as the novelist and moral philosopher, Iris Murdoch) senses the loss of a moral foundation in contemporary ideas of selfhood and relates her own loss of feeling to this problem. Her hesitation to write and her self-critical voice echo Virginia Woolf’s idea in *A Room of One’s Own*, that a woman writer should “break the sequence—the expected order” in the constituted discourse (95). Moreover, the multiple personalities that interrelate in the novel reflect what Juliet Mitchell refers to as a kind of “heterogeneous area of

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<sup>3</sup>Interviewed by Margarete Von Schwarzkopf, Lessing answered her question about her attitude towards women’s movement.

the subject-in-process” and her question of “In the process of becoming what?” in *Women, the Longest Revolution*, is also what Lessing searches for in this process of writing retrospectively and proleptically in the various notebooks (294).

### 1.1. Conflicts of Morality

The beginning of *The Golden Notebook*, however, as well as the beginning of *Free Women*, starts with Tommy’s issue with liberal individuation which is closely related to his sense of the loss of moral foundation. He says that “I know what I don’t want, but not what I do want” (*GN* 37). His moral conflict seems ironically reflected in his parent’s relations, his mother, a communist, usually appearing antagonistic to her ex-husband, Richard, a capitalist, but they are in agreement in trying to persuade him into taking up his father’s work. His situation seems to reflect what “neo-Aristotelianism” proposes: that late-capitalist societies suffer from “a loss of moral and almost civilizational orientation, caused by excessive individualism, libertarianism, and the general temerity of liberalism” (Benhabib 24). The moral conflict about one’s selfhood is examined under different concepts of “freedom,” and Lessing’s intention to interrogate these is implied even in the title of this frame novel—*Free Women*, as well as Anna’s family surname—Freeman, and then her ex-husband’s surname—Wulf.<sup>4</sup> Anna’s hesitation and transformation of her attitude towards writing are also related to her realization of the dilemmas of “freedom.” Hegel proposes the concept of “freemen” in an idealisation of the Greek polis where “in public as in private and domestic life, every individual was a free man, one who lived by his own laws. The idea (*Idee*) of his country or of his state was the invisible and higher reality for which he strove, which impelled him to effort” (qtd. in Benhabib 46:154).<sup>5</sup> Benhabib explains that “the rights of subjective welfare and conscience are among the constituents of the moral freedom of the individual, and the individuals’ pursuits can never be wholly integrated within a concrete ethical totality” (46). The conflict arising in the realm of the domestic raises the questions about the possibilities for repair and reconstruction of

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<sup>4</sup> The short biography of Anna is later proposed in the third part of the Blue Notebook.

<sup>5</sup> See Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings*.



relationships between people, rather than the large questions of public or organised politics.

Tommy's ambition to be a writer also suggests his intention to take his place in a wider civic society and to take up responsibility for the public sphere. The dialogic relation between their positions echoes the Brecht-Lukács debate on the form of the novel and political efficiency. He criticises Anna for writing exclusively in her notebooks as an "arrogant" and even solipsistic act—a version of modernism—unconnected to the public good. Instead of addressing her concerns to a wider public, she locks away her notebooks, almost like Orwell's Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) writing his secretive diary hidden away from the Thought Police. But Lessing, as the writer of *The Golden Notebook* itself, uses the *contretemps* to begin to raise questions about the role and responsibility of the writer in modern society. She actually proposes in the essay cited above that the "act of getting a story or a novel published is an act of communication, an attempt to impose one's personality and beliefs on other people" (SPV 70). When she fails to take responsibility as a writer to communicate her true feelings to the public, Tommy is ironic about Anna's protest against politicians not telling the truth.

Tommy's paralysis of will reflects Anna's lack of feelings in her notebooks. He seems to imply that the solipsism is aroused from one's inability to deal with the chaos. He is critical that "people are not good at all, they are cannibals, and when you get down to it no one cares about anyone else" (GN 234). Tommy's numb will is represented through his "inward-seeming stare" and, behaving like a blind man, full of hysteria, is presented as in parallel with Anna's inward act of secret writing to herself. However, for Tommy, writing is his possibility to break out of the boundaries and the alienation that grows between people. Insisting that it is irresponsible to spread feelings of disgust, Anna turns down Tommy's hope of expressing his confused self through his writing. But neither is she able to face what Tommy insinuates is the dark or shadowy side of herself or of others. He very directly points out that Anna could not live with the fact that she keeps "trying to write the truth and realizing it's not true" and also blames her for being "afraid of being chaotic" (GN 233). What he feels particularly disappointed about is that Anna does not share her chaos with him or other people but endeavours instead to

impose what might be viewed as arbitrary patterns on her life in order to create a kind of inauthentic order (*GN* 234). When he asks what she still believes and which beliefs provide her with sustenance in her life, her insincere answer is the last straw leading to his suicide attempt.

Anna's conflict over writing is also a reflection of a broader struggle to adjust the relationship between herself and the world. A morality of certainty seems incompatible with her living as a modern woman. She firstly has to figure out the sources of the conflict between her personal role as a mother, and her public role as a writer. Benhabib suggests that "contemporary universalist moral theory has inherited this dichotomy between autonomy and nurturance, independence and bonding, the sphere of justice and the domestic, personal realm" (158). It could be said that Anna struggles in these antagonistic discourses. Alongside the various pressures on her professions in each of the notebooks, (novelist, magazine editor, social worker), she is simultaneously forced to confront her sense of frustration in her various roles as a mother, a mistress, and lover. Although she seems to be trapped in these roles, with no way out or forward, the separated notebooks are like stages on the way to figure out her problems from a variety of not always readily compatible perspectives. Tonya Krouse suggests that, "by refusing to define the subject in one way or the other," *The Golden Notebook* is difficult to label simply as "modernism, post-modernism, or feminist" (40).

The laying bare of her different aspects represents Anna's attempt to fathom the social construction and constitution of her identity and her attempt to break out of it. As Lessing explains, a writer should recognise "the responsible individual, voluntarily submitting his will to the collective, but never finally; and insisting on making his own personal and private judgement before every act of submission" (*SPV* 12). She appears to be searching for a balance between the dominant concepts of self internalised from those culturally available, and the conflict in her own mind.

## 1.2. Women Writers' Anxiety

Through her writings, Anna reflects the immediate and historical context of Lessing's own historical moment, with its sociological concepts of self, role and performance. The first line of the Black Notebook describes them collectively: "The four notebooks were identical...(b)ut the colours distinguished them—black, red, yellow and blue" (GN 55). Socialisation as a kind of "performance" between the performer and the audience was first foregrounded in the highly influential work of Erving Goffman but became the dominant within later, fully-fledged postmodernism.<sup>6</sup> If the interaction between the performer and the audience is routinized through certain ritualised articulations, then this "constitutes one way in which a performance is 'socialized,' modulated, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (Goffman 30). Writing out of a post-structuralist context, some thirty years later, Judith Butler's construction of performativity bears some similarities with the work of Goffman, but she also develops the concept that "gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (*Gender Trouble* 33). In order to break away from these constituted actions and routines, Butler proposes that the "practice of parody" can "reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration" (*Gender Trouble* 186). In *The Golden Notebook*, this kind of performance is shown in the arrangement of the notebooks and the frame fiction: while the frame fiction *Free Women* performs as a conventional narrative telling stories from various characters' perspectives and in a formally conservative way, the title of the whole book *The Golden Notebook* reflects the writer's intention to represent the work as a more personal, individual and diverse kind of writing, one that might also reveal her reluctance to obey the rules of performance.

For Anna, her four notebooks are a kind of performance of her life in which to reveal those "Annas" in different contexts and also the "Annas" who try to speak

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<sup>6</sup> Erving Goffman explains that "when an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to rise" (14). See Goffman.

in their own ways. She even uses parody as a means to reconstruct and review herself. Her division of her life into four notebooks implies her various roles, and also her conflict within. On the one hand, Anna inherits a Western tradition of rationality that searches for order and reason through the processes of logic and the imposition of system. Therefore, Michael argues that Anna's clarifying her life into four notebooks "will stave off the chaos of contemporary existence and enable her to retain a concept of wholeness; it is her way of staying "above all this—chaos" (88). However, Anna's compartmentalising of her life, explained by Patricia Meyer Spacks as similar to women's pattern of dividing "their lives into compartments" (97), also reflects her anxiety as a mother, used to following the routines of her children and husband.

In addition, her use of the different genres is actually a kind of challenge to Lukács's ideal of realistic writing.<sup>7</sup> Avoiding being simply subjective in her notebooks,<sup>8</sup> Anna attempts, throughout, to find ways to connect her personal life to the outer world. Michael suggests that the novel "breaches the dividing line between public and private events and life" (103). The form which she chooses also reflects her embarrassment about expressing her confusion as a female writer in relation to a male-centred culture. Estelle C. Jelinek suggests that, through autobiographical form, the diary and the letter form, women reflect their diffused, multiple roles and their sense of fractured consciousness (5). The interrupted notebooks are similar to Anna's split and chaotic situation. These notebooks become a way of expressing herself that seems more manageable, less threatening; thus, as Michael proposes, the novel "challenges the conventional distinction between high art and daily representation" (103).

These notebooks also allow her to locate her frustrated existential feeling, which seems so threatening and personal, in a more social and even Marxist perspective. Every time she sits down to write, she lets her mind slacken, allowing

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<sup>7</sup> Lunn explains Lukács's idea of realism in that "the best realist novels presented general historical reality as a process revealed in concrete, individual experience, mediated by particular groups, institutions, classes" (78).

<sup>8</sup> In *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, it is proposed that the use of "reportage, diaries" are deemed by Lukács as "the result of a narrow concern for subjective impressions, a concern which itself stems from the advanced individualism of late capitalism" (96). See Selden.

words to lead her to “darkness. Terror. The terror of the city. Fear of being alone” (GN 55). The image suggests some need to balance the claims of narcissistic regard with the need to inhabit, comfortably, the outer world. Anna has refused to be defined as a traditional artist although she has not yet found a satisfactory alternative way of reconciling her private selves and public persona as a writer. In Mrs. Marks’ consulting room, for example, she feels that the delicate and beautiful paintings on the wall no longer correspond with the “crude, unfinished, raw, tentative quality of her life and of others”; she also considers that she should endeavour to “hold fast to it” (GN 203) and also transform it into “aesthetic” form.

### **1.3. Anxiety of Erasure of Subjectivity**

At the beginning, Anna fears that her selfhood is being erased in her writing, what Judith Kegan Gardiner calls “a gigantic anxiety about the erasure of a writing self” (147). When she meets Mrs. Marks for the first time, Anna tells her that she ought not and cannot write another novel because she no longer believes in art (GN 200). At the beginning of the Black Notebook, Anna describes how the publication of *Frontiers of War* brought her to examine the meaning in general of the act of writing and the position of authorship as well as the distance between what she has written and how various people have realised or interpreted it. However, the account of the subsequent publishing fortunes and her reputation allow her to reflect more expansively on the meanings of writing. Words become unreal and far from the actual experiences they are meant to recover and convey: “Unreal—the novel is more and more a sort of creature with its own life” (GN 55). As her book subsequently becomes a commercial product and the material for other media, it has become “a property of other people” (GN 55). Anna seems to feel a kind of loss that her writings might be distorted by others or that she cannot express herself through them thoroughly.

Therefore, her act of keeping her diary secret is also her way of preserving her own writing identity. However, when Mrs. Marks discovers that she is keeping a secret diary of her own, Anna believes that Mrs. Marks simply interprets this act of writing as part of an attempt at “unfreezing, the releasing of the ‘block’” that has

stopped her writing (GN 205). Anna is subsequently filled with anger and resentment because she feels Mrs. Marks is “robbing” her of the diary, “in mentioning the diary, in making it part of her process” (GN 205). As a result, she stops writing from that day on and begins instead to paste up newspaper clippings of world disasters, wars, conflicts, reflections of an outer world that is “so overwhelmingly terrible” she is unable to represent it at all (GN 215).

The hesitant writing self reflects the weakness of one’s ego. Along with her inner therapy with Mrs. Marks, she grasps the outer form of Communism to look to an alternate sense of belonging. In the Red Notebook, she describes the reason she joins the Communist Party: it echoes and engages that aspect of her which is identified with the “tight, defensive, sarcastic atmosphere of the inner circle” (GN 137). Her sense of rebellion and resistance towards the institution is paradoxically what leads her to join it. However, this clinging to another kind of form only leads her to disappointment. Words become a kind of smoke-screen with which to trick people in the over-simplified and bluff belief in Stalinism that is disseminated in the party pamphlets. Anna feels that “words lose their meaning suddenly” and they “sound like a foreign language” because the gap “between what they are supposed to mean, and what in fact they say seems unbridgeable” (GN 258). At the beginning of *Free Women*, Anna argues that “if Marxism means anything, it means that a little novel of emotions would reflect what is real in a society since the emotions are a function and a product of a society” (GN 42). Meanwhile, in the letters written by members of the Party that Anna reads, she senses how selfhood shrinks to something negligible in the view of the party. The letters are all almost identical with each other, resisting any kind of expression of individuality: they seem interchangeable; besides, they are “all hysterical, self-accusatory, full of guilt, self-abasement” (GN 47). She is in a state of self-doubt and afraid that her writing has become part of these stereotypes: for, if literature is not the expression of the individual voice as well as that of a community of speakers, then what is it for? Is the liberal view of art to be destroyed in the collective gaze of Communist orthodoxy? She asks herself, “what stereotype am I? What anonymous whole am I part of?” (GN 48).

Anna's self-examination in the Black Notebook may be regarded as reflective of a deeper struggle between the loss of her sensitive and affective self and her insistence on impersonal truth. At the beginning of the Black Notebook, she has already named the notebook "The Dark" (GN 56). This notebook is about her memories of Africa, the most formless and disordered period of her life. That was also the time when she decided to build an ideal world with her communist partners. The story in *Frontiers of War* is based on how she lived at the time. Influenced by Marxist ideology, Anna feels obligated to offer so-called social realism or "objective" literature and so-called "truth." The sense of expressive blockage might be related to the expanded gap between oneself and the chaotic world, and that between oneself and one's art. The small voice is so difficult to make heard because the power of the external object world is so enormous, "economics, or machine guns mowing people down who object to the new order" (GN 42). Moreover, Anna also feels that the novel as a genre is becoming more and more dysfunctional in the present, merely "a function of the fragmented society, the fragmented consciousness. Human beings are so divided" so they "blindly reach out "for their own wholeness, and the novel-report is a means towards it" (GN 59).

Anna's "guilt at having written *The Frontiers of War*," according to Caryn Fuoroli, is one of the reasons for her writer's block (148). She feels her novel is "immoral" because what "came out of it was something frightening, the unhealthy, feverish illicit excitement of wartime, a lying nostalgia, a longing for licence, for freedom, for the jungle, for formlessness" (GN 61). Anna is actually attracted by this kind of freedom that might "signify the chaos or 'cracking up' that accompanies the breakdown of social conventions and the disintegration of individual subjectivities" (Krouse 40). On the other hand, Besty Draine proposes that this battle with a "lying nostalgia" in every notebook is actually "a yearning for the recovery of the stage illusion of moral certainty, innocence, unity and peace" ("Nostalgia" 140). Anna also realises that it is "that emotion" which would make her other fifty books "novels and not reportage" (GN 61). In her dream, her book is symbolised as a "casket," which she deems quite precious, and she is eager to show it. When she opens it by herself, it is full of a "mass of fragments, and pieces" (GN 216). However, these painful fragments turn out to be a jade crocodile, with

tears of diamonds when the box is taken away by the businessmen. She actually struggles between her own creativity which emerges out of personal response, emotion and subjectivity, and her responsibility to write the "truth": there seems no available way of thinking through, dialectically, these opposed poles. Her self-criticism is also her own struggle between "what she thinks" and "what she feels."

She even feels guilty for only being interested in fulfilling herself, in living as fully as she can, because the idea "is fatal to art" (GN 60). She has to "deliberately whip up" in herself that same emotion" (GN 61). As Taylor suggests, Anna is fragmented in terms that straddle ideas about the proper form for the novel in the second half of the twentieth century: she tries "to break away from a socialist realism which obliterated subjectivity" and, on the other hand, away from "a nihilistic modernism that collapsed everything into subjectivity" (10). She hesitates between these two available and established ideas about the generic shapes of the novel but is unable to choose exclusively one or the other.

This kind of "anxiety of authorship" is also similar to what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue is a consequence of the fact that women writers have to "struggle for artistic self-definition" owing to their "inferiorization" and "cultural conditioned timidity about self-dramatization ... dread of the patriarchal authority of art ... anxiety about the impropriety of female invention" (Gilbert and Gubar 24). Women writers may not be convinced enough about their own writings, due to the fact that women are not regarded as the "precursors" of the literary canon. Meanwhile, they are also afraid that they cannot "fight a male precursor on 'his terms'" (Gilbert and Gubar 23). Cederstrom also proposes that patriarchal societies induce neurosis and anxiety in women writers because "[d]eveloping in a patriarchal culture, women have few models to follow" (119). Therefore, in the first part of the Black Notebook, Anna keeps criticising her own writing for its emergent emotions about the past. Meanwhile, in the process of memorising, she realises that her "ironic tone" in describing things is a kind of ignorance covered over as the assumed desirability of toleration of every situation. This tone "was self-punishing, a locking of feeling, an inability or refusal to fit conflicting things together to make a whole; so that one can live inside it, no matter how terrible" (GN 63). That kind of refusal to feel is also the refusal of one's own ability to change things. She points



out that “the refusal means one can neither change nor destroy; the refusal means ultimately either death or impoverishment of the individual” (*GN* 63). This is similar to the dead end of life, what Sukenick proposes is “when feeling, that guest which has so often been turned away, fails to call altogether, that both Martha and Anna feel the need to ‘invite it back’ because it is part of their crucial battle for a part of themselves that is lost” (113). Therefore, Anna’s self-criticism is full of ambivalent feelings: while her rational style of thinking is used to blame herself for the emotion that is emitted from her own book, she is also afraid of losing her “sensibility” since every kind of emotion, including confusion, is also part of life.

Even though Anna tries to avoid the lying nostalgia in her description, the stories in the Black Notebook are actually full of ambiguous emotion and passion. Spacks mentions that the Black Notebook “offers the truth of feeling” (97). The debate about sentimentalism also appears between Anna and the group leader, Willi in Africa. When everyone is troubled by their emotional situation, Willi insists on sticking to “certain basic principles” instead of “crying about it” (*GN* 117). The personal relationship between the white driver, George, and the black woman, a cook’s wife, undercut by the racial, economic and moral conflict, is actually the epitome of their story in Africa. The stereotype of George’s sexual attractiveness and his interest in sexual adventure appears repeatedly in Anna’s later writings. As George remarks, as a socialist, “it’s the gap between what I believe in and what I do” (*GN* 117). For him, although he sees that they have all devoted themselves to a social ideal, as well as to resolving racial problems, it was their way of reacting to people around them that is “calloused” because they don’t really care about those people as individuals (*GN* 117). Anna’s comrades provoke the racial conflict between the white hostess, Mrs. Boothby, and her black cook with the effect that the loyal servant loses his job. While everyone is sentimental for the cook’s tragedy, they did not realise it is caused by their lack of consideration about Mrs. Boothby’s emotion as a hostess and a woman. After so many years, Anna realises that they were “locked” in their own group mind. Not surprisingly, in the second part of the Blue Notebook, many years after joining the Communist Party, and reading numerous literary works of so-called “communal unselfish art,” Anna is “forced to acknowledge that the flashes of genuine art are all out of deep, suddenly stark,

undisguisable private emotion" (GN 298). She can only sense "banality" coming out of the impersonal work written under the jurisdiction of The Party, and she is eager to read one work by its members "written wholly from genuine personal feelings" (GN 298). She starts to stammer when giving lectures on art in the Party, and this kind of hesitation is similar to her hesitation and inability to write.

When Anna could break down the ideal of so-called truth, Anna thus could free herself from her self-criticism and self-abasement. When her book is filmed and discussed by others from different perspectives and with different goals, Anna realises how easily art might be distorted for various reasons, such as a "Diary" being created for business concerns. Anna rewrites her story into a parody since a TV producer tries to change her novel into a love story. Carol Franko proposes that "*The Golden Notebook* contains a more ambivalent, even duplicitous use of parody, both as theme and technique" (258). In part three of the Black Notebook, Anna composes an "imaginary journal" that is supposedly based on a diary of a young American. Since she understands that reality is easily made up, there is a constant worry that words cannot easily express the "truth." As a result, she tries hard and carefully writes down the "raw material" of the novel, *Frontiers of War*. Yet she still finds that she can never be "objective" and every word she writes is still loaded with "nostalgia" (GN 135). Not until the last part of the Black Notebook can Anna understand the gap between her memory and so-called "truth."

Anna's self-criticism regarding her own words is also her way of criticising the ideal of the authenticity of language and her recognition that memory is fallible in part because words in the present reshape and change perceptions of past events. According to Waugh, many feminist writers in the twentieth century have found it hard to identify with the ideal of liberal autonomy "defined as transcendence, impersonality and absolute independence whether an idealised goal or a nostalgic nihilism, whether informing the aesthetics of Modernism or those of Postmodernism" (*Practising* 209). Many critics have proposed that Lessing tries to challenge the authority of language as well as the concept of "truth" and in this sense she comes close to the preoccupations of the modernist novel from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* onwards. For instance, Franko proposes that Lessing "wants to write truthfully about the power of language to construct experience and

its inadequacy to convey 'real' experience" (258). Michael notes that "Lessing moves away not only from a realist mimetic view of language but also from a high modernist view of language" (104). Moreover, Krouse argues that Anna's doubt about the model of authorship which is to defeat the "centred, rational, self-determined subjectivity," of traditional humanism is similar to the post-modern and post-structuralist concept of the subject (41). Beth A. Noehm points out that, by radically challenging the very notion of authorship, Lessing seeks to "challenge our modernist codes of reading, to challenge our desire to read the text as a closed system which must be ontologically stable, structurally coherent, and coherently authored" (95). The juxtaposition of *Free Women* and the four notebooks makes it hard to decide which of the narrators is reliable and to be trusted. In each section, the omniscient point of view in *Free Women* is interrupted by Anna's subjective voice. As Joanne S. Frye observes, the "shifting point of view" and the "blurring and overlapping of supposed thematic unities thus reinforce our growing uneasiness about the trustworthiness of the narrative voice" (177). *Free Women* is not the novel that "frames" Anna and the only truth of Anna's story; rather, it is part of the reflection of Anna, from the perspective of the third personality, whose role is to conduct readers to a reconsideration of the subsequent effects of the events in the notebooks. As Suzette Henke explains,

[b]ut further speculation about Anna's editorial function leads us to a house of mirrors endlessly reflecting mimetic distortions of an ever-elusive ur-experience that is to be found nowhere in literature. The author as textual authority has been erased from the scene of writing. (173)

Since the narrative authority is unclear, "there is no single originator of meaning, there can be no fixity of meaning, and no hierarchy of discourses" (King 53). Given the blurring of the voice between the author and the character, the author owns less authority to convey her ideas. The role of the author is no longer an omnipotent ideal.

## 2. Writing as a Kind of Everyday Performance in Every Small Personal Voice

### 2.1. The Shadow of the Third in the Yellow Notebook

Anna's Yellow notebook, in the form of fiction, is entitled *The Shadow of the Third*. Anna's repetitive description of the stereotyping of men and women could be her way of revealing the repetitive patterns to which people become accustomed. As a form of fiction, it is "analysis after the event" but "the form is a kind of pain" in the process of analysing the pattern of the relationship (GN 196). Butler proposes that there are "possibilities of gender transformation" which could be found in the "failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (*Gender Trouble* 179). In the Yellow notebook, Paul Schlueter argues that Anna tries to see herself from a novelistic perspective through this "fictional alter ego" (108). Through Ella, Anna tries to exercise her role as a novelist and to examine her emotional life. On the one hand, Ella is like Anna's projection of the idealised self. The title of the novel, "The Shadow of the Third," as Schlueter suggests, also implies that Ella is "the woman altogether better than I was." Anna names her protagonist "Ella" because, once in a pub, she met a woman named Ella, who always knew what she wanted. Anna says, "I could never do that. That's not Anna at all" (GN 394). On the other hand, after five years of the relationship, Anna realises that the motif of this novel is "Paul's wife, the third," a shadow figure who Ella imagines herself to be: "a serene, calm, unjealous, unenvious, undemanding woman, full of resources of happiness inside herself, self-sufficient, yet always ready to give happiness when it is asked for" (GN 179). In addition, there is also a "shadow figure" hidden behind the expected role performing in a relationship. Unlike Anna, Ella expresses her need for love directly and is not ashamed of showing her feelings about sex. For Anna, sex is what she struggles to express: "I have to fight to write about sex. Extraordinary how strong this prohibition is" (GN 412). When Paul feels tired of their relationship, he implies that she is free to be with anyone else. Ella mechanically gets revenge on Paul by following his suggestion and embarking upon sexual adventures to perform as a free woman as he expects. Yet she could never

feel free and reach orgasm without love, so she attributes the integrity of her life to her relationships with men. Consequently, Waugh notes, when Ella searches for wholeness through romance, it is “a discovery of self in other which is also an annihilation of self” (*Feminine Fictions* 203). Through Ella, Anna sees how a woman puts her rationality to sleep when she devotes herself in love:

Paul gave birth to Ella, the naïve Ella. He destroyed in her the knowing, doubting, sophisticated Ella and again and again he put her intelligence to sleep, and with her willing connivance, so that she floated darkly on her love for him, on her naivety, which is another word for a spontaneous creative faith. (*GN* 183)

As a romance, *The Shadow of the Third*, parodies women’s romantic idealisation of love. When Ella (Anna) looks back, she cannot help laughing at her innocence in the past.

Writing Ella is actually Anna’s process of discovering what she is instead of an act of creating. Language, Spacks proposes, “is for Anna the only conceivable means to freedom. Her experience produces dead ends, defeats touching nothing but hopelessness; yet writing experience can redeem it” (97). Lessing mentions in the introduction to the second edition of *The Golden Notebook* that the experience that has gone into the writing is a “crystallising process,” “traumatic” but life-changing (*GN* xiv). It is a process of a gradual discovery. Writing Ella, Anna conquers her frustration towards writing expressed in the Blue Notebook. Ella says that writing is more “like acting out scenes with an invisible alter ego, or carrying on conversations with one’s image in the looking-glass” (*GN* 133). Ella’s attitude towards writing and creation is freer than Anna’s. She writes “sensitive and feminine” stories, the type that she and her friend most dislike. Disregarding any ideology, Ella just lets her creativity flow, though she suffers from shameful feelings. Following the words in her mind, Ella writes them down, and even acts them out.

For Ella, words hold a great influence over her. After Paul made love with her the first time, “she was using the word ‘love’ already, and with a naivety quite foreign to her normal way of analyzing relationship” (*GN* 168). Her life with Paul is

even “full of phrases and symbols” (*GN* 181). Caged by the ideology of words, especially “love” carrying with it, she is like his frightened wife and other women dependent on men (*GN* 268). She says, “I use the word love and think of myself as free,” yet she knows that it is finally just a fraud because she is eventually “in pieces” (*GN* 268).

It is through Ella that Anna practices the interaction of “form and content” of Marxist theory, considering how thinking is ahead of the act of writing and writing is only the process of producing a form. Through Ella, Anna realises that writing “is not an act of creation, but an act of recording something” and the facts had formed inside herself, “in invisible ink” (*GN* 269). Unlike Anna, writing as a kind of independent act, a kind of gesture to reserve her self-identity, Ella realises that her “being ‘free’ has nothing to do with writing a novel” but with her attitude “toward a man” (*GN* 269). In addition, for Ella, writing is also “experiment” with herself “to try and be different kinds of people” (*GN* 399). Pickering proposes that, in the Yellow Notebook, Ella also believes that “literature may be hypothetical, involving both discovery and prediction” (113). The interaction between content and form is even completed when Ella’s imaginary constructions are transformed into the real life happening later in the Golden Notebook, in the story of how a man and woman crack up “because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits. And out of the chaos, a new kind of strength” (*GN* 400). When Ella waits for “the images to form,” the story eventually also takes on life (*GN* 400).

## **2.2. Resistance to Performance in the Blue Notebook**

In the Blue Notebook, Anna seems to deal with her problems as a woman, of being a mother or a lover. Her lack of feelings partly reflects her unwillingness to perform these roles through conformity to social expectation, characterised, according to Cederstrom, as “the conflict between her need for freedom and the restrictions of motherhood” is Anna’s real struggle (*GN* 131). Being a mother often leads her into a state similar to what Chodorow describes as “the loss of self” out of an “overwhelming responsibility for and connection to others” (“Family Structure and Feminine Personality” 59). She thus suffers from emotional paralysis as the

consequence of “a regressive desire to feel nothing at all rather than to suffer pain” (Cederstrom 128). However, her psychiatrist Mrs. Marks does not realise Anna’s resistance to the circumscribed words of “true artist” and “real woman” whose meanings are deemed as “an absolute” and whose problems are considered separately (GN 204). In her dreams, futile feelings appear in her roles as an artist, a woman and a mother. They all have the qualities of “false art, caricature illustration, parody” in a way to resist her roles in reality (GN 202). People appear with the “doll-like” characters, interacting with this feeling towards each other. In another dream, her ex-husband also acts this way and brings her the feeling of frigidity with Michael. In a dream about her daughter, she reacts to her daughter mechanically, without any feeling, making herself “perform every movement” (GN 201). This act demonstrates Chodorow’s idea about motherhood as “a product of feminine role training and role identification” (*Reproduction* 31). Not until Michael leaves her does Anna realise she is deeply affected by Michael’s cynical attitude towards the fact that she used to be an “authoress” and also her every concern towards her daughter (GN 204). Indicating the end of the relationship, Mark leads Anna to describe their relationship as a story and questions her: “you make your stories about life and tell them to yourself, and you don’t know what is true and what isn’t?” (GN 283). When their relationship is described as “a story” instead of reality, “the substance of [her] self was thinning and dissolving” (GN 283). Anna is even more eager to write down the fact as truthfully as she can, but she could only catch the sense of untruth since she loses confidence in how to shape herself.

Shoring up herself, she uses an emotion that “women have, about children” to fight against negativity in life, including “the weight of death” that Michael confronted in the war, as well as the fact that he is leaving her (GN 284). In an inserted memory in 1946, she records her decision to see a doctor because of her daughter: “there’s Janet...I think I shall go to a psycho-analyst” (GN 200). From Mrs. Marks, she learns to impersonalise her experiences. She thinks that it is “the disease of women” in her time and this “woman’s emotion: resentment against injustice, an impersonal poison” (GN 285). She sees it everywhere in “women’s faces, their voices, every day, or in the letters that come to the office” (GN 285). As Ellen Morgan suggests, “instead of resenting the injustice,” Anna chooses to “turn

her anger away, depersonalizing and depoliticizing it” (61). Anna represses her feelings and ignores her inner struggles regarding the inevitability of role-playing in order not to break down.

The maternal role, however, does help her to develop a different perspective on her life. It helps her to transcend and transform her “resentment” into “affection” in relation to her daughter. A baby gives her “a feeling of continuity, of rest” (GN 287). This kind of affection also allows her to go back and forth in time and view life over a longer period. When she is with Janet, she says, “I shrink, in affection, to Janet’s size, and become Janet” (GN 286). There seems to be some hope for the world as seen through the child’s eyes. She sees “the enormous yellow fire like a great eye; the window, enormous, through which anything can enter; a grey and ominous light which waits for the sun, a devil or an angel, which will shake away the rain” (GN 286).

On the other hand, Mrs. Marks represents an omnipotent spiritual mother. Mrs. Marks becomes a “large and powerful witch” in her dreams where she is menaced by the threat of anarchy, although Anna seems to be handed a “talisman against evil” by her (GN 214). Basically, Mrs. Marks represents a kind of eternal mother image that transcends time and space: what Melanie Klein calls the Imago:

Behind her voice I could hear the sounds she always evoked at such moments—sea lapping on old beaches, voices of people centuries dead. She had the capacity to evoke a feeling of vast areas of time by a smile or a tone that could delight me, rest me, fill me with joy—but I didn’t want it just then. (GN 404)

Anna wants to move beyond her role as a mother, and she also wants to examine her sense of destruction in relation to her own historical moment. Moreover, dwelling on the maternal role brings her too many burdens that she cannot take any more.

### **2.3. Individual vs. Wholeness**

Anna reveals to Mrs. Marks how her impotent feelings are related to the current destructiveness and violence in the world and hence why she is so very



disturbed by it. She is afraid of “death and destruction” which seems stronger than life (*GN* 202). However, in her dreams, Anna goes back to her past and cries in “nostalgic pain,” feeling relieved by that emotion. Cederstrom mentions that this emotion of a “death wish” is aroused because one can only face “a world of prisoners, imprisoned not only by the war but the rigid social structures that placed restriction on human relationships, not only those between black and white but between men and women as well” (120). But Anna does not want to take refuge in her dreams, like a woman who would rather believe that the world of her dream is more real. However, in her notebooks, she uses clippings of the newspapers about wars around the world to externalise “her own destructive qualities” (*GN* 131).

Anna joined the Party for “a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live,” but at last it “intensified the split” (*GN* 142). She realises that the reason is more than the organisation or the tenets of the Party; it is “something deeper than that” (*GN* 142). Her decision to leave the Party is also a reconsideration of the Communist concern about the necessity of relations of the one to others, the interpersonal and the whole human beings. When executing her mission for the Party, canvassing working class areas, she sees the housewives indifferent to politics: “Five lonely women going mad quietly by themselves, in spite of husband and children or rather because of them. The quality they all had: self-doubt. A guilt because they were not happy” (*GN* 146). This sense of self-doubt is similar to her personal experience as a mother and a woman, and these working class women appear even less confident about the dignity available in their housewifely roles.

When Anna begins to loosen her grip on socially constituted outer forms, she sees a vision in her dream. Beginning with a paranoid view of the earth, Anna is allowed to view the world from a distance and see its long history. She sees “an enormous web of beautiful fabric” covered with the pictures of “the myths of mankind” and also “the myths themselves” (*GN* 256). Red at the beginning from the Communist countries, it is “Invaded by the bright different colours of other parts of the world,” the vision of the story of all mankind (*GN* 256). The borders between each territory blurring and the form dissolving, Anna obtains enormous happiness when “the colours are melting and flowing into each other” and becomes

whole with one beautiful glittering colour she had never seen. It reveals a new ideal that is beyond available political concepts which all seem to represent other forms of confinement. After this unbearable happiness, “the slowing turning world was slowly dissolving, disintegrating and flying into fragments” and she is left in chaos (GN 256). She hears a small voice: “somebody pulled a thread of the fabric and it all dissolved” (GN 257). It seems to imply that the small personal voice is able to be heard and is an important role in this process.

In 1956, when the Cold War achieved its climax and the Communist Party developed its new direction, Anna resumed her enthusiasm for politics. However, she realised that she had “achieved absolutely nothing” and it is her “naivety” that makes her believe in the possibility of a new C.P. (GN 383). Political enthusiasm eventually leads to another kind of individualism, like her comrade Harry, who deems himself elected by the authority of the Party to visit Russia. The Black and Red notebooks are gradually covered by these newspaper clippings. She tries to look for the possibility of “freedom” as revealed in violent news.

#### **2.4. Communication between Individuals**

The multiple writing forms in *The Golden Notebook* represent how Anna’s life is interactive with other individuals and communicates with theirs, instead of only being confined to self-centred experiences. Through the private form of the diary, Anna opens out to other relationships. Rebecca Hogan suggests that the diary writings, like Chodorow’s description of the fluid female ego, are “open to closer relationships between world and text, author and text, reader and text” (100). These diary-keepers reflect how one’s life is restricted by the different creeds in the outer world, yet the fusion of these forms provides Anna with a means of communication with her divided selves and the world. Even more, as Janet Gurkin Altman suggests, epistolary narrative expresses “the desire for exchange” (89). They represent a kind of wish to exchange and communicate between people.

In the Yellow Notebook, the letters are from those housewives, confined in the house to pursue the perfect family in the 1950s after the Second World War. This “happy modern housewife” image portrayed by the magazines and television,

is described by Betty Friedan as a “mystical creature” in her investigation of women’s life in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>9</sup> Friedan also points out that the feminine mystique is closely related to the phenomenon of psychoanalysis, attributed to “the writers and editors in the mass media, ad-agency motivation researchers, and behind them the popularisers and translators of Freudian thought in the colleges and universities” (124). According to her conclusion, women are mostly described to be suffering from the “masculinity complex” (Friedan 121). The housewives in search of psychological support could only communicate through the letters, answered by Ella, the mistress, and Paul, an absent husband.

Anna tries to face her writer’s block, by being an editor of the publishing department in the Party. Most of the texts sent into the office are inside the “current myth” or even “self-deceptive myths” about Communism (GN 297) and they are lost in “impersonality” (GN 299). Yet these letters sent by the authors express more sincere and personal opinions and “come out of a different climate altogether” (GN 302), out of the hope of “expressing” oneself through the word (GN 303). Anna gradually realises that it is the tone and feel of the “individual conscience, the individual sensibility” that makes these letters attractive (GN 299). Ironically, the stories, locked in drawers, become a kind of escape from normal life and a gesture of refusing to communicate, although they are written with the fully formed Marxist intention of being understood.

In the Yellow Notebook, when Ella visits her father, she mentions her vision about him and her mother: “He remains alone, withdrawing from his wife into books and the dry, spare dreams of a man who might have been a poet or a mystic. And in fact, when he dies, journals, poems, fragments of prose are found in locked drawers” (GN 398). Her father is surprised when asked about this. His poems are all about “solitude, loss, fortitude, the adventures of isolation” (GN 398). His disappointing attitude towards life leads him to confine himself away from others which echoes the suicidal intention in Ella’s novel as well as Tommy in *Free Women*. The act of keeping the writing secret is because “they are afraid of what they are

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<sup>9</sup> *The Feminine Mystique* is about Friedan’s survey of the life of housewives as well as researching in psychology, media and advertisement from 1957. She published her research in 1963.

thinking” (GN 406). Eventually, the last thing that people want to face is themselves. His act of reading Ella’s fiction is one of the few moments of communication between them.

## **2.5. The Need for Individuation**

Anna decides to “walk off” by herself and look for her own way (GN 403). Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen propose that Anna emphasises her “individuality and belief in the historical uniqueness of the individual” (51). From the third part of the Blue Notebook, more writing styles appear. After March 1956, she draws a line across her previous notes and “continued in a different writing” (GN 400). After leaving the Party and Michael, away from support, ideologically and emotionally, she also refuses to fit herself into any old pattern, like “the archetypal dream, or epic story, or stage in history” to rescue “formless into form” and to become whole by blocking off “individual pain” (GN 401-3). Reacting to this form-making pressure, Anna and Molly often call Mrs. Marks “Mother Sugar,” because the name “indicate[s] a whole way of looking at life—traditional, rooted, conservative, in spite of its scandalous familiarity with everything amoral” (GN 10). In the process of therapy, Mrs. Marks tries to talk Anna into the rules of the so-called “morally better” and “to fit Anna into an ordered world” (GN 402). That Mother Sugar follows Jungian psychoanalysis suggests her complicity with “the laws of the father, an agent of bourgeois stability” (Gardiner 146). Mrs. Marks often names her “Electra” or “Antigone,” two unconventional female characters in Greek tragedy. However, Anna rejects to be “named” because she wants “to be able to separate in myself what is old and cyclic, the recurring history, the myth, from what is new, what I feel or think that might be new” (GN 404). Anna wants to grasp her “personal” experience of being “neurotic,” which is in the condition of “being highly conscious and developed” (GN 402). She also refuses any forms, like dreams, which could safely hold “all the pain, and the killing and the violence” so that they are harmless to her (GN 402). Now, she has to experience them in person. She wants to believe in a new vision “because the dream of the golden age is a million times

more powerful because it's possible, just as total destruction is possible. Probably *because both are possible*" (GN 404).

When Anna is able to confront her personal experience, she also regains the power to "name" it. It is revealed that the unconscious can resist reductive rationality. Moving to a new house, originally on behalf of her lover, she is unconsciously choosing a space for her notebooks, because not until she is in her house alone does she see "moving to this flat as giving room to the notebooks" (GN 407). This kind of intentionality is not rationally calculated. The important things in life "creep up on one unawares, one doesn't expect them, one haven't given them shape in one's mind" (GN 406-407). When reading her notebooks again, she realises that the experience of being rejected by Michael has affected her and changed her "whole personality" and she does not even "recognize" herself (GN 407). Her refusal of her own experiences and feelings has misled her and reshaped her memories in other directions. Anna finally understands that her restrictive "criticism," her "defensiveness" and her "dislike" of her own writing have become a kind of sterility which also results in the "untruthfulness" of what she had written and what she remembered (GN 407). More anxious about the distance between the truth and her words, Anna could only catch the appearance of her life and therefore become a hollow shape on the paper, "nailed on the paper" like the pieces of a doll (GN 407). The form eventually dissolves when "words mean nothing" and Anna of the notebooks becomes nothing, which frightens her because her intelligence is also dissolving (GN 407-8). Breaking down the rationality, she tries to get rid of the confinement of words and to define words for herself "to be good as well as bad" (GN 409). Encountering further psychological darkness in her dreams, she no longer searches for frightening forces in the forms of abstract archetypal myths, but they are embodied "in a person" that could be part of her or easily be evoked in herself (GN 409). Meanwhile, she also could relate it to her personal feelings and "name" them by herself (GN 410).

### **3. When the Malicious Old Man Encounters the Spiteful Old Woman: Working out the Pattern as a Way of Breaking Through**

At the beginning of the third part of the Blue Notebook, Anna writes down her personal information, including her full name as Anna Freeman. Her surname reveals Lessing's implication of the search for freedom in the world as her novelistic theme, but it also reflects its self-contradictory existence in the personal life of her character. As she is often expected to play the "Great Mother" in her relationship with men, according to Spiegel, Anna identifies with the positive aspect of the "Great Mother" to defend herself against "the violence and chaos within and without her" (Spiegel 73). She is used to taking care of men and is actually fascinated by this power. However, because of men's ambivalence towards the mother figure, the relationship between Anna and her men often falls into a sado-masochistic pattern. For men, "heterosexual relationship alone recreates the early bond to the mother" (Chodorow, *Reproduction* 207). As a result, men develop complex relationships with women that are actually similar to their relationship with their mothers. Spiegel explains that, from Jung's perspective, men are overwhelmingly attracted to the "Great Mother" but feel "simultaneously attracted to and terrified of her" (71). In such a relationship, men hold ambivalent attitudes towards women. On the one hand, they are glad to return to the infantile state to be reunited with their mothers on the imaginary level. However, in fear of losing themselves, they tend to act coldly or even dominantly towards women. Thus the sado-masochistic cycle is formed. Some of them might act childishly sometimes; at other times, they act sadistically and controllingly.

However, deceived by the form of love, Anna often ignores the destructive part in it of playing the role of "Great Mother." In the Blue Notebook, Anna experiences conflict between her roles as a mother and a woman. Anna's lover, Michael, often ignores her anxiety over her responsibility as a mother. Like a jealous child, he envies Anna's daughter, Janet, occupying Anna's time and attention. He uses sex as his weapon and says, "and now, Anna, I suppose you are going to desert me for Janet?" (*GN* 286). Anna thinks he is "like a child who feels himself slighted for a younger brother or sister" and resents his selfish and childish

behaviour (GN 286). Yet she is still under “[t]he control and discipline of being a mother” and endures it (GN 286). After Michael leaves her, Anna feels more ironic towards her image as a “free woman.” Julia in the Yellow Notebook even describes their situation as being in a “sexual mad house” in which their role of “free women” brings men a kind of imaginative frisson (GN 392). When she develops more and more destructive relationships with different men, and recognises the divided parts of men and also of herself, she can gradually see the sadomasochistic pattern. She perceives “the negative side of women’s need to placate, to submit” and also to “create men” according to the dominant and submissive pattern (GN 414). She then feels that she becomes all the resentful images that she has ever dreamed about: “the evil vase,” “the old man-dwarf,” “the hunch-backed old woman” and “the witch” (GN 424). She has embodied the resentment and coldness that she suffers in life, and she is no longer the kind and tender maternal figure, but one who controls and hides her hysteria, like Nelson’s wife and any woman trapped in the cycle.

However, it is De Silva who brings Anna close to chaos. De Silva is a typical man who refuses to love others but constantly expects women’s kindness to himself. He is “incarnate, the principle of joy-in-giving-pain” (GN 429). His patterns of bullying women make Anna feel “cold and detached” and there is “no life or warmth left” inside her (GN 428). His performance as a “mother-needing child” drains out her life (GN 428). Like an exhausted mother, she feels herself lifeless. She also recognises that women are often caught in the same deception and that they suffer this kind of abuse again and again. Molly says, “what fools we are, perpetually, eternally, and we never learn, and I know quite well that next time it happens I’ll have learned nothing” (GN 430). As long as they don’t give up playing the role of the ideal mother, they fall into the same sado-masochistic pattern again and again.

When breaking down the outer forms, discovering that the Communitarian ideal seems to be an illusion, Anna turns instead to the interpersonal relationships available within a capitalist society where the private has been disconnected from the public and people try to ignore the terrors and threats of the external world, such as the destructiveness of the H. Bomb. Emotions are frozen “because at the end of every emotion are property, money, power” (GN 467). When Janet leaves

home to attend school, Anna loses the only framework for her life which has helped to maintain her “normality” and an acceptably socialised role. Alone in the house, she recalls perceptions from her childhood, where, without such socially constituted confinements, she tried to “name” the world by herself. She tries to connect herself with the world by naming the objects inside the room and moving gradually outwards to encompass the entire world outside. By doing this, she can reach what she wants, “a simultaneous knowledge of vastness and of smallness” (GN 469). In “Anna, Anna, I am Anna: the Annas of Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*,” Sprague contends that this game in the novel becomes “a woman’s power. It is tied to personal and political power” (156). Molly Hite also explains that “in the game,” Anna tries to expand consciousness and overcome fragmentation while she can “‘create’ in her imagination her immediate surroundings and then progressively enlarge her scope to comprehend the entire universe” (62-3). However, this act is “finally insufficient because it presumes a fixed, ‘outside’ location for the ‘creator’ that allows her to remain both detached and in control” (Hite 63).

When Anna encounters Saul, she has the chance to break old patterns through their recognition of each other. At the beginning, Anna reaches a state of “calm and delightful ecstasy, an oneness with everything,” when she is forced to leave her self-indulging world because of him (GN 480). Gradually, affected by his anxiety and split personalities, Anna comes to see how her own selves are split in order to respond to the different “Sauls.” However, they repeat the sado-masochistic sexual relationships, more violently and hurtfully. Waugh suggests that “the experience with Saul enables Anna to see the extent to which her masochism is a function of her split-off fear of disintegration, her overwhelming dependency on others” (*Feminine Fictions* 204). She comes to recognise that she is both “the malicious old man and the spiteful old women,” in her dream.

Anna’s short stories in the Yellow Notebooks sometimes appear to express a kind of second sight, reflected in Saul’s behaviour. Yet, her pre-vision might only reflect some repetitive patterns before. Staying within the room, fighting with their different attitudes towards love and sex, they realise that they are “fighting about something else” and experience “being crazy” (GN 492). He is confined within a



rigidly defended selfhood and his repetition of “I, I, I, I, I,” like his split selves, is disconnected, shooting like bullets from a machine gun (GN 496). Anna tries to fight against his “cycle of bullying and tenderness” (GN 496-7). However, she realises she has gradually “gone inside his craziness” and is also looking for that “wise, kind, all-mother figure,” knowing his need through her own and also falls into the self-pity manufactured by women themselves and is terrified of the idea of her willingness to trap herself in this pattern (GN 502-3).

Feeling trapped, she tries to direct her own fear outwards by creating a new experience in connecting her personal terror with the destructive power through the news coming from the outer world. She has the feeling that her personal terror is similar to the effects of the fear of war and political conflict in the world:

I felt this, like a vision, in a new kind of knowing. And I know that the cruelty and the spite and the I, I, I, I of Saul and of Anna were part of the logic of war; I knew how strong these emotions were, in a way that would never leave me, would become part of how I saw the world. (GN 503)

She now understands that they are all part of the destructive world. The personal pain is neither minimized to insignificance nor limited as a confinement to selfhood. Waugh explains that this is an experience, “a merging represented in the new, positive terms of the collective, the ‘we’, rather than the defensive, over-rationalized, egotistic ‘I’ ” (*Feminine Fictions* 204). Anna gradually feels a change inside her, “a sliding lurch away from” herself and she knows “this change to be another step down into chaos” (GN 506). As Kauffman points out, with Saul, Anna “participates in a violent process of splitting and projecting multiple selves, multiple ‘others’” (145).

Anna tries to “summon up” her other Annas from the past, as well as her political comrades, the mad Charlie Themba, and the respectable leader, Mr. Mathlong (GN 506). She melts into these two extreme personalities and experiences an “immensity” in which there is no sanity or madness. In this process of splitting herself and breaking down the limitation of the bounds of selfhood, in her dream, she and Saul are both embodied in the “malicious male-female dwarf figure” and are the counter-part of each other (GN 508). To celebrate the joy-in-

destruction is to see “the essence of love, of tenderness” concentrated into “a kiss or a caress” between them (GN 508). However, when she wakes up, Saul is still trapped in this destructive pattern, building up a gulf between them again and again. With the experience of transcending her personal experiences in the dream, Anna speaks for the experiences of other women:

But I saw this not merely as denying Anna, but as denying life itself. I thought that somewhere here is a fearful trap for women, but I don't yet understand what it is. For there is no doubt of the new note women strike, the note of being betrayed. It's in the books they write, in how they speak, everywhere, all the time. It is a solemn, self-pitying organ note. It is in me, Anna betrayed, Anna unloved, Anna whose happiness is denied, and who says, not: Why do you deny me, but why do you deny life? (GN 509)

She realises that, although she experiences the splitting personalities with Saul in their interaction with each other, Saul's selfhood is still immersed in the destructive pattern of his relationships.

This understanding about the situation between men and women pulls her out of the personal hatred towards Saul and obtains a more expansive sense of selfhood related to a broader collective. Waugh explains that only when Anna “recognizes her displacement and marginalization as a woman, a process of ego dissolution begins where she finds herself merging into others” (*Feminine Fictions* 204). This recognition of the collective even expands her practical physical feelings, and, in her dreams, she sees that many people try to “fit themselves into Anna's body” (GN 512). However, she resists Paul's entry because she rejects his “sterility” as a spirit and those others who “try to block the future by blocking emotion” (Drain 147). Attempting to recover her sense of rationality by reaching out her hand to write in the blue notebook, she is also fighting her “lying nostalgia” and terror of dissolution in her transformation into different personalities, like the soldier in Algeria and the peasant woman in China. She sees how she is still in the habit of having to “name” other people from the perspective of “an alien personality” (GN 514).

Recognising her own habitual reaction, Anna now realises her need to create a new way to interact with the world. As Waugh suggests, Anna experiences “a loss of boundaries which no longer expresses the desperate projections of paranoia but a new possibility of connection, of discovering one’s identity through others” (*Feminine Fictions* 204). However, Saul’s antagonistic pattern makes her feel “sucked into a quicksand, or pushed on a conveyor belt” that entangles her with its “grinding machinery” (*GN* 515). Now, Anna also tries to look for a new way to escape from this repetition. In another dream, Anna even tries to play out these differing male and female roles; she writes:

We played against each other every man-woman role imaginable. As each cycle of the dream came to an end, I said: “Well, I’ve experienced that, have I well it was time that I did.” It was like living a hundred lives. I was astonished at how many of the female roles I have not played in life, have refused to play, or were not offered to me. Even in my sleep I knew I was being condemned to play them now because I had refused them in life. (*GN* 516)

By playing these different roles and feeling like “living a hundred lives,” Anna realises the restriction of her personal appraisals of men and even of women. In the process of exchanging man-woman roles, Saul and Anna seem to experience the possibilities of genders that escape from their previous personal understanding and self-restriction. While playing the role that is “not offered” to her, she seems to experience gender identities as something that “can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 174). This new recognition is necessary because Anna can afterwards depart from the repetitive pattern and not to fall into self-pity concerning her situation as a woman. When Saul asks Anna to keep writing, she accepts it unconsciously and buys a new notebook. Her gesture of refusing to give Saul her new notebook is the beginning of her effort to break the dominant and submissive patterns that have arisen between them. She knows that “this need to comply was part of the sadistic masochistic cycle we are in” (*GN* 517).

The experience of mergence brings Anna and Saul into a relationship of mutual spiritual influence, and Anna obtains a new perspective to view her own experience. The inner Golden Notebook starts with the sentences of Saul Green. Anna tells Saul that “you’ve become a sort of inner conscience or critic,” and Saul tells her that “If I’ve become your conscience, then it’s a joke, you’re certainly mine” (GN 531). Anna is in a state of being “driven” to face the fear of destructiveness in her dream. Under the “dream-water,” she has to choose to submerge herself in the subjective pain or to fight it. One of the voices reminds her that she has to “fight, fight, fight” with her life (GN 526). Anna is fighting to break through the sado-masochistic pattern which cages herself, as well as Saul. Trying to fly away, she sees the tiger, which is Saul, hurt by the cage and is going to be caught, yet she wants him to run wild through the world. Constructing this dream into a story, she uses her consciousness again to shape the pain out of the pattern: Ella too is created out of this pattern.

However, “the controlling person” in her dreams stops Anna following her intimation of emerging patterns and asks her to “go back and look at scenes” from her earlier life (GN 527). “This looking back” is “*making sure they were still there*” (GN 527). In the process of naming them again, she could also “‘name’ them in a different way” (GN 527). Meanwhile, her memory is presented in another symbolic scene and is like a film projected by others. Thus, Hite proposes that, “when she finds viewing ‘conventionally well-made films’ that parody the conventions she herself has taken for granted in imaging this part of her life, Anna realises how limited her vision has been” (63). Now those people from the past returning in her life become parts of one another, or merge into one new person, to form a kind of monument that might serve as a touchstone for how to reprocess and reclaim the past. The statue speaks to her: “to lock a human being into solitary confinement can make a madman of him or an animal” (GN 529).

As if receiving the voice of an oracle, she intuits that she must henceforth be the boulder-pusher—a Sisyphian image—who helps people to realise this process of recreation of self through other. She is left with the responsibility to recreate “order out of the chaos” that her life had become (GN 530). Anna requests Saul also to break their pattern of interrelationship, since he is “much stronger” than she is (GN 531).

In this process, they realise that they could be influential on each other in ways that are not simply destructive. Anna suggests that people in the world should be able to be “invaded by alien personalities” just like them (GN 533), for what they have experienced is not only between Anna and Saul, but something that could be an experience between any two persons in the world. Anna thinks that the conversations between them are like “a hundred different people living now, in various parts of the world, talking and crying out questions” (GN 533). The experience between them brings Saul “with good useful pure kindly peaceful emotions” and he proposes that people should be like “empty containers” and wait to be filled by this emotion (GN 533).

Their experience of “intersubjectivity” has become the “moments of ‘knowing’ one after the other,” and these moments are so powerful that this “illumination” is difficult to describe in words (GN 541-542). Anna therefore tries to imagine symbols or marks that might “preserve the forms,” even the dreams (GN 542). Waugh proposes that Anna sees that “narrative representations, ‘making sense,’ are necessarily metaphorical substitutes, statements of a loss which constructs the ‘real’ through the fantastic and the imaginary”(Feminine Fictions204). Especially when she was shown the fragments that she did not see personally in the film, she realised that many things were beyond her experience, “beyond Ella’s, beyond the notebooks, because there was a fusion” (GN 543). Saul’s positive power affects Anna by moving her to believe in the “beautiful impossible blueprints” and that she should start to write again or she will really crack up (GN 546). Saul encourages Anna to transform her capacities of “reproduction” into a capacity for “creation”. He also alters the competition between men and women into the power of creation. He says, “if you can do it, then I can” (GN 547). Saul gives Anna the first sentence for her novel: “The two women were alone in the London flat” which is also the start of *Free Women* (GN 547). He also asks Anna to give him the first sentence for his novel. They stop the ruinous pattern and instead Anna feels that Saul has become her brother and a part of her (GN 548). They exchange the first sentence for their novels, as a way to “preserve the form” so as to produce *Free Women*, as if giving new life to each other.

#### 4. Intersubjectivity in *Free Women*, as a Story-teller and also a Protagonist

The frame fiction, *Free Women*, makes Anna not only a story-teller but also a protagonist. Benhabib contextualises this duality within Hannah Adrendt's idea that "from the time of our birth we are immersed in 'a web of narratives,' of which we are both the author and the object" (198). She explains further that the self is "both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told" (Benhabib 198). As a frame novel, *Free Women* makes the communication between different selves open and public. Schlueter notes that, since fiction is a kind of public writing, Anna can "go beyond the limitations of private communication to express to others" (107). For the form of the novel, *The Golden Notebook* itself, is not only Anna's private notebook, but also represents a public writing about Anna's story. While the Annas in the notebooks search for their own autonomous voices, the impersonal voice of the narration is hardly objective, interrupted as it is by the subjective voices as well as the title, *The Golden Notebook*. According to Waugh, "*The Golden Notebook* reveals the same concern with identity and merger, separateness, and connection which forms the basis of the utopian vision and the subversion of realism" (*Feminine Fictions* 201). The interludes of journal and fictional writings are not only about Anna's self-representation but they also represent her adjustment of the relationship between herself and society, a kind of "formlessness (unity)" that Melanie Hunter and Darby McIntosh suggest "exists as an ever-changing combination of ever-changing relationships between fragments, or notebooks, or people, or links" (114). These various writings in different forms connect different personal voices in a society. They "create a spiritual space" so as to connect the part to the whole but each part is not lost in a total merge into that wholeness (Hunter and McIntosh 114).

Created by Anna and Saul in the final phases of the inner Golden Notebook, Anna in *Free Women* could be deemed as another protagonist thinking out the thing "from all angles"(GN 563).<sup>10</sup> Nancy K. Miller argues that the "dispersed" subject and the post-modern subjectivity expressed in the idea of the death of the

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<sup>10</sup> This sentence is originally proposed by Milt to describe himself in *Free Women*.

author cannot be used to interpret identity for women writers. Given that “women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by too much self, ego, cogito, etc.” (Miller 197). That is why Anna had to fight against Saul’s “I,I,I,I,” in the inner Golden Notebook. Moreover, Waugh suggests that, in post-modern feminist debates, women’s writing “has neither attempted to transcend relationships through the impersonal embrace of Art as formal autonomy or sacred space nor through rewriting its own Apocalyptic sense of an ending” (*Practising* 134).

Since it is written after the inner Golden Notebook, however, the year in which Anna receives the title from Saul, *Free Women* is close to the concept that “literature is analysis after the event” proposed by Anna in the Yellow Notebook (*GN* 196). Furthermore, it tries to get beyond the limit of one’s vision and experience. However, such a change does not mean to impose a false pattern on a story, like putting a happy pattern on a defeated life. She has “got to accept the patterns of self-knowledge” first and then she could “twist it into victory” (*GN* 399). Tommy’s blindness after his failed suicide attempt also symbolises a kind of psychological confinement. He becomes like a “zombie” with no feelings, hiding his emotion (*GN* 323). Pickering explains further that his blindness is “Anna’s metaphor for this generalization” (111). He refuses everyone’s care and he confines himself into a rigid mental carapace, trying to make his parents feel guilty about him in order to influence their lives. He becomes hostile, and even dominating, towards his mother, yet he is “all in one piece for the first time in her life” (*GN* 323). Waugh proposes that “Tommy’s self-inflicted blinding has left him, for the first time, all ‘in one piece’, this confirms Anna’s growing belief that simple unity is maintained through a process of ‘dividing off’” (*Feminine Fictions* 202).

Anna’s experience of merging herself with other personalities begins when her life is interrupted and taken over by demands from all sides in a general atmosphere of hysteria. While Tommy tries to rescue his stepmother from a self-debased life, they commit to political activities which are unfamiliar to her. The hysterical mood expands in the extreme while repressed by a front of rationality. Anna eventually has to confront these fragmentations, and she tries to lock them

up into her notebooks. Tommy's insistence on claiming justice and autonomy echoes Benhabib's statement that "[j]ustice and autonomy alone cannot sustain and nourish that web of narratives in which human beings' sense of selfhood unfolds" (198); on the other hand, Anna's self-restriction also reflects the fact that "solidarity and care alone cannot raise the self to the level not only of being the subject but also the author of a coherent life-story" (Benhabib 198).<sup>11</sup>

The spatial pressure in the life also represents the interrupted inner boundary. According to Chodorow's idea, because of their mothering by women, girls experience "more permeable ego boundaries" than boys and often "define themselves more in relation to other" (*Reproduction* 93). Anna feels that her room is "no longer her own" after Tommy has entered it, and her very sense of self is confiscated. Richard, who summons her to his grand office to play a role required to restore his vanity and his failed dignity as a male because "Marion's escape from her position as prisoner, or fellow-victim had left him alone and hurt" (*GN* 327). In the crowded tube, she encounters a stranger who tries to accost her. His "humiliated and triumphal" fantasy is similar to "Richard's aggressive need to humiliate her" (*GN* 333). Meanwhile in her own house, Anna experiences hostility in the self-defensive gestures of her homosexual lodger. She feels like a "dry well, a cracked opening into the earth that was all dust" (*GN* 347). The image of a crack also symbolises the new possibilities opened up in the process of cracking up. In the Blue Notebook of this section, Anna imagines the possibility of experiencing new forms of communication with a man that they both feel the "joy of recognition" about "a crack in that man's personality like a gap in a dam, and through that gap the future might pour in a different shape—terrible perhaps, or marvellous, but something new" (*GN* 405).

Her tension and sense of the frustrations of being a woman are aroused to the extreme when Marion hysterically pleads for her to attend to their political activity. Anna's normally defensive rationality seems hypnotized into suspension, and she gradually enters into Marion's hysteria with no control at all over what she is going to do (*GN* 440). She is experiencing "the provisionality and permeability of

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<sup>11</sup> Here Benhabib analyses Carol Gilligan's moral debate of care against justice which is more emphasised and praised as a traditional moral concept.



personality” here like her experiences in the notebooks (Pickering 114); in effect, she dramatises the capacities and potential of the novel form itself. She can subsequently enter and talk of Tom Mathlong’s political ideals, as well as Charlie Themba’s going mad as a consequence of his political persecution. This communication through madness in *Free Women* is achieved by Anna, Marian and Tommy. According to Pickering, such communication suggests that Anna gradually accepts “her incipient breakdown, her willingness to work through her madness” (114).

Anna externalises her inner chaos through the clippings from the newspapers which adorn her walls. Like “a central point of awareness,” she tries to “fit things together” by “a million uncoordinated facts” as she has done in her notebooks (GN 555). Elizabeth Abel explains that, burdened with responsibility, Anna is thus “engulfed in her attempt to organize the meaning of the world” (431). Therefore, in her dream, she is anxious, for her “breasts were empty” in front of Janet and Tommy, representing “starved” figures (GN 556-557). The empty breasts seem to symbolise Anna’s anxiety about not being able to be an ideal mother as well as an ideal author. She realises that she has been mad when the clippings of newspapers in her notebooks extend to cover the entire wall space of her room.

Thus, Anna’s new understanding in *Free Women* leads her to accept the “act” in the immediate moment, in reaction to the loss of moral sense aroused by Tommy’s suicide attempt. Fahim mentions that, in her fictional construction, “Lessing is trying to create a dynamic balance between the world of temporal experience and the timeless world of inner experience which, interpenetrating, should provide wholeness” (83). Similar to the end of the inner Golden Notebook, Anna experiences a new sensation, “like a hallucination, a new and hitherto not understood picture of the world” (GN 557). This new sensation is outside the form through which she understands the processes of her immediate experiences, and is more like the result of her entire life experience. She says, this “illumination—which was timeless” is about an experience “beyond the region where words could be made to have sense” (GN 557). Since words lose their meanings, any act must be made without faith in “good” or “bad” (GN 558). Her scepticism of “words” is closely related to her loss of moral sense, which is the cause of Tommy’s suicide

attempt. Anna concludes that any decision should be “simply a sort of provisional act, hoping it might turn out well, but with no more than that hope” (*GN* 558). This acceptance of a “provisional act” is a way to relieve her anxiety. This also echoes her first conversation with Mrs. Marks in the Blue Notebook: “I watch people—they decide to be this thing or that. But it’s as if it’s a sort of dance—they might just as well do the opposite with equal conviction” (*GN* 197). Her sense of responsibility forces her to act in this way, and the decision “would cost her life, or her freedom” (*GN* 558).

Anna’s decision not to write is also part of this “provisional act” which might lead her to a next step. Greene proposes that the closed form of this novel, which seems contrary to the fragmentary endings of the Golden Notebook, suggests that “having dissolved the forms, she can remake them on her own terms” (*Poetics* 117). Saul Green in the Blue Notebook comes to break down Anna’s rigid self; Milt, on the contrary, draws Anna “from the fusion with the world” and allows her to “pass through her final maternal crisis” (Abel 432). When Milt strips off the newspapers on the wall, Anna feels “protected and cared for” (*GN* 562). Rejecting the old recurring battle between males and females, Anna also releases herself from overburdened responsibility and unbalanced relationships. Pickering explains that it is not only “the omission and concentration that make the conventional novel false but also the act of ordering the chaos of experience according to worn perceptions and outgrown precepts” (122). Anna chooses to do social work, as an answer to Tommy’s question about the Communists’ emphasis on “basic organization of society” instead of immediate assistance of people in need. It does not mean that she tries to retreat to her old patterns of response; on the contrary, Anna feels that she must “break everything down” (*GN* 556). Pickering considers Anna’s devotion to social work as “demonstrate[ing] the essence of boulder-pushing, which is to take on simple, ordinary tasks” (121). One’s responsibility is not only to communicate through words, but also to be taken into relationships with others. On the other hand, Anna’s decision not to write is a kind of proclamation that “in the gender asymmetry of dominant culture the female witness, sensitive or not, is still not accepted as a first-person universal” (Miller 197). From this perspective, Lessing’s ideas about writing are similar to those of Elaine Showalter, who is against

the idea proposed by Cynthia Ozick that “writing transcends sexual identity, that it takes place outside of the social order” (qtd. in Miller 197).<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Milt’s last sentence, “let’s preserve the forms” may be seen, as Greene suggests, as one that “enables her to endure, forging a new relation to the forms that is not a capitulation but enables her to take stands, in full recognition of the arbitrariness of these stands, in a spirit of courteous irony” (*Poetics* 117). These new relations are not simply about those of literary convention or writing, but also about Anna’s new feeling of shaping a sense of personal autonomy. This includes as well the new parental relationships in Tommy’s family: Tommy living with Marian and Molly taking care of Marian’s son. This shuffling between families also represents the reconstruction of new possibilities of relationships between people, which echoes Benhabib’s explanation that “a coherent sense of self is attained with successful integration of autonomy and solidarity, or with the right mix of justice and care” (198).

Intersubjectivity in *The Golden Notebook* is thus represented through the intricately correlated relationships between each notebook and the frame novel. *The Golden Notebook* as a whole breaks through the confinement of so-called “reality” within the genre of realism. Although the style of the notebooks seems so personal, each notebook represents different kinds of social modes that people use to try to make connections with the collective, such as politics, writing, family or even relationships. Therefore, every attempt of Anna to effect change and to make a choice is also her quest for innovative ways to interact with the wholeness of an imaginary collective. Anna gradually realises that every part of herself is reflected through the Other, through other people. Anna’s performance of those personal voices of the collective within her notebooks foregrounds theme of intersubjectivity, emphasising the necessity to voice them in different ways since inner voices are sometimes overwhelmed by the disappointment and pressure from the outer world. Anna eventually has to return to the social world to break down those restrictions imposed on herself through her interactions with people. Only then can she fully achieve her new recognition that has come from her experience

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<sup>12</sup>See Showalter’s idea in “Women Who Write Are Women” 31-33.

with Saul. In addition to personal effort, inner growth is shown to be related to the interaction with the collective. The different endings in *Free Women* and the inner Golden Notebook demonstrate that intersubjectivity is performed in different ways. The ending of *Free Women* is not a closed ending for Anna. Since, as Sprague proposes that her palindromic name, “suggests her great hidden circular or unending power, her possession of a kind of eternal fecundity that is a writer’s power and a woman’s power” (*Narrative Patterns* 84), the last sentence is also the beginning of *The Golden Notebook* as well as *Free Women*, there is the possibility and chance for Anna to embark on yet another journey of self-discovery.

## Part II. The Intersubjectivity of Mutual Creativity

### Chapter Five

#### Recreation through Blanking Briefing: The Journey of I.I.I.I.I...in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*

##### 1. A Postmodern Subjectivity with the Symptom of Amnesia

*Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) is unusual in Lessing's *oeuvre* in its use of a male as the major protagonist – a departure from Lessing's usual preference. It therefore warrants some attention. The book is roughly divided into two parts: the first part includes the inner journey of Charles Watkins, and is developed alongside an account of his treatment in a psychiatric hospital; the second part consists of letters from various individuals acquainted with him and that present an insight into his daily life before his psychotic breakdown. The story of Charles Watkins and the reasons for his arrival in the hospital therefore need to be inferred from this patchwork of stories and textual accounts. Watkins's amnesia and the "mad" narrative of his search for the Crystal are multi-determined in relation to this tapestry of discourses. Anita Mylse suggests that his psychotic state or "mental abnormality" is presented as a kind of "state of heightened consciousness opening those inner vistas to the schizoid which are closed for ever to a normal person" (67). Watkins's dislocated feelings and his inner search for the transcendental Crystal are presented through a narrative account that also suggests a mode of postmodern subjectivity. Fredric Jameson, in his seminal essay on postmodernism, described the postmodern condition as one markedly involving modes of "nostalgia" and "schizophrenia" (qtd. in Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 78). But Watkins's state is also presented alongside his insistence on engaging the "totality" of the collective and close to the kind of aesthetics of "impersonality" associated with modernism. Moreover, his split visions on the inner journey are suggestive of the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid position in which an infant undergoes the

mechanism of defence and internalisation through fantasy as a way of dealing with its fear and desire in relation to an external object. Waugh describes the similar psychological transformation of subjectivity in the shift from modernism to postmodernism which is from “an aesthetics of impersonality (‘schizoid’) to one of extreme depersonalization (‘schizophrenic’)” (*Feminine Fictions* 79). Waugh explains further that since “impersonality” fails as a means of defensive control, the fragmenting of subjectivity is “the final defence against the fear of annihilation by the object and the *desire*, therefore, to destroy the object oneself” (*Feminine Fictions* 79). Watkins’s symptoms are presented as a masculine defence against his regressive desire to return to the fusion of the pre-oedipal condition because the recovery of an imaginary lost wholeness might be occasioned “only at the expense of an annihilation of identity” (Waugh, *Feminine Fictions* 79).<sup>1</sup> At the beginning, when Watkins wakes up at the hospital, he expresses his unhappiness at the way in which the medical profession institutes an absolute barrier between the medical professional and the “mad” patient: responding to the nurse, he says “You said *We*. I know that ‘we’. It is the categorical collective” (*BF* 14). When the nurse asks him what she should answer, he says, “You as we. Not you as *you*” (*BF* 14). Similarly the pursuit of the “One” in his journey is presented as akin to the Platonic idea of the desired union with the sun as the ascent to the Good. But the Platonic ascent might also be reinterpreted as a desire for pre-Oedipal recovery. Watkins’s desire for reunion with others is similar to the infant’s eagerness to obtain “holding” and “oneness” with the mother that is central to the work of Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott. Watkins wants the nurse to “lift” him and “blast” him to his destination (*BF* 14). Waugh suggests that one expression of the gender anxiety of male modernists realised itself in relation to the desired object through the “mobilization of the paranoid-schizoid defences of splitting (intense idealization and denigration), fragmentation, projection, and introjection,” whereas women modernists such as Woolf appear far more invested in a “struggle to cope with ambivalence without splitting” (*Feminine Fictions* 80). Rubenstein too suggests that “the inner journey

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<sup>1</sup> Chodorow explains that a boy’s Oedipal love for his mother is more “overwhelming and threatening for his ego and sense of (masculine) independence” since it is an extension of the intense mother-infant unity (*Reproduction* 131). See Chodorow.

itself, both a reflection of and an effort to heal the division is the central assumption of the novel" (*Novelistic Vision* 188). Lessing's adoption of a male protagonist seems relevant here. Watkins's fantastic inner journey appears to be both a mode of regression and an attempt to overcome the gap between himself and others and to recognise his intersubjective relation with them through the mode of fantasy.

For it is through Watkins's inner journey that he is able to break the fixed symbolic meanings in the real world of the everyday. Since the novel is defined by Lessing herself as an "inner-space fiction," King insists that this is a form "which leads the reader into new 'spaces', new imagined worlds, which offer an alien perspective on contemporary reality" (55). Through the blurring of distinctions between "dreams, madness, the irrational," Watkins gradually breaks down those barriers between his social mask and his inner needs" (King 81). As in Lessing's previous work, breaking down the fixed barriers between oneself and the world is her concern and in this novel, in particular, she achieves a curious ontological upheaval where, as the reader follows Watkins's sea journey, this experience gradually begins to feel more 'real' than the flattened and bureaucratic world of the hospital, so that it is the 'real' world, the world of the hospital world that begins to take on a delusory feel (*BF* 16). A number of critics have pointed out that the journey of the protagonist is similar to that of Jess Watkins in R.D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience*.<sup>2</sup> In Laing's text, Watkins' suffering from amnesia is interpreted as allowing him to abandon the restrictions of his previous life. It is worth noting that Watkins' sense of dislocation is first linguistically represented when he describes his journey in the presence of the nurses and the doctors. Lessing had already used linguistic experiment as a vehicle for the expression of fundamental doubt through the form of *The Golden Notebook*. Similar to *The Golden Notebook*, the "briefing" in the title suggests another kind of "narrative," described by Fuoroli as facilitating Lessing's attempt to "find a form which will not only allow Lessing to point out the inadequacies of reference and realism, but will

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<sup>2</sup> Whittaker mentions that, as several critics have pointed out, including Marion Vlastos and Robert Rubenstein, his subsequent mental voyage has parallels with that described by Laing in *The Politics of Experience*" (77).

also enable her to move beyond these limits” (146). When Watkins is forced to wake up, he retains some memory of his journey, and the glimpses of this offer a kind of ironic counterpoint and misrecognitions in the conversations between he and the doctors. Watkins keeps pointing out the “gulf” that exists in their respective discourses, and that the doctors fail to recognise the significant “fact” in his life (*BF* 140). He repeats the word “I gotta use words when I talk to you. Eliot. I gotta use words. But if not God, what?” (*BF* 136). Fuoroli further suggests that “Charles’s invocation of T. S. Eliot’s line, ‘I gotta use words when I talk to you,’ points out Lessing’s belief that language functions in the novel as a necessary evil” (147). Watkins suggests that “words” have lost their meaning because they have fallen on the floor, and what he means by this is presumably that meaning is underdetermined, dependent of context and use and there cannot be a rigid designation of meaning that stands on every situation and at all times. Watkins wants an acceptance of a language that is the vehicle not simply for either/or but either/and, similar to Eliot’s idea of inclusive wit, so that there need not be an exclusive choice between living and dreaming. It should be his dreams *and* his life (*BF* 141). Julia Kristeva’s ideas about language and subjectivity within the frame of psychoanalysis are useful here. She proposes that if symptoms are the vehicle for a “repressed language of hatred or love, or of emotions too subtle for words,” then they may serve as a conduit for “energies no longer filtered by any psychic trace or representation” (*In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* 6). In one of the letters, it is revealed that Watkins develops a stammer before breaking down, a bodily manifestation of the insufficiency of language and his sense of the impossibility of communicating his state of mind to anyone. Gambaudo proposes that for Kristeva, “psychoanalysis is therefore able to offer the reality of authoritative discourse (symbolic) in balance with transgressive elements (semiotic)” (30). Besides the Freudian concept of the signifier and signified, Kristeva proposes the “semiotic” as “representations of affects” that are “labile psychic traces subject to the primary processes of displacement and condensation” and that such manifestations are “opposed to the symbolic representations inherent in, or derivative of, the system of language” (*Beginning* 4). In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, Lessing tries to represent that semiotic order through the inner journey,



and at the same time, to show its conflict with the normal world represented by the hospital and the medical reading of Watkins's condition. It is the possibility of "a subject in process" that Kristeva proposes through the ongoing fluid process of fluctuation in the "relations to the other" (*Beginning* 9).

## **2. Self's Encounter with the Archetypal Collective**

In addition, the form of space fiction and the mental journey of Charles Watkins are analysed from the perspective of both Jungian psychoanalysis and Sufism. The account of Watkins's journey resonates with classical archetypes and allusions as well as transcendental intimations of mystical experiences. Whittaker notes Lessing's use of "the fantastic, the mystic, the archetypal and the symbolic, not merely as literary devices to alert us to the paucity of realism, but because she genuinely needs those modes of expression to convey her experience of another dimension than that of the everyday world" (76). However, his previous trip, which focuses largely on his matrophobia, seems to reflect the construction of his subjectivity in the encounter with a version of the collective unconscious. Cederstrom states that Watkins's descent is in accord with "the archetypal experiences of death and renewal once available through heroic ordeal are now encountered primarily through nervous breakdown" (137). One of the key differences between Freud and Jung's idea of the unconscious is that, while for Freud the unconscious is the site of the primary presses and repression, for Jung it is the space of cultural memory and mythopoetic romance. For Jung, the self must emerge as the reconciliation of the conscious mind with a mythopoeic unconscious. However, this encounter with the collective unconscious seems to revert to an experience of nihilism in the formal and repeated meetings of the messengers after Watkins enters the Crystal. The Crystal seems to carry a number of symbolic possibilities and resonances. It is firstly similar to Jung's idea of transformation. Jung mentions that the "Cave" is the major symbol in the process of psychic transformation because this is a place "in which one is shut up in order to be incubated and renewed" (Jung 69). The inward voyage, by making "a connection

with his unconscious contents,” “may result in a momentous change of personality in the positive or negative sense” for the voyager (Jung 70).

Watkins may be seen as a kind of postmodern hero, reflected not only in his amnesia in the real world, but also his changeable identities within his internal adventures. He appears to name his comrades randomly, where one is Charles and another is Charlie. They are evidently his split selves. At the beginning, the sea journey of Charles Watkins reminds readers of many ancient epics such as those of Beowulf or Odysseus. He imagines himself as, and identifies himself with, different classical heroes or sinners. As Susan Rowland notes, “myth” has a dual sense in Jung’s writings: “as evidence of the unknowable unconscious in individual personal myths and as evidence of the unconscious in cultures” (28). From its very inception, his inner journey is firstly constructed through many mystical archetypes. The personal journey is effectively projected onto the collective dream so that Watkins’s journey is burdened with a grand responsibility, a heroic gleam, from his departure onwards. A variety of critics have noted this heroic quality: Mylse states that the journey “reveals him more as a person concerned with macrocosmic unity” (67). In addition, Singleton suggests that “Charles Watkins’s voyage is compared to Odysseus’, with the connotations of homecoming expressed by that story” (69). At the beginning, Watkins is like those heroes, believing that he has been assigned the mission of seeing the crystal in the company of eleven other males. When they depart from home, “they, the women, were waiting with us, for on us their release depended, since they were prisoners on that island” (*BF* 19). It would seem that, as with Greek heroic travellers such as “Ulysses,” Watkins is searching for something meaningful and of greater or more transcendental value than what is conferred by the normal routines of his life. Pickering proposes that in Sufism, the Ocean is an important image “of Infinite Possibility, which may be both within and without, [and] informs all his mental activity” (126). Unlike those ancient heroes who have to fight monsters and are tempted on their way, Watkins must fight against the numbing and deadening effects of a late modern civilisation which has lost all mythopoeic sense and which is reflected in the technological approach to human life that is offered as “treatment” in the hospital. Interestingly, Cederstrom argues that Lessing tries to reflect “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is

contemporary history” that T.S. Eliot proposes (137). She suggests here a link with High Modernists such as Joyce and Eliot who were conscious of the loss of mythic foundations and the need to recover them as a kind of ideal possibility through ironic literary awareness. It is as if Lessing is conscious of continuing the modernist project to open up consciousness by exploring the capacity of altered states of consciousness—including those of madness—to connect with a sense of expanded vitality in the present. The narrator mentions at the beginning of the trip that “Our expectation had been for aid, for explanation, for a heightening of our selves and of our thoughts” (BF 20). Watkins seems to expect the intimation of higher standards that might save him from the oppressive restriction and the “ordinariness” of the contemporary world. When he waits for the appearance of the Crystal on the sea, he wishes to “watch them approach and take their measure—and adjust our thoughts and manners” (BF 21). These images of higher valuation are similar to “the metaphor of alchemy to Jungian and Sufic ideas”: Singleton suggests that “one should find specific alchemical symbols in Lessing’s work...the development of a more advanced consciousness—is similar to theirs” (122). After Watkins misses his first meeting with the Crystal, he also seems to lose his understanding of the meaning of life, especially when he calls it “Crafty,” and “Why.” In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Kristeva explores the modes of the melancholic from the perspectives of philosophers and psychoanalysts and as she suggests, it appears that for Watkins too, the quest for the meaning of life is as important as life itself. Kristeva explores the close relation to melancholia of the Aristotelian concept of “mesotes”: Aristotle located melancholia in nature “mainly by having it ensue from *heat*, considered to be the regulating principle of organism, and *mesotes*, the controlled interaction of opposite energies” (*Black Sun* 7). This Aristotelian idea appears to lie behind the meaning of the Crystal: Watkins relates it to the image of fire and he imagines that it would be “sun’s breath, the solar wind” (BF 30). However, men’s pursuit of this heat is “as dormant as those of a babe in the womb” (BF 30). Meanwhile, he assigns his comrades who are “flame-throwers,” to administer what is “fair” and “justice” (BF 20, 29). Watkins points out that this kind of search also has a long history in the Christian tradition, where all men are sinners and fallen and in search of atonement and reparation. Questioned by the doctor

about the story of Sinbad that he once taught, he answers “Sin bad. Sin Bad. Bad Sin” (BF 15). Ironically, it is misunderstood by the doctors who assume that he must have committed a crime. They apply the language of judgement. The repeated “around and around” also represents the repetitive attempt to break through the current situation, like the transmigration in Buddhism, and he believes that “for all these centuries I had been sailing around and around and around and around for no other reason than that one day I would meet them...but I have been left behind” (BF 22). However, when he is left alone after the first appearance of the disc, he feels “branded” as if he is being abandoned by the grand adventure. He is then not the hero who tells his wife about his adventure, sharing with her the glory of seeing the Crystal. King has itemised the classical allusions in the novel, describing how Watkins is “at once Jason, in pursuit of his ‘purpose’, and a second Odysseus fighting against the lure of the Sirens. He is a Sinbad, a Jonah, an Ancient Mariner left alone on board ship, a Judas, ‘branded’ as guilty when only his eleven companions ascend in the heavenly Crystal” (56).

Lessing’s choice of a male protagonist who is “an intellectual, a professor of classics,” seems to represent the ultimate in rational discipline. Cederstrom also suggests that Lessing seems to be setting up a binary of “*logos*”—rationality, consciousness, deliberation and *eros*—against a more feminised world of the senses, feeling and the unconscious” (138). The world of *logos* is also represented by the hospital which forces Watkins to awake from his dream and then forces him back to sleep through administering pharmacological chemicals. In *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Michel Foucault demonstrates how civilization creates “a milieu favourable to the development of madness” (217). Man in the modern world might lose “the physical happiness in which his relation to the world is usually established” (Foucault 218), forgetting natural instincts and feelings in interaction with the world. Watkins inhabits a world of academia that in this novel appears to be viewed as complicit with the kind of instrumental rationality that has extended technological control over the natural world and human nature. Yet in some of the letters, it is indicated that he longs to escape from the confinement of rationalist logic and disciplinary boundaries and to bring into the world something new that exceeds these boundaries and binaries.

The letter from his old colleague, Jeremy Thorne refers to Watkins's rebellious turn against his profession, but indicates its injuriousness to his relationship with others and his career. Meanwhile, Watkins intention seems to be to break through the conventions of public speaking in order to provoke his audience and leading Rosemary Baines to begin a process of self-examination as she reflects on the lecture. King suggests that in this castigation of the academy and the hospital as seats of wisdom and knowledge, the novel "mounts a forceful attack on those cultural institutions which are generally regarded as society's strength" (59). Baines is impressed by Watkins's idea that every parent places their hope in the next generation but without examining what they may have lost themselves. The mistakes of every generation seem to be "sameness" and "againness" (BF 151). She agrees with his point of view that education should keep children's "lively alert fearless curiosity" towards the world (BF 151). However, the function of education seems to be to provide only "impersonality, formality" for the young and the repression of their natures constitutes a "prison shade" cast by these institutions (BF 154, 152). Baines remembers her intuitive feeling in childhood; a feeling of being on a "wavelength" which is "on a different, high, vibrating current, of the familiar becoming transparent" and that this feeling is gradually suppressed by her education (BF 153). Meanwhile, she mentions how her many mystical experiences seem to be in opposition to the assumptions of "the most recent religion," science, which is a "categorical, classifying discourse" and "not objective as claimed, but ultimately ideological" (King 61). Watkins does not appreciate her inspired reaction to his lecture, however, and denies her friendly concern about his stammer until the night when, on the brink of breaking down, he walks towards this stranger who has shared with him her own unconventional experiences.

The abrupt conversations between Watkins, the doctors and nurses in the psychiatric hospital are a kind of performance put on to reveal through riddles his real thoughts. In her letter, Rosemary Baines tries to discuss with him his symptoms of stammering, similar to the situation of her friend, Professor Frederick. While Watkins's breakdown is vaguely explained, Frederick's case appears as a kind of reflection of Watkins' condition. Frederick's stuttering is actually his own rebellion against the gradual conflict between what he once believed in the past and his

“awakening moment” in the present that cannot be articulated. The uncontrollable speech is similar to the breakdown of the symbolic order. Previously, he had discovered things through rational questioning about the “whys and the wherefores” (which is also proposed by Watkins in his journey) (BF 159). While the relation between signifier and signified is inconsistent, there seems to be a hope of searching for the meaning beneath what appears “full of riches, promise,” but as he does not know how to bring back this new knowledge, as in Plato’s allegory of the cave, the world repudiates him and “each turns away from him as he approached” (BF 159). He feels himself rejected by the world as if he had approached “a mirror and found it blank” (BF 159). He thinks he might be mad or ill. King proposes that “instead of accepting as his identity the mirror image reflected by society, validating or censoring his desires, he becomes again a *tabula rasa*” (59). But in his exploration of animistic cultures, Watkins discovers that the priests have special powers of communication, using a variety of sounds and not simply words. With his rational mind, Watkins rejects this idea of communication. Yet, when he begins to suffer himself from the stammer, he develops a similar experience of multiple sounds emanating from his own body. There is “another stream of words paralleled to the stream of words that he was actually using” and expresses “opinions rather off at a tangent” which are “crazy, dotty, batty, cranky” (BF 161). He tries to control and review his every word before sounding it out, which is like “a way of putting a lock on one’s spontaneity, creativity” (BF 162). In operating this kind of control, he is presented as complicit with a society that controls through instrumental rationality (King 60). But after reading the story of the Victorian clergyman, he realises how the social pressure to comply with expectations and standards serves to suppress rebellious ideas. He decides that he should not repress his Profound Doubts about Archaeology, “Doubts about its bases, premises, methods, and above all, its unconscious biases” (BF 168). Finally, he moves towards recovery by “letting the ‘parallel stream’ of ideas, or words, that inhibit him from saying the conventional things, come out: he listens and then voices it” (BF 169). King proposes that “Watkins succeeds in controlling his stammer—and all that it implies—because raising to consciousness his full sense of what is wrong with society would destroy his sense of identity, as his subsequent amnesia proves” (60).

Instead, Watkins voices the experience of his inner journey through poetic displacement, sounds seemingly severed from conventional signification and he thereby allows his consciousness to flow out into the actual world.

### **3. In Search of the True Self in the Archaic Maternal Moment**

Watkins appears to undergo an emotional reaction after missing the union with the Crystal, similar to the depressive phase in the development of the infant in Kleinian psychoanalysis. He feels angry about what he perceives as the callousness of the Crystal and is “sickened with loss” in its seeming rejection of him (*BF* 23). He then seems to shrink like a small creature that longs for the feeling of security. He is like “one small kitten . . . feeling with its muzzle and its senses for its lost companions among the rapidly chilling fold of the blanket” (*BF* 23). He is thus helpless and lost like a child. This Crystal is like the “phantasy” which, according to Klein, is a function of the immature ego. What he is waiting for is actually not clearly defined and is named “Them,” the “disc” or Crystal. It seems to be a primal mode of regression to the longed for fusion of the pre-Oedipal. Watkins describes how, when the Crystal arrives, they would feel “a sensation first,” all through their bodies, and that “in a fever or a great strain of exhaustion, or in love, all the resources of the body stretch out and expand and vibrate higher than in ordinary life” (*BF* 21). Otto Weininger reiterates this sense that the pre-Oedipal phase of development “is primarily a phantasy that has to do with the physical sensations experienced by the infant” (2). When he leaves the original ship, he names it “Lollipop,” a childish name (*BF* 35). His drifting alone on the sea is like experiencing the splitting of the ego once again (*BF* 35). Weininger explains that “the ego splits itself” in order to “maintain itself in the face of this overwhelming anxiety” which overwhelms the infant in the process of separating itself from the warmth and safety provided by the mother’s womb, an apprehension of terror or annihilation (3). But the sea as a maternal emblem seems also to interrupt and threaten the heroic pursuit of autonomous selfhood. He feels that his journey is “Fretted and worn for ever by a mothering sea / A jealous sea that loves her ancient pain” (*BF* 33). The sea, which nourishes all creatures in the world, also almost destroys

the possibility of undertaking and completing the heroic journey. The doubled images, of a mother as a grand carer (which is also similar to Winnicott's good enough mother, the holder), and of the mother as a witch-destroyer, begin to appear at this point.

While Watkins allows himself to plunge further into the journey back toward the pre-Oedipal, he also learns how to break the confines of his imagination. When he drifts alone at sea, he gradually loses his oars, and is swept along by the current: another allusion perhaps to the sea-change of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This part of the novel, too, seems to reflect Laing's idea in *The Politics of Experience* that "one cannot clearly distinguish active from passive—on a journey" (Whittaker 77). Watkins is the first to be forced to lose control of the raft, because of the typhoon. He is aware of himself, as a creature with lungs required to breathe air, and has to try to break through his own limitations, so he says "men are teaching men to have fishers' lungs, men learn to breathe water" (BF 30). However, the Crystal is always connected with his desire to overcome limits. He says "air lungs for air, but organs made of crystal sound, or singing light, for the solar win that will blow my love to me" (BF 30). His journey becomes more fatalistic and imaginative than his classical counterparts since, like Ulysses for example, he relies more on his senses than his rationality or capacity for strict logical thinking, even though he must always fight against the masculine frustration of being cast away from his mission, his singular purpose. The air and sea image, on the other hand, provoke Aristotle's "mythical allusions as he links melancholia to spermatic froth and eroti, with explicit references to Dionysus and Aphrodite," and Kristeva explains this further as the philosopher's "ethos" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 7). But as Winnicott proposes, "Only the true self can be creative and only the true self can feel real" ("Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self" 148) so that Watkins must learn to integrate his imaginative sense of possibility into the mundane life represented through his conversations in the hospital. He thus reads to the nurse the poem about his situation whilst lying on the rock.



Kristeva explains that “*depressive affect* can be interpreted as a defence against parcelling.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, sadness reconstitutes an affective cohesion of the self, which restores its unity within the framework of the affect” (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 19). Within the lost sea, Watkins tries to regain his sense of omnipotence through his imagination. He then decides that he will no longer be trapped in that place, and he uses his will to summon the porpoise to save him from this “poisoned sea, filled with stinking effluent from the bowels of man, and waste from the murderous mind of man” (BF 35). When he safely arrives on land, he feels welcomed in a forest, with “intimate air,” no feelings of “hostility,” and a leopard also looks “benign” (BF 39). He is guided by two yellow cat-like creatures which lead him “through impossible stretches of mountains” (Myles 68). With the company of the two animals, Watkins keeps going “up and up” along with the river to its source. The process is an “ascending” not only from the sea but also a spiritual rising (BF 45). He walks like a “robot” until he reaches the source of the waterfall. The river washes him “like bathwater” and he sleeps “well and calmly” after a long time (BF 47). His journey seems to lead him to what he has not known, and he says it is as if “the knowledge of what I would see caused me to see what otherwise I could not” (BF 49). Allowing himself to sleep, he seems to prepare for getting closer to his own unconscious. It is no coincidence that he feels familiar with an abandoned city, with gardens and scented plants everywhere. He wonders “when it was such a perfect place for a community to make its own,” why the citizens disappeared (BF 51). In this empty place, he “need not be solitary” because he feels that the city “was itself a person, or had a soul, or being” and it seems to know him. He seems to be at a point of the union with the place and the world; he says that “my friends were all about me, I know that, and in some way they were of the substance of this warm earthy stone, and the air itself, but it was not enough for me just to live here and breathe its air” (BF 52-53). Actually, a description of this stone city does appear in the letter from Baines, which is about her friend Professor Frederick’s reflection on his doubt about so-called “truth.” As an anthropologist, Frederick’s doubts about his discipline are first aroused when he discovers a tribe in Africa whose life is based on the

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<sup>3</sup>Kristeva explains “schizoid fragmentation is a radical, paroxysmal manifestation of parceling” (*Black Sun* 19).

movement of a river and whose lives are led in accord with the seasons of nature. Although the tribe is deemed “barbaric and backward” by conventional anthropology, Frederick judges it as a highly developed society because it is one with “harmony, responsibility towards its members, and lack of aggression towards neighbours” (*BF* 164). Yet it seems that these are not the principles admitted as “progression” in this study. He has consequently been struck with “doubts,” similar to “a religious person’s ‘doubt’” after leaving the site (*BF* 154). His confidence is seriously threatened and he is left with the feeling that he could never know the true ideas of this ancient society because his own world is dominated by “things,” like “artefacts, possessions, machines, objects,” and he can only see through a distorting lens which is the barrier” of his own age (*BF* 164). The stone city seems to imply and remind Watkins of his own doubts that are similar to those of Professor Frederick and he takes it upon himself to clean up the space which is similar to a mandala shape: a square with a circle inside. Actually, the city is full of the images of the mother archetype in Jung’s scheme. The fertile and fruitful island, the gardens, the magic circle and mandala, all imply the idea of “protection” in the mother archetype (Jung 15). In this place, Watkins experiences the “satisfying and gratifying” that is the infant’s feeling of affirmation through the good breast (Weininger 8). Watkins’ attempts to enter into the ancient society’s symbols of wholeness can be read as complementing his journey into the unconscious and he says that: “I knew only that this was what I had to do, and could only suppose that my friends must have told him so, since it was after my dream of them that I had known it” (*BF* 54).

#### **4. From Abjection to Acceptance –Encounter with the Feminine Eros**

However, Watkins’s desire for spiritual ascent is accompanied by his struggle against the repressed unconscious and this is reflected in his interaction with the natural world. It seems that the natural world exerts increasingly more influence on him. He first senses the “pull and antagonisms and tensions from the sun and moon”; his sleep is “ordered by the timing of the moon” and there are interactions between himself and the moon. He is increasingly driven by the shape and circling

of the moon and even “fell into a misery and a dimming of purpose” (BF 56). It seems that he has a feeling of betraying the Sun, “man’s father and creator” when he is “moonstruck” and “mooncrazed” (BF 56). He even thinks that he himself could understand the thoughts of the moon. He, like the earth, has no choice but to accompany the moon, and is destined to move “around and around and around” (BF 58). Watkins seems to be driven by the libidinal desire “on the part of the infant for constant gratification as evidence of the mother’s love” (Weininger 10) but he also experiences anxiety as soon as this kind of lunatic behaviour is connected with the death image. When he is “lunatic,” day and night, waiting for the arrival of the Crystal, the death of a white beast wakens him from this indulgent fever. The death of a beast in the dark then makes him feel that the place is no longer a “purged and salt-scoured and guiltless one”; he thinks that he “had drawn evil” into the surroundings into himself and even had the feeling of killing the animal (BF 59). King mentions that this “Eden,” his island, “re-enacted the Fall, and as in the Christian versions, mankind’s sin is revealed through the relationship of male and female, with the further implication that what is wrong with woman” (56). This incident, with the implication of religious (especially Christian) sin, seems to represent the rise of the super-ego. King explains further that “a smell of blood implicitly connects the moon’s phases with the female menstrual cycle, underlining the traditional association between the moon, female and insanity” (56).

Watkins is then noticeably afraid of the appearance of the moon and tries to escape from its influence, like an infant learning to separate from its mother. He has to cast away the feelings of guilt and starts another journey that is similar to what Kristeva calls, “abjection.” In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva proposes that the abject, the jettisoned object, “is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses” (2). Mari Jo Buhle explains that “Kristeva imagined patriarchal culture as the product of the masculine effort to repress the memory of, and a continuing desire for, pre-oedipal fusion” (336-337). In his subsequent escape from the influence of the moon, Watkins seems to go through a socialisation process, rejecting the maternal role represented in the Freudian concept of the Oedipal Complex, or in Jacques Lacan’s Mirror Phase and

Kristeva's entry into the symbolic order.<sup>4</sup> He chooses instead to make himself sleep and retreats to "living in a different place or country" which is actually the life in hospital and that is "so heavy and dismal and alien" to him, "like entering a prison cell" (*BF* 61). However, his terror of "treacherous glamorous sucking light" makes him "prefer that landlubber's living" (*BF* 61). His escape from the moonlight refers to his reluctance to admit the "feminine" side of his nature, attached to the mythic and not the rational, and he is in flight from its acceptance—perhaps even a kind of reflection at the time of writing on political feminism and its claims for women, and responses to those claims by men.

His feelings of fright at this sense of guilt seem to reflect the conflict in his relationships with people in real life. Nancy Topping Bazin proposes that "Lessing never underestimates the pain and difficulty involved in escaping from the past which has determined how one lives" (12). Lessing seems to enact this split through the representation of Watkins's apparent tearing of himself into two parts, as he tries to struggle between the forces of his own rationality and the power of the lunatic moonlight. Gambaudo explains that "If the Kristevan maternal represents the move from nature to culture, the abject represents the boundary between nature and culture that the subject crosses in the process of symbolisation" (140). On his way to avoid the moonlight, Watkins meets witch-like women in the forest with blood "smeared around their stretched mouths" and "trickling off their chins" (*BF* 62). The women could be seen to represent his fear and repressed desire in his real life. He says, "I knew quite well who they are . . . though there was a gulf in my memory, blotting out the exact knowledge of where these people fitted into my long-past life" and he knows that they are "intimately connected with" him (*BF* 62). These women all look the same, "their three faces, women's faces, all the same, or rather, all variations of the same face" (*BF* 62). However, he still remembers the name, Felicity, who is his wife in another life. The horrified ritual of eating the infant is in accord with the characteristics of "abjection," preserving "what existed in the

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<sup>4</sup> Sylvie Gambaudo explains that "in positing parental desire, in the pre-Oedipal phase, as the place where the socio symbolic contract is first established, Kristeva also proposes the maternal function as foundation of the subject. It is in fact the maternal that organises separation from itself and identification with the pre-Oedipus or Lacan's Mirror Stage" (140).

archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be” (Kristeva, *Powers* 10). This event happens at night, echoing Kristeva’s suggestion “in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out” (*Powers* 10). He is forced to eat the meat and he becomes aware of his own carnality while the carnivorous dance is performed over the body of a dead male child. King proposes that “the transference of his repressed guilt onto that self he labels female, so that all that is valued—his spiritual and intellectual aspirations and ideals—is attached to the male self, while what is deemed undesirable—his carnality—is attached to the ‘female’” (57). The witch also seems to represent the terrible mother image—the imago—in Jung’s version of this iconic figure. The orgiastic behaviour seems to reflect his deepening guilt and fear, whereas the children and women appear to reflect an awareness of his inadequacies in personal relationships and his need to project these onto others. This scene also seems to reflect his sense of guilt in his relationship with his mistress, in which he refuses to take responsibility for their son. When he wakes up in the hospital, he tells the doctor that his son is dead and his wife is surprised by his confusion. However, at this moment, he still tries to blame all his behaviour on the influence of the moonlight rather than on his own will. He says that, while he is himself, “the sun’s child,” he would have “the will to walk away” from what the night would lure him into (*BF* 64). He connects his irrational part with the witch-like women as well as the lunatic moonlight and tries hard to repress it or to escape from it. Rowland notes that “Jung saw that cultural repression of the feminine had occurred over centuries, and he defined it as neurotic. Repressing the feminine is a source of psychic and cultural sickness” (44). However, in this experience of “abjection,” he is forced to confront and merge with this other side of himself. Kristeva proposes that in abjection, “which is nevertheless managed by the Other, ‘subject’ and ‘object’ push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable” (*Powers* 18). Subsequently, he again misses the descent of the Crystal as he is “drawn with the blood-drinking women” into the forest (*BF* 69). Kristeva proposes that the “catharsis” in Platonic terms is associated with “the mind alone, as

harmonious wisdom, that insures purity” (*BF* 28). His failure to meet the arrival of the Crystal is therefore attributed to his chaotic spirit and he is immersed in the body and carnal desire and has therefore, as in the Western philosophical tradition following Plato, not risen from the sensory to the intelligible – the encounter with the crystal here understood as a kind of Platonic symbol for the sun. Myles explains from the perspective of Sufism that because he fails to develop “superior consciousness,” he could not “tune in” to the crystal “through the necessary purification which leads one to the ultimate inner transformation” (69). The town then has “a new feeling” which is “a silly silent giggling, an infantilism, a coarseness,” and he compares this neurotic atmosphere with the time when he met the women in the forest, “their faces smeared with blood, but they were laughing and smiling, as if nothing much was happening to them” or to him (*BF* 69).

The subsequent developments in the city embody the repression of nature in the constitution of civilisation and culture through the civil wars between hybrid animals. These events intensify the feelings of abjection through the cruel and bloody war. The imitation of human behaviours of the animals, such as rat-dogs and alps, appears as a kind of parody of human culture. These animals are highly sensual and are driven by their animal sexuality. However, they try to learn the behaviours of human beings, such as standing upright and walking on two legs. There is even social pressure that does not allow them to behave according to their original instincts. This is similar to Kristeva’s idea that the process of abjection “reminds the subject of its natural origins and that subjectivation is the repression of their nature” (Gambaudo 140). When they walk like men, this confers on the animals “such a look of pomposity and self-importance” (*BF* 75). Douglass Bolling explains that this points to “the rigors of the evolutionary process as it struggles from an earlier to a more advanced stage” (559). These animals even develop a kind of hierarchy between different species. It seems that “the first kind, the rat-dogs, saw the monkeys as inferior, and that the monkeys agreed, or were prepared to appear to agree” (*BF* 75). Human beings often repress their own natural instincts in order to act in accord with social standards. Foucault explains further that it is not only “knowledge that detaches man from feeling; it is sensibility itself: a sensibility that is no longer controlled by the movements of nature, but by all the habits, all

the demands of social life" (218). Gradually, the place becomes more polluted and overcrowded from the gathering of different species. The symbolic order appears a meaningless chaos, though Watkins tries to communicate the meaning of his words to them, to try to maintain the order and cleanliness of the city in order to welcome the Crystal. Kristeva proposes that impurity "represents or serves a *logic of distribution* and behaviour on which the symbolic community is founded: a Law, a reason" (Powers 91). Furthermore, the turmoil of order turns to severe chaos after the fighting starts one night and develops into carnage. The heaps of corpses lying everywhere in the city foul the clean river and then the sea. This is similar to the "insanity of modern warfare and to Lessing's apocalyptic vision in *The Four-Gated City*" (Bolling 559). Kristeva mentions that "if the corpse is waste, transitional matter, mixture, it is above all the opposite of the spiritual, of the symbolic, and of divine law. Impure animals become even more impure once they are dead" (Powers 109). This chaos reaches its height when even the animals eat the corpses. While Watkins takes flight on a great white bird, he heads to the other side of the sea to see his lover, Conchita, and behind her is "the red blotch of new suburbs" (BF 81). She too seems to look for another means of expression, beyond words, because it is a "halting, worrying, blocked song" (BF 81). In her song, nature seems to speak out and shout while she has no words, and she sings: "the earth sang out, but I was dumb" (BF 81). Singing and dancing appear to be an alternative form of expression, because "who cannot dance must bleed" and "I should find a sweet release in song" (BF 81). She also implies the words could never fully express who she was: "Not I to sing as free as birds / Whose throat forms only human words" (BF 81). It is implied that art is the form which might offer release from the dead corpse: "To make the flesh shine whole again" is to reach "where the mind coils strong / To recreate in patience what the slow / Limbs, bound, knew simply as a song, but long ago" (BF 82). The flying bird also represents a kind of consciousness which allows him to escape from this chaos and it is also another kind of "holder" for Watkins that protects him. While death is represented by a female Rat-dog, who is giving birth but also suffering from sexual harassment after her death, the whole process of abjection obtains its sacredness. Kristeva explains "mother and death, both abominated, abjected, slyly build a victimizing and persecuting machine at the

cost of which I become subject of the Symbolic as well as Other of the Abject” (*Powers* 112). Kristeva explains that the formation of the symbolic, which is about the harmonious blending of the abstract and arbitrary signs of communication, should be tied to the “affective meaning of prehistorical identifications, and the dead language of the potentially depressive person can arrive at a live meaning in the bond with others” (*Black Sun* 24). Watkins seems to reach his spiritual catharsis after this death. The cruelty of the fighting reaches its extreme as the male rat-dogs attack a female rat-dog that has just given birth to puppies. The maternal image is frighteningly connected with death, while “blood and milk poured out together” (*BF* 84). However, she struggles until her death while the males try to mate with her. While Watkins weeps for the hopelessness of the world, his compassion towards the white bird is expressed and his fear that “this marvellous creature might be killed by the warring beasts” (*BF* 85). This kind of affection and identification with others breaks the boundaries between him and them. Bolling explains that “the rat-dogs symbolize the psyche’s need to come to terms with its dark dimensions in order to grow into stability and wholeness” (559). Watkins is there ready to welcome his spiritual transcendence. Under the protection of the big white bird, he can arrive inside the square centre and begin to clean up the bloody place. He is therefore able to enter the benign circle that will facilitate his uniting of the inner and outer worlds.

## **5. Microcosm as Macrocosm in the Union with the Crystal**

Watkins’s experience inside the Crystal has multiple meanings. The image of light is associated with the Platonic symbol for the sun. On the other hand, his experience of becoming one with everything is akin to the chora proposed by Kristeva, while she also adopts Plato’s concept as “a receptacle” (*Powers* 14). Kristeva also explains that it is the “instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect—the prohibition placed on the maternal body” (*Powers* 14). From the perspective of Sufism, it is also a process which allows him to distil his own ideas into something more transcendental. Myles suggests that “Watkins feels a part of the macrocosm and realises that the humanity as a whole is identical with



the crystal consciousness" (69). In that pure and crystal-like space, he experiences new sensual feelings: everything seems to turn inside out. He starts to realise how people once were before they were polluted, symbolised in the transparent images and bright light, represented by "lucid glass, and tinted luminosity" (BF 88). What he has known before "was thinner"; where he is now is "a pattern and a key and a blueprint for the outer city" (BF 89). He realises that every creature has this "crystalline air kneaded into it" even "the most violent, energetic and busy of them" (BF 90). On the other hand, he is now like clay, being "kneaded" with everything, and breaking down the barriers between inside and outside. "The light" does not "match with any quality of group or pack morality" (BF 90). He becomes part of the wholeness in the Crystal. The female figures are not at first represented in this paradisiacal forest but when he holds his memory, "a compulsion or pressure or need grew into them: a demand from the excluded, a claim" (BF 90). Through a hesitant process, he learns to accept his experience in the forest and to recognize that they are part of his life, becoming a page in his passport for this stage of the journey. Now, "the women were lodged" in his mind," "faceted" in his new mind "like cells in a honeycomb" (BF 91). Lessing's vision includes acceptance of the body and of the affective life, regarded in most Western religious and philosophical traditions as fallen, feminine, but now accepted as part of being human. Bazin adopts Ernest Becker's explanation that the "hermaphroditic" image represents "a desire for a healing of the rupture of existence, the dualism of self and body, self and other, self and world" (qtd. In Bazin 10).<sup>5</sup> He starts to comprehend his "fusion with the people who were friends, companions, lovers and associates, a wholeness" and that he is stuck "like a bit of coloured glass in a mosaic" (BF 91). After he comprehends his wholeness through his personal relations, he starts to expand his perception. Rubenstein mentions that "the index of his psychic wholeness is his perception of the fundamental unity of all things, of the interrelatedness of matter and spirit in every dimension of the cosmos" (*Novelistic Visions* 185). Lessing seems to suggest the possibility of overcoming the binary divisions of patriarchy and this section is full of the images of fusion, like "reeling" and "spinning," and Watkins is

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<sup>5</sup> See Ernest Becker 225.

even represented as in the original Greek mysteries, fusing with the animal mind of the natural world. Like a “pulsing swirl of all being, continentally changing, moving, dancing, a controlled impelled dance,” he is “locking together the inner pattern of light with the outer world of stone, leaf, flesh and ordinary life” (BF 92). Whittaker comments on the invocation of Sufi philosophy, that the “attraction of Sufi is its refusal to separate areas of experience, its insistence on connections and fusion” (80). His acceptance of his self-antagonism is also his own self-reconciliation. In the Crystal, different elements try to fuse together, like light and sound, and “these two identities becomes one” (BF 93). The infusion of perception is similar to the reunion with the body of the Mother and “this cannot be verbalized; it is a whirl of words, rhythm” (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 239). He starts to make a connection with other people. Becoming part of the whole, “that gave the utter insignificance of these motes their significance: in the great singing dance, everything linked and moved together” (BF 96). Meanwhile, he starts to “feel, or sense, or recognize, a pulse of individuality that I had known once as poor Charlie, or Felicity, or James or Thomas,” and they “were a whole, connecting in this wholeness with the myriad differing wholes that each of these people had formed their lives, were continuously forming in every breath they took” (BF 96).

Watkins’s expanded vision of the universe tries to break through the limitation of human consciousness. Braine suggests that the real issue is “a matter of the relation of humanity to laws of the universe that simply (and radically) transcends individual personal existence” (108). He travels “from his celestial voyage aboard the crystal; then figures of Greek and Roman mythology appear to effect his ‘return’ to earth” (Bolling 560). The vision from the crystalline vantage point conveys the immensity, the outer and inner space. This mythopoetic space provides a kind of view from nowhere but one that is also paradoxically beyond human consciousness, connecting it with a cosmic space outside a reworking of the Greek concept of a cosmopolis. Watkins’s journey in the universe reminds him that one is part of the universe, like “Moon’s spinning closer in to Earth,” so that one is influenced by so many things on the earth and each microbe is so closely related to another (BF 102). However, people are most of the time locked in their “I,I,I,I,I” and this is the madness of human beings because they do not realise that, being

microbes, they “are a whole, they form a unity, they have a single mind” (BF 103). He also proposes that the habits of a divorce between “‘I’ and the ‘We’, is “some sort of a terrible falling away,” and without realizing “the sweet sanity of We,” human beings may lead themselves toward “a catastrophe” (BF 103). This prediction of apocalypse is shown as a film in the conference. It is forecasted that “the planet had bred a new race. It was a mutation. While not much different in appearance from the previous human, the new human being has increased powers of perception, a different mental structure” (BF 119). This special kind of perception which is destroyed in the development of the individual is precisely what was suggested in the letter of Rosemary Braine. Through the expanding “identification of microcosm with macrocosm,” Watkins overthrows the singular order in the world. He questions “why Father of Gods and Men” and then proposes that “gods go in disguises” and “where suns are as tinely warming as men (that broth of microbes) are to planets” (BF 106).

In this journey, Watkins, like Plato’s philosopher returning to the world to try to communicate and find a language for his newfound truth, understands, however, that he is, like most people, hiding himself in the shadows. Katherine Fishburn mentions that “this is a book about people’s unwillingness to see what is before their eyes” (53). In the beginning of the poem he mentions that, “All men make caves of shadow for their eyes / With hats and hands, sockets, lashes, brows / So tender pupils dare look at the light” (BF 104). People are so accustomed to conforming to the so-called truth and guarding themselves from any implication of other possibilities of truth. Therefore, even in the place “where light lies shadowless / A man will lift his hand to guard his eyes” and it is the thing that Watkins has “done in strong moonlight” (BF 104). Moonlight therefore, is symbolised as the truth that is often represented by sunlight. In the process of growing up, as well as the evolution of humanity, people develop from the “beasts on all fours” to “a beast upright,” then they “jerked up that idle hand to guard his sight” because “Man may not look directly at his sun” (BF 105). Lessing describes the effects of a rationality developed and passed down from Platonism. While Minerva is blamed by her father for being “so personal” and “so emotional,” she persuades Mercury to descend again in fragments and “the Battalions of Progress

are strengthened for the Fight” (BF 115). This suggests that Lessing’s consistent concern is about “care for others” and that this is the basis of truth. In the conference, it is mentioned that the “inability to feel” is the obstacle to realise humanity as “part of Nature, plants, animals . . . in the Cosmic Harmony” (BF120). Most of the time, “each individual of this species is locked up inside his own skull, his own personal experience” (BF 120). Furthermore, when they are in different “ethical systems, religious systems” in the new religious-science, people can only have “very fitful and inadequate gleams of insight into the fact that life is One,” especially because of the insistence of science on “dividing off, compartmenting, pigeon-holding” (BF 120-121). People often live within the confines of personal or group biases without awareness. In *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, Lessing describes how people are imprisoned in “group minds”. People believe that they can make individual choices by free will, but Lessing mentions that people are actually group animals so that it is dangerous not to understand “the social laws that govern groups and govern us” (*Prisons* 48). It is clearly pointed out that “multi-relations” are the real truth of the world (BF 122). Rather than blaming individualism, Lessing emphasises that people should realise the interrelatedness between each other. King proposes that “resisting the emphasis on individualism resulting from his or her social condition, each person must recognize their place in the whole” (65). Only by recognizing the unity of the whole can people break down the barriers between each other. Bazin mentions that Lessing always suggests in her fiction that

individuals would have to admit that all people are interdependent and that each must then be cared for and not regarded as ‘other’ or ‘alien’...human beings would have to perceive themselves as part of that unity, all barriers based upon class, race, or sex would have to be eliminated. (11)

Rubenstein proposes that the task of the messengers is “to bring the truths discovered in the collective memory to personal awareness, to fuse the split between the generic Everyman of the inner space journey and the individual self of waking life” (*Novelistic Vision* 187).

Although similar to the broadly Romantic idea that the self begins life innocent and close to the glory of God, in this book, however, humans are presented as being in the process of awakening from the chaos of the current situation of the earth and then moving towards the light. However, one has to struggle from the very moment of waking; even in the actual process of waking up, there will be a period “like the recovery from an illness” (*BF* 124). Furthermore, one might become a doctor of madness, or equally, a mad person. The boundary between madness and sanity is again blurred, as is the definition of “truth”. Therefore, the stories of descents are destined to be “told and retold—as fables, as far as most people were concerned” (*BF* 123). When Watkins returns to the earth in the hospital, he struggles to get up from the sleeping pills; the situation reminds him of when he was a baby, required to sleep all the time and to behave like (Winnicott’s) “good enough” baby. King proposes that “this episode gives dramatic expression to the Wordsworthian concept that ‘our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting’” (58). Human beings have rules imposed on them and are forced to put their own nature to sleep when they arrive in the world. King mentions that “in sleep these desires manifest themselves, offering in dreams images of the self at once threatening to the conforming self and the object of intense, though repressed longing” (59). Watkins is unwilling to wake up to face all that is “regulated ordered and social and correct” (*BF* 129) and is eager to be “gripped into sleep by medicines and syrups and dummies and dope” (*BF* 127). In the process of struggling, Watkins feels so helpless that he is “like a kitten trying to climb out of the slippery-side zinc pail” and this “unwanted unneeded cat” is “better dead than alive, better asleep than awake” (*BF* 127). Watkins is eager for the pill from the doctor because he “never learned to live awake” and he “was trained for sleep” (*BF* 129).

## **6. A Mosaic Self**

Several letters appear in the second part of the novel, from those people who know or who have tried to communicate with Watkins. The briefing about Watkins is therefore composed of these first person voices from different

perspectives. While the first part represents how Watkins desires and attempts to get back to the crystal and looks for the harmony within the world, the second part represents how Watkins's life is related to others in different ways, but he seems unable to understand and appreciate these connections at the beginning. Continuing the concept of the deputy of the gods in the crystal, the different stories in these letters also show various ways to understand Watkins's symptoms. In her long letters, Rosemary Baines, who is actually not an acquaintance of Watkins, proposes similar psychological developments through the case of Professor Frederick. She tries to "put words together, in the hope that they will be as strong as those" used by Watkins; her writing is like "the spreading of a yeast or some sort of chemical that has started working in one place" (BF 145-146).

It seems even harder to understand Watkins from the information his acquaintances' provide about him. Draine suggests that if "Watkins's characterisation is 'thin' with respect to personal traits, it is 'thick' with the philosophical substance that the novel is primarily designed to convey" (107). His wife, Felicity, intimates that before their marriage, he seemed to be quite passionate and is crazily in love with her even though she was his student. After the marriage, he devotes himself to his career, as a professional and academic professor, and his aggressive careerism has interfered with his ability to care for and to pay attention to his family. The relationship between them appears aloof and she is not even aware of his disappearance before she is informed by the police station. With regard to his old friend, Jeremy Thorne, who he grows up with, Watkins is a person who does not care about others' feelings. He always appears eccentric and solipsistic. When Watkins was in the army, for example, he had refused his commissions; when he went to university with Jeremy, he did not express any appreciation when he offered him a summer holiday trip on a yacht. He appears to show little compassion towards personal issues or difficulties of others, such as when Jeremy and his wife, Nancy, undergo their marriage crisis. Here he tells Nancy that people "are all much too personal about the whole thing" (BF 187) and that anyway it is only chance that brought them together as a couple. His ideas make Nancy deem herself silly about her personal emotions. Meanwhile, he tries to be revolutionary in his career, cursing the Classics, which are his profession, in front

of an American visiting scholar and his colleague, Jeremy. The letter of Constance Mayne, his mistress, represents her anger towards the ideological arbitrariness of his position and his selfish and careless attitude towards her. For his earlier opinion that “there was only one literature and one language, namely Greek” have strongly influenced her and led her to change her subject to ancient literature in order to please him. When she tries to criticise him, complaining that he shows little concern about the conditions of Women and Slavery in his speech about Civilisation, she is repelled that she also does nothing to help them. It is as a consequence of this apparent insouciance that she curtails her academic career and works in a factory, simply to earn his approval and to become his mistress. It seems that in her view, it is only when she has lost everything in her life that she realises he is indifferent to her feelings. Her final letter of goodbye has the effect of bringing him to her, but solely for sexual congress and not for any display or declaration of affection towards her or their son.

Watkins’s briefing at the end of the novel to the doctor is another kind of union through his adoption of the story of others as well as his own. It is actually rather obscure and vague and his colleague, Miles Bovey proved it to be a duplicitous story. However, it is only in this experience in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, that he has a chance to connect his personal experience with the experience of wholeness. Draine proposes that every part of the experience has to be deemed part of the total Truth, since “no one fact or interpretation is reliable,” and she explains further that “no one level of narration is true or meaningful until it is correlated with the others” (95). His descent into hell, hellish war, this hellish earth, is represented in this briefing to the doctor. Whittaker mentions that as Lessing earlier stated openly in *The Golden Notebook*, “there is no such thing as an isolated individual experience, and she demonstrates this by making Charles capable of incorporating another person’s history into his own memory” (82). In his own self-presentation, like his sea journey in the other world, he is full of excitement and heroic behaviour during the war, which differs from his colleagues saying that he has been entirely passive during the war. King mentions that “parallels between the briefing which introduces this episode and its mythological counterpart also abound: in each case the ‘messenger’ is to be

dropped into total darkness to seek out others with the same purpose” (66). When Watkins remembers that period of time, he is full of emotion, of which shows very little in the previous letters. He says that “it is only in love and in war that we escape from the sleep of necessity” (BF 209). It seems that people often numb their own feelings and only in extreme situations are they aware of their own existence. By escaping from “the cage of ordinary life,” people sharpen their sensual feelings, reach “a state where every day is a high adventure, every moment falls sharp and clear like a snowflake drifting slowly past a dark glistening rock” (BF 209). Lessing therefore seems to be reflecting the existential ideas of her time, most obviously enshrined in the idea, derived from Karl Jaspers and other philosophers who had influenced R. D. Laing’s idea of the ‘boundary situation’, the extreme moment that reveals to us what we are. He mentions that remembering that time is “as if a friend’s eyes rest in loving curiosity on your face, and you feel your face spread in a smile because of the warmth the two of you generate” (BF 209). It is only in this story that Watkins reveals a kind of realisation towards “love” and “caring” in his relationship with Konstantina, whose name is similar to his mistress, Constance, and is symbolised as his lover in imagination. Rubenstein proposes that “the experience of self-transcendence manifests itself through not divine but earthly harmony and union, in a love relationship” (*Novelistic Vision* 192). In this story, he is able to reveal his emotion towards Constance, which he rejects in real life, and connects in a sublime form of communism. In his story with Konstantina, under the mission of fighting “against Evil,” a kind of “general love” towards communism, Watkins develops a relationship with her as the great goal in his life. Cederstrom mentions that their relationship “has none of the pettiness which characterizes his love affairs in real life” (148).

Again, Konstantina’s death is a way for Watkins to achieve individualisation. From Freud to Klein, the loss of the mother seems to be one of the necessary steps towards being autonomous, both biologically and psychologically. Kristeva proposes that in the process of individualisation, there is often the image of the “death-



bearing woman" (BF 27)<sup>6</sup> and she suggests that "matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstance and can be eroticized" (BF 28). This "death-bearing woman" first appears in the chaotic war of the animals in the inner journey. Konstantina's death (in order to protect him), as well as the female deer's attacking her in order to protect its newly born fawn, seem to conclude Watkins's journey towards an understanding of love. He too is like that vulnerable creature, protected by Konstantina's sacrifice. After carefully burying Konstantina, he sees the female deer standing there and watching him for a long time. He realises that a small fawn has just been born when he sees the birth cord connecting the fawn to the mother. The detailed description of the appearance of the cord seems to remind Watkins of his own reunion and departure from the maternal, which is symbolised by the womb-like Crystal. He says that "three or four days later, the cord would be withered and gone, the fawn's coat licked and clean, the fawn, like a human child, or like the maize plants I had seen that morning, at a crest of promise and perfection" (BF 222). He realises that their appearance "had in some way upset the mother and baby in the ritual they had to accomplish, had thrown things out of balance" (BF 223). From the scene of birth and death, Watkins has "achieved a new awareness of life and an acceptance of the organic cycle of which life is a part" (Cederstrom 148).

It is difficult to judge whether Watkins's inner journey fails. Draine proposes that "Lessing's adopted genre apologue...clearly affords her an opportunity that realism finally denied—a field in which to develop 'a vision of a good which my defeat evil'" (109-110). Watkins's choice of electric shock treatment echoes the result in his inner journey that "there is to be no Briefing" (BF 124). The choice of ETC is similar to his amnesia, a way to "remember" and also to "reconstruct" what he has known. Although he has many different choices apart from that of ECT, he feels the "desperately urgent" need to remember something in his ordinary life. He feels a need to find out the truth behind the appearance of day to day life, that the

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<sup>6</sup> Kristeva explains that once the maternal object has been interjected, "the depressive or melancholic putting to death of the self" follows and as a consequence "I make of Her an image of Death so as not to be shattered through the hatred I bear against myself when I identify with Her" (*Black Sun* 28).

important thing is “to remember that some things reach out to us from that level of living, to here” (BF 246). Since his experience is not approved by the doctors and people around him, his return to them becomes a kind of rebuilding of his relationship with them. Draine explains from the perspective of Sufism, that “the goal Remembrance, then, is reunion with the One, from which daily life tends to separate us” (102). He realises that his being ill is only part of the process of figuring out and that being “paranoid” consists of “reflections from that other part” of himself, and is a way for him to know things that “normal” people don’t know (BF 246). Whittaker mentions that Lessing increasingly sees the elements of “dreams, madness, the irrational . . . as carrying messages that must be attended to” (83). Although Watkins refuses Rosemary Baines’s offer of assistance, her letters seem influential in his inner journey and might be “like a snake swallowing its tail” which also echoes that Watkins forgot about his inner journey at the end (BF 146). In the story of the honeysuckle and the camellia, he reveals the importance of “Time.” He says that “Time is the whole point. Timing” (BF 243). However, he realises that besides waiting for the timing, it is also important that he has to make efforts in the process of further understanding of life. He reveals that “the further growth of the honeysuckle made it possible to reach the camellia” (BF 243). While he learns to accept the mystery of life, he also knows that he cannot only passively wait for the coming of the truth. Regardless of whether or not he remembers this journey, as Cederstrom points out, “he already has a workable relationship with the elements he believes forgotten” (149). It is just the moment for him or for the world to get to that truth.

Intersubjectivity in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* is not only practically represented by the union with the Crystal in the inner world, but also through the letters which constitute the mosaic self of Watkins. The gathering together of the two plants at the end of the story also implies the interconnectedness of every single life in the universe. Being one of the fragments of Mercury the Messenger, Watkins’s story is only part of those pieces scattered around the world. The briefing is therefore, like the title of this book, composed of the experiences of many people.

## Chapter Six

### Creating an Iron Egg: Resurrection through Recurrence: Relational Caring Positions in Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor*

#### 1. The Encounter of Personal and Impersonal Worlds through Winnicott's Transitional Space

In this Chapter, my aim is to explore some of the ways in which Carol Gilligan's idea of an "ethics of care" might be performed through a reading of Lessing's novel as a means of reconstructing the self's relationship with the world in the face of increasingly relativistic accounts of morality and justice. Although Gilligan's work post-dates Lessing's novel and was written as a response to Lawrence Kohlberg's Kantian ethics (which excluded both women and the idea of care), one might argue that Lessing's work had, from the start, been concerned with issues around caring in relation to questions of justice. Both Gilligan and Lessing were aware of the work of object-relations psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, and, by adopting Winnicott's concept of "potential space," it might be shown that "care" is necessary for the creation of a secular and creative relationship with the world. In "The Play of Justice: Justice as a Transitional Space," Jane Flax proposes that D.W. Winnicott and other object-relations psychoanalysts, like many feminist theorists, "stress the central importance of sustained, intimate relations with other persons or the repression of such relations in the constitution, structure, and ongoing experiences of a self" (336). Meanwhile, in *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, Virginia Held suggests that the ethics of care "might better address contexts of mothering, family responsibilities, friendship and caring in society that seemed not to be addressed through moral theory that dominated the middle years of the twentieth century" (28). In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the relationship between Emily and the Narrator, as well as their relationship with the collective, might be read more closely in the light of this understanding.

In this novel, intersubjectivity is embodied through the Narrator's surreal experiences of being situated both in a dystopian "actual" if futuristic world as well

as in the other world—a space of the imaginary, behind that of daily life. The appearance of the inner world is closely related with the outer situation, and the Narrator's life is again influenced by interpersonal relationships as they move between inside to outside, blurring the boundary between them. The dystopia represented in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* centrally involves the breakdown of the individual's relationship with the world. Critics have long noted that Lessing's dystopian disillusion was an expression of her growing disaffection with Marxism and her sense of the need to excavate the sources of the human impulse to change the foundations of society in ways that involve more than economic change or the kind of redistribution of wealth at the core of the British socialist post-war settlement.

At the beginning, memory is represented mainly with a characteristic atmosphere of uncertainty. People are afraid that what they remember is "evidence of a stubbornly preserved originality of mind," so they need to look for the evidence and confirm the details of each event to prove that their own "personal experience" is "common," is "shared" and they search for the "similarities," instead of "difference" between each other (MS 8). Civilisation has almost entirely collapsed, and relationships between people wait to be reconstituted. Justice and care are approached obliquely and ironically. Values are confused. A family tragedy that results from taking in too many refugees is represented as a comedy by a theatrical group. Social standards have been shaken, and it seems that people have lost all sense of the social rules to follow. The chaotic world has become a broken shell, unable to protect people, who are left like helpless babies. The idea of being unable to control a relationship with the outer environment is similar to that explored by Winnicott through his idea of the solution of "potential space" in his *Playing and Reality*.<sup>1</sup> This transitional space appears, among others things, as a way of handling "the immense shock of loss of omnipotence" experienced by the emergent self in relation to the mother (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* 71). Meanwhile, just as an infant has to adjust

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<sup>1</sup> Winnicott postulated "a potential space between the baby and the mother," and he contrasts "this potential space (a) with the inner world...and (b) with actual, or external, reality" (*Playing and Reality* 41).

his/her own distance with the outer world, this “potential space” provides human beings with a chance to recreate their own relationships with the world.

In the novel, citizens find it difficult to live alone and to discard interaction with other people. Since they cannot trust news from newspapers and pronouncements from the authorities, they have to grasp information through day-to-day conversation with other people. It seems impossible for them to distance themselves from this public and to evade their social responsibilities. Unlike the assumptions of traditional psychoanalysis, Winnicott proposes that individual development cannot be detached from the environment. Consequently, the potential for a different future is only to be created when human beings constantly reconsider their interactions with the outer world. Given this, Emily’s appearance allows the Narrator to repair her own relationship with the past. The surreal spaces in the novel not only allow the Narrator to cross the space barriers but also reverse the linear time development so as to develop a more interrelational subjectivity. Adam Phillips notes in *Winnicott* that, unlike Freud and Klein, who had emphasised the disillusionment and processes of mourning in human development, “for Winnicott there was a more primary sense in which development was a creative process of collaboration” (101). As a result, the dystopia in this novel represents not only a breakdown but also a chance to recreate past experiences and correlate them with a future culture and society.

### **1.1. Winnicott’s Transitional Space**

The mysterious spaces behind the wall appear as a transitional space where the Narrator is faced with an even more surreal world. Each time the outer world seems most threatening and dangerous, the Narrator becomes increasingly fascinated by a sense of another world behind the wall, whose existence she “realises” one day. Knapp suggests that these other spaces are the Narrator’s way of searching for a wholeness “that can no longer be sought on the terms of the ordinary, everyday world” (104). When the Narrator plays the role of surrogate mother in real life, it also echoes the existence of another world where she is waiting for a new life that seems on the point of being born. It is as if she is “holding an egg to one’s ear that is due to hatch” (*MS* 14). She is patiently waiting

for the “accurate time it needs to get itself out of the dark prison, it is as if a weight redistributes itself, as when a child shifts position in the womb” (MS 14) and she even hears “a child crying” (MS 15). The appearance of this other world suggests that the Narrator is not emotionally paralysed; rather, she is actually trying to find an alternative way to understand and come to terms with her current life. Rubenstein mentions that “the Narrator’s state of psychological pregnancy (the egg) produces a child” (*Novelistic Vision* 223). Behind the wall, the Narrator confronts the “impersonal” and “personal” scenes. Her movement in different times and spaces is her way of searching for the self, through her consciousness and unconsciousness, through self and the collective, and even through the mystic universe.

Fahim proposes that, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, three levels of “equilibrium” are integrated: “the rational, psychological and the spiritual modes of consciousness exist and interpenetrate to become a privileged way of looking at the world crisis” (87). However, the process of spiritual transcendence requires the Narrator’s active interaction. By examining the restrictions of personal experience, she attempts to break through the repetitive circle of human life. Her encounter with the impersonal world is her way of searching for a way of changing instead of accepting the archetypes passively. The impersonal scenes that the Narrator sees in the world behind the walls “might bring discouragement or problems that had to be solved, like the rehabilitation of walls or furniture, cleaning, putting order into chaos” (MS 39).

However, there is also the hope of rearranging what is constituted in the world. Rubenstein posits that “the Narrator wants to leave the recurring cycle which is the shape of human life” (*Novelistic Vision* 232). The discovery of another world leaves her with “the conviction of a promise” of changing instead of accepting the archetypes. (MS 39). Even more, she might have the chance to get to that “lightness, a freedom, a feeling of possibility” (MS 39). On the other hand, the past is presented not as something that can simply be abandoned, but as something that she will have to review and rearrange and that is why she feels familiar with these rooms. Winnicott proposes that this “cultural experience” is allowed to be “located in the potential space between the individual and the

environment" (Flax 339-340).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, visiting these other rooms provides the chance to create a new relationship between her self and the outer world.

When the Narrator is handed the responsibility of Emily, a child from somewhere unnamed, however, she is rendered incapable of disconnecting herself entirely from the mundane world of care. Nonetheless, it is through taking care of Emily that she is able to recover her passion as well as her responsibility towards life. She has the feelings of being "a continuation, for her, of parents, or a parent, a guardian, foster-parent" (MS 27). Meanwhile, Emily's "inexperience" and "passion of longing" makes the Narrator create "a fable" for their future (MS 32). Gilligan echoes Nancy Chodorow's idea in that "female identity formation takes place in a context of ongoing relationship since "mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with themselves" (Gilligan 7). Through Emily, the Narrator recognises the dependency, helplessness and vulnerability of human beings, as well as the way in which Emily has been educated into and inherited a passive female role in her life. The Narrator tries to shore up Emily's feelings of security so that, at the beginning, Emily finds the house to be a "shelter" which she is "able to pull around her, like a blanket, for comfort" (MS 18). In using the idea of a blanket for comfort, Lessing seems to be directly invoking Winnicott's idea of the transitional object, the third space or the infant's "comfort blanket."

However, Emily is still tempted to obtain the recognition of those wanderers on the street whose activities are violent and rebellious, like the gangs and troops and homeless people. Many times, Emily is eager to leave with her tribe of friends in order to follow the route of "the epic" that is "told and re-told" (MS 49). Emily oscillates between this secure shell of the home and the pull of the outer world which might offer other shelters amongst the various collectives. In the process of Emily's searching for the shelters, her mutual comfort and dependency on Hugo produces another kind of refuge: their interdependence upon each other, though one is human and the other an animal. Emily is not only a receiver but also a giver in relation to Hugo. Gilligan states that "the concept of relationships changes from

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<sup>2</sup> Unlike Freud (1961) or Lacan (1978), Winnicott "does not conceptualize symbolization and culture itself as something alien to the individual, imposed over and against the inner self" (Flax 339-340).

a bond of continuing dependence to a dynamic of interdependence” (149). Hugo’s appearance as either a dog or a cat presents a kind of magical creativity. As a beast with “cat’s eyes in a dog’s body,” he is even more humanised than the cannibals on the pavement, for he has preserved the social instinct of the animal, not influenced by human civilisation. Her love for Hugo also prevents her from doing something violent, unlike her partners in the outer world. The special being of Hugo also implies the need to build up different forms of interaction in the world. Indeed, when she realises that she could never include Hugo in the communal world on the pavement, she decides to give up the idea of leaving, recognising that, as an act of escaping only, there is something inauthentic about it. Although she “wanted more than anything to be off into that savage gamblers’ future with the migrating ones, she was not prepared to sacrifice her Hugo” (*MS 69*). Her emotion for Hugo is what makes her distinct from the children of violence.

## **1.2. Encounter with the Personal Scene**

When the Narrator sees the personal scenes about Emily’s earlier life in the other world, she also witnesses the anxiety of a woman both as the cared for, a baby, and as the carer, a maternal role. The concept of narrative in psychoanalysis is that the “story” might be reversed in order to be rewritten. The same sense of the non-linearity of the narrative is noted by Gilligan, who mentions that “the reinterpretation of women’s experience in terms of their own imagery of relationships thus clarifies that experience and also provides a non-hierarchical vision of human connection” (62). Whether in real life or in the world behind the walls, Emily is a reminder of the personal experiences that gradually restrict one into a fixed narrative. Rubenstein thus recognises that “Emily also embodies the dimension of fixed time, the past; her new guardian is depressed by her from the day of her arrival partly because she reminds the Narrator so insistently of her younger self” (*Novelistic Vision 224*). Therefore, the Narrator evades the “personal” scenes behind the wall:

But to enter the ‘personal’ was to enter a prison, where nothing could happen but what one saw happening, where the air was tight and limited, and above all where time was a strict, unalterable law



and long, oh my God, it went on, and on and on, minute by decreed minute, with no escape but the slow wearing away of one after another. (*MS 39*)

When the Narrator first enters Emily's room in her infant stage, she enters a room decorated in Edwardian style: everything is white and the "Nursery Clock" implies the dedicated and calculated atmosphere of childcare (*MS 40*). No matter whether it is the little girl or the mother, they are all imprisoned in this airless room with the endless routines of caring for children according to dogmatic rules. Furthermore, the baby Emily's yearning for emotional comfort and care from her mother is denied by her weary mother. The Narrator voices through Emily her own disillusionment with and understanding of her own mother. The small Emily, at that time, "seemed to understand it all, to have foreseen it, to be living through it because she had to, feeling it as a thick heaviness all around her—time, through which she must push herself, till she could be free of it" (*MS 41*). In these scenes, the small Emily is hungry, both physically and psychologically. Waugh proposes that "Lessing thus reveals the historical and cultural construction of femininity as a process of institutional denial, repression and marginalization, the repeated castigation of the mother" (*Feminine Fictions 208*).

The anxious scenes in her childhood which emphasise regulation instead of the relationship between child and carer seem already to imply and determine Emily and Gerald's failure to constitute a family or a new society later. Flax underlines the crucial function of relationship in justice, noting that many rationalistic theories of justice deny "the importance of human attachment in the constitution of the self and in cultures more generally" (337). It seems therefore worth considering the historical background to the approach to childcare in the period. In *Dream Babies: Childcare Advice from John Locke to Gina Ford*, Christina Hardyment proposes that child care has always been influenced by historical contexts, even political events. Before 1940, and especially after the Great War, the next generation was raised according to an ideal of discipline for military purposes. The emphasis was on rules for mothers to follow and execute. Following behaviourist assumptions, the majority of theories assumed the desirability of

training children by regular schedules and rules; parents were regarded as responsible and made to feel inferior if children seemed not to be well brought up. After the Cold War, in the 1950s, there appeared “a war about ways of life,” and the West developed an ideology of individualism contrary to the Soviet Union, which subordinated “the individual to the good of the whole” (Hardyment 214). Erik Erikson emphasised the idea that parents should inculcate a basic sense of trust and give children the freedom to fulfil themselves via oral expression (Hardyment 222).<sup>3</sup> Erikson set the mother’s importance in a social matrix, “not only as guardian, but as interpreter of the culture” (Hardyment 236). However, since women have grown up in a patriarchal society, they play the role of interpreters of that culturally determined life, reinforcing rather than challenging it. Edith Buxbaum points out that, if the errors of parents are seen to create pathologically sick children, in turn, the theory is bound to create anxiety in parents, especially the mother (qtd. in Hardyment 236).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, John Bowlby’s idea of “maternal deprivation” popularised the concept that “mothers had to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their babes to ensure their inoculation against the danger of emotional hang-ups and unfulfilled intellectual potential in later life” (Hardyment 236).

### **1.3. Encounter with the Impersonal Scene**

While the Narrator is absorbed with how to help Emily and Hugo survive, she is led into a further journey by seeing the impersonal scenes in the other world. When she visits Emily’s baby room the next time, she finds only the disordered and damaged rooms. However, the impermanent and changeable qualities in this other world seem to lend to history an opportunity for change. The Narrator has the chance to repaint the rooms and clean up what has existed there. Meanwhile, she realises that her every existence in the room is a “continuity” of what she did in the past into the future, and she is “in a continuing relation to that invisible destructive creature, or force” just as she is “with other beneficent presence” (*MS* 59). Cederstrom argues that the Narrator “must unify these isolated fragments of time,

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<sup>3</sup>See Erik Erikson.

<sup>4</sup> See Buxbaum.

make them part of the larger patterns of her life, in order to discover the direction and meaning of her destiny" (177). Her every action in these rooms shows her desire for existential and spiritual rebirth. When she tries hard to scrub the walls and ceiling clean, she seems as if "standing inside a cleaned-out eggshell"; she had taken off the grime "which had been preventing a living thing from breathing" (*MS* 58). The repetition of the egg image implies a return to the primary stage of the childhood of Emily, or of her own childhood.

In addition, when the Narrator's life is more connected with Emily's, the boundaries between herself and the other world are thinned and dissolved. The real life in the world affects the arrangement of the other world, and the Narrator's sense of care toward Emily also leads her into different scenes: "And there for backdrop was the ambiguous wall, which could be so easily dissolve, dissolving, too, all this extraneous life, and the anxieties and pressures of the time—creating of course, its own" (*MS* 67). The changes in these different spaces correspond to the interaction between the Narrator and Emily, and they appear correlative to each other. Jeanne Murray Walker suggests that "Lessing manages to combine both these intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects in the relations between the two major characters" (96).

Meanwhile, the world behind the walls brings her to a transitional space filled with creativity. Lessing draws here on a variety of traditional symbols: she sees a "six-sided" room behind the wall. The colours of the carpet left on the floor are lifeless which appear an "imminent existence, a potential, no more" (*MS* 69). However, the carpet owes its revivification to the efforts and co-operation of each person. When a person matches one piece to the carpet, they exchange "a congratulatory glance from one of the others" and share the "soberest and most loving-co-operation" (*MS* 70). This inner room enables the Narrator to understand how archetypal patterns and social stereotypes could be changed through the effort of each person. People all have the opportunities to "drift in here, see this central activity, find their matching piece—would lay it down, and drift off again to other tasks" (*MS* 70). It also implies that people have to leave the constituted patterns of the society and the culture and look for what Lessing represents as the eternal inner self.

The Narrator realises that Emily has to experience this process of growth for herself and “in due time she would fill like a container with substances and experiences” (MS 82). Furthermore, the Narrator waits for Emily to be able to leave this life pattern, and “step off this merry-go-round, this escalator carrying her from dark into the dark” (MS 82). This necessary growth, Cederstrom observes, is vital for “the feminine psyche,” which is paralleled by “the growth of the ego as it moves from the parents to the collective to individuality” (176).

The Narrator’s consistent sheltering and care of Emily eventually bring both of them back to the “benign circle” that Winnicott proposes.<sup>5</sup> Phillips explains that “the ‘benign circle’ constitutes the stage of concern; because of the mother’s responsiveness, “the infant is able to accept responsibility for the total phantasy of the full instinctual impulse that was previously ruthless” (qtd. in Phillips 108: 103).<sup>6</sup> When this stage of concern is completed, “ruthlessness gives way to ruth, unconcern to concern” (qtd. in Phillips 108: 103). The illusionary and ruthless fantasy towards the omnipotent maternal role is understood and forgiven after the Narrator sees the claustrophobic personal scenes in Emily’s room. Meanwhile, the “mother’s responsiveness,” as in Winnicott, is expanded to involve consistently committed concern from everyone and which is also symbolised by the cooperatively created carpet. As discussed earlier, this has already been suggested through the way in which Emily and Hugo’s mutual care for each other saves Emily from being seduced into the cruelty and loss of control of the violent children on the street.

## **2. The Futile Care in the Dystopia World**

Emily tries to recreate a circle of care in her family with Gerald, an ambitious leader who would like to save all the homeless children. They build up a family with

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<sup>5</sup> In *Through Pediatrics to Psycho-analysis*, Winnicott proposes the idea that “by good-enough childcare techniques, holding and general management, the shell becomes gradually taken over and the kernel (which has looked all the time like a human baby to us) can begin to be an individual” (qtd. in Flax 338: 99). See Winnicott.

<sup>6</sup> See Winnicott *The Child and the Family: First Relationships*.

“warmth” and “caring,” and Emily believes herself “to have acquired a ready-made family” (MS 83). Yet the heroic ideal, with its origins is already patriarchal and Emily is already assenting to a traditional role in supporting the male leader. She chooses to take on the ancient female role as the commune’s woman, what Walker describes as being “patterned by her past” (106). Moreover, Emily’s happiness as a hostess only lasts for a short time because she is not the only woman who possesses the leader of the house. Fahim points out that Emily, who might have provided a role model for the younger generation, at the age of twelve, is “already trained to conform to the outer reality at the expense of the inner self” (91). Cederstrom also suggests, however, that “Emily is still trapped by collective patterns” (179). Following the old collective pattern, justice and care are performed according to restricted rules and endless sacrifice. However, the situation also shows precisely how the conflict arises in domestic relations and within the family. Besides “mutual aid” and “self-sacrifice,” the habit of “callousness” persists as the instrument of survival. The children obtain their supplies by means of weapons and illegal actions. Like the old generation, Gerald “focuses on externals only” and “takes responsibility for physical level of survival” while Emily is worn out in trying to maintain and care for everyone’s needs in the house (Fahim 93). Gilligan proposes that “women’s insistence on care is at first self-critical rather than self-protective, while men initially conceive obligation to others negatively in terms of non-interference” (100). Gerald ignores those personal needs, fulfilling the male’s sense of obligation in terms of what Gilligan describes as “noninterference” (100).

Gerald’s house starts with “the Ryans,” who symbolise the consequence of violence and familial dysfunction but who also have found a kind of communal way of life that might be built into a social ethic. Perrakis observes that “these communal dreams suggest those unknown aspects of the psyche that contain the collective experiences that have shaped and conditioned cultural values and attitudes” (49).<sup>7</sup> They offer a style of living that is collective, sharing the “minute-by-

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<sup>7</sup> Perrakis also explains here from the perspective of Young-Eisendrath and Dawson that “we seem to be in the domain of what Jung called the personal unconsciousness where archetypal images like the Mother and the Father are clothed with individual experiences and emotions” (qtd. in Perrakis 49: 320). See Perrakis 47-82 and Young-Eisendrath and Dawson.

hour life, communal and huggermugger,” feeling no need to take the burden of personal responsibility (*MS* 106). According to Emily and Gerald’s ideal, they remove the “old nonsense, people in charge telling people what to do” (*MS* 112). However, Emily and Gerald’s role as educators giving instruction in life skills cannot avoid building themselves up as a kind of “authority” for these children.

These children of violence have little sense of judgement between what is right and wrong, but it is not until Emily’s best friend, June, leaves her suddenly, that she realise that the futile efforts to educate them and care for them have already worn her out. And June does not “value herself” despite the “love, devotion, effort” that Emily and the Narrator have provided for her (*MS* 143-144). She is therefore immediately attracted by another “women’s group” when Emily is too tired to pay full attention on her; she feels no ties of loyalty. Debra Raschke argues that Emily and Gerald seem to rely too much on the “outer forms of behaviour—on convention and duty” and that it does not matter much what ideology they adopt “if the underlying structural pattern has not been changed” (48-49).<sup>8</sup> Gerald is unable to maintain his kingdom when he decides to take on the responsibilities of “a gang of new kids” (*MS* 146). These yahoo children, no older than ten years old, spawned in this chaotic period of history, are the victims of that generation and they “seemed never to have parents, never to have known the softening of the family” (*MS* 147). In order to survive, they degrade themselves to the level of animals to live in the tunnels, since, as Fahim proposes, “their instincts being stifled and conditioned by society to conform to certain patterns become perverted when they are no longer under control of ego, once social structures are weakened” (93). Moreover, according to Cederstrom, by “recognizing the limitations of the ego and collective roles through Emily, the protagonist now explores the most basic elements of existence—the animal and instinctual” (184). They never have a chance to build up that “benign circle” through adequate concern and care, so they are unable to establish a more interactive relationship with the outer world. Contrary to Hugo’s loyalty and patience towards Emily, they have only “a fitful and unpredictable loyalty” and “they seemed to have no memory

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<sup>8</sup>See Raschke 43-54.

of what had happened even minutes before" (MS 148). However, they did not even have "the cleanliness of animals, their instincts for responsibility" and "they were worse than animals, and worse than men" (MS 152).

The function and traditional forms of the family are now useless; behind the wall, the family is represented as a candy house. The Narrator sees that Emily and June have broken the edible house, which they ate and ate and yet can "never be filled with this white insipidity" (MS 123). The restrictiveness of civilisation's rules ignores the innate emotional needs of a baby or a human, even when she is screaming and demanding that her needs be met. The discontent is so strong that Emily is shown eating her own "excrement" when the scene is changed to the nursery room (MS 124). But the crying baby in that scene also implicitly echoes the violent children from the underground; if there was not enough food for them, "they ran shrieking and jeering through the house, destroying everything" (MS 150). Waugh suggests that these "children of violence" reflect the fact that "our need for love, shelter, food, and nurturance, born out of our fundamental formation in human relationships, must be met if we are to survive" (*Feminine Fictions* 208).

Besides these children's needs, Gerald ignores other inhabitant's feelings as well as he insists on maintaining his heroic ideals, what Held describes as "justice valued rational action in accord with abstract principles" (62). However, Gerald knows nothing about maintaining relationships besides fulfilling his own masculine dignity by conquering even more girls. In this, Cederstrom argues that "Gerald, applying masculine logic to the situation, continues to believe that something can be made of them, that some order can be brought to the anarchy of the instincts" (184). As a result, his house can only break down and his children all leave him.

### **3. Beyond "Good Enough Care," Relational Caring Position as a Way of Reparation**

Emily and the Narrator's personal experiences seem to coalesce in the face of maternal ambivalence and the need to make reparation. In "The Production and Purposes of Maternal Ambivalence," Rozsika Parker notes that, while the infant's ability to integrate the depressive feelings is an important achievement, the mother's "ambivalent feelings towards her baby are more often than not

considered to be a problem for a mother” (17). According Winnicott, “a normal, healthy mother is able to summon up ambivalence in object-relating and to be able to use it appropriately” (qtd. in Parker29:146).<sup>9</sup> Parker criticizes the assumption that Winnicott’s mother is “shorn of turbulent affect” and she either fails to become conscious of hatred and falls back on “masochism” or she simply sublimates her hatred by “singing sadistic nursery rhymes” (27). Parker tries to explore the “creative role of hatred in maternal development” that Winnicott overlooks, and explains further that the lullabies contain “the painful coexistence of love and hate” continually pushing a mother into “the creative seeking out of reparatory solutions” (Parker 27). The Narrator sees little Emily in the world behind the walls, having to sweep the leaves that keep falling on the floor, yet “already the piles she had made were being submerged” (*MS* 117). She is horrified because she could not find a place that is “still covered over and sheltered, still safe” (*MS* 117). This falling world implies Emily’s overburdened experience in the real world. Raschke argues that these dying leaves “are the old thinking patterns that become the bedrock of supposedly new ideas” (48). Then the Narrator enters the nursery room and sees Emily’s parents asking her to take care of “her baby” that is handed to her. When she is suddenly forced to take over the baby, she seems to have been given responsibility as a woman even though all of this is too much for her.

This scene, parallel to that at the beginning when the Narrator is given Emily unexpectedly, seems to suggest the Narrator’s similar maternal ambivalence. In response, Emily loves the baby “with a passionate violent protective love that had at its heart a trick and a betrayal, heat with a core of ice” (*MS* 119). This also echoes the previous personal scenes involving her mother’s weary face. Walker asserts that Emily’s “control and repression arose from the awesome, frigid whiteness of her nursery and the deprivation such whiteness suggests” (106). The maternal hatred is vehemently expressed after the Narrator sees Emily eating excrement, and she has to repress her “repugnance” towards the “faint contaminating smell” and to “set herself a task” not to behave like Emily’s mother,

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<sup>9</sup> See D.W. Winnicott, “The Concept of Trauma”.



whose "quivering dislike of the child [is] communicating itself" in the process of bathing (*MS* 125).

After this scene, the crying of the infant and the mother's repudiation behind the wall invade her real life. She hears the "interminable low sobbing" both in real life and behind the wall, and she wants to "pick up and kiss and soothe" the miserable child (*MS* 128). The weeping girl turns out to be Emily's mother. The Narrator takes up the baby, whose "little arms [are] desperate for comfort, but they would be one day those great arms that had never been taught tenderness" (*MS* 128). Greene suggests that the "sobbing child turns out to be not the child but the mother epitomizing the endless tedium of this process" which is about a "nightmare repetition" between an unloved mother and daughter (*Poetics* 149). Consoling the crying baby, who is actually Emily's mother, the Narrator also breaks the repetitive circle in the behavioural world and in the inner life. Raschke suggests that "the journeys into the personal rooms initiate a kind of healing that breaks down binary barriers and links all of the spatial settings of the novel" (51). It is noted by Parker that the "recognition of her ambivalence" is needed if this process is to "remain benign and for the baby to survive," for this will prove to the baby that "loving reparation is indeed possible" (30).

Through the personal and impersonal scenes, what really underpins the behaviour in the outer world is laid bare: "what you experienced ... was in the space behind the wall, moved the players behind the wall" (*MS* 134). Flax notes that "[c]ulture, like play, exists in this third area, the potential space between the inner life and the individual and objective reality. Without something to make use of (tradition out there), no creativity or culture is possible" (339). Only after experiencing these scenes is the Narrator able to give a full definition of "it": "It" is "a force, a power" in the form of natural disaster, like an earthquake or "a visiting comet," or the tragedy created by men, like "a war," a "tyranny" or "the savagery of a religion" (*MS* 130). In addition, "'it' was everywhere, in everything, and 'it' was "nothing that could be described once and for all, or pinned down, or kept stationary" (*MS* 133). Fahim posits that "the two levels of inner and outer interpenetrate and unite to give the full dimensions of the 'crisis' denoting that 'It' was not in the material outer collapse, but has its roots in the realm behind the

wall" (104). In addition, this "potential space" allows the Narrator to get beyond the confined forms, and it again echoes Lessing's concern about "breaking down as breaking through." These rooms are processed to be "set up, perfected—and then knocked flat"; similar to the way human beings experience the world (MS 134).

#### 4. The Fabular Ending as the Transformation of Cultural Space

While the inner rooms seem to echo the chaos of the world outside and "the anarchy was at its height," this other space gives the Narrator new hope. She sees "gardens beneath gardens, gardens above gardens: the food-giving surfaces of the earth doubled trebled, endless of it—the plenty of it, the richness, the generosity" (MS 136). Walker explains that the garden metaphor "solves the problem of excessive hunger which plagues Emily" psychologically; it suggests the plenitude of nature—of one's own ripening nature, of patience with one's own slow, developing completeness" (111). Contrary to the garden in Emily's house, which is used as a practical function and only builds up the boundary between herself and the children, the gardens inside the wall appear as a kind of culmination of "the union between the masculine and feminine principles to achieve unity of multiple levels of perception" (Fahim 114).<sup>10</sup> The running water from the mountain flowing into the garden is not only "reversing Eliot's *Waste Land*" but is also crossing and dissolving "cultural, personal, and spiritual boundaries" (Raschke 49). The gardens give the Narrator more strength and confidence in the original world. She says, "I did hold it. I kept it in my mind. I was able to do this. Yet towards the end it was so; intimations of that life, as if that place were feeding and sustaining us, and wished us to know it" (MS 137). The garden also represents that transcendence through the cultivation of nature that is needed for the improvement of culture. Greene proposes that "nature alone cannot yield what is needed—new social arrangements require culture, cultivation, and the imagination of alternative possibilities" (*Poetics* 152).

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<sup>10</sup> Fahim explains further that "sun" and "the gardener" both imply the masculine presence; and "where the feminine presence 'was so string in this place, as pervasive as the rose-scent'" (115).

In reality, because of the savage children, almost everyone just leaves the place to acquire freedom “at least from what was left of ‘civilization’ and its burdens” (MS 141). However, Greene observes that “freedom for Lessing is never attained by abjuring responsibility” and it is “only gained by adhering to responsibility” (*Poetics* 154). Flax explains that transitional phenomena “also enable us to move back and forth within multiple realities, including those of others as well as ourselves, and to tolerate ambiguity and ambivalence without losing a sense of individual location and responsibility” (342). When people all leave the place, the “building, as a machine, was dead” (MS 167). While Gerald fails to revive the machine of a family or a community with Emily, he remains with a few yahoo children because of his sense of responsibility. It is indicated by the Narrator that “perhaps that gang was only lethal as a unit, but the individuals were savable” (MS 163). Emily’s resistance to rejoining him also allows him to examine his ambition to be a leader, and he has had to pay the cost “of doing what they wanted, serving them” (MS 168).

Meanwhile, the outer environment has become so degraded that the basic conditions for survival such as clean air and water are now under threat. They will have to pay attention to this environment and learn to care for it, if they are to survive. This care begins in immediate relations though rather than with abstract principles. It is Emily’s love towards Hugo as well as the Narrator’s love towards Emily that makes them stay in the house and prevents them from an aimless wandering in the world or even a move to Gerald’s savage family. Hugo, as an animal, reminds them of the importance of instinctual needs and feelings. For the Narrator, Hugo is originally “an ugly, yellow beast” but is gradually transformed into a morally significant human-like being. Hugo gradually becomes not only their “accompaniment, an aid, as a dog,” but he is also “a being, a person, in his own right, and necessary to the events” (MS 157). They own “air, water, food, warmth” and they find life is easier than for a long time (MS 172).

In the last personal scene, the burden of inheritance, the rules passed on from the mother to the daughter, is represented in the stereotype of woman as seductress, in the “scarlet dress” “a conventional garment worn by hundreds of thousands of women” (MS 158). While the mother, as a loveless woman, expels

the daughter and Hugo, she also places the baby “outside her area of omnipotent control” in the process of separation (Parker 30). “To let go” is no longer the task for a mother but also for Gerald. The brutality of these “children of violence” is so extreme that he almost loses his naïve belief in them. However, rescued by Emily from his suicide attempt, Gerald is finally able to make up his mind not to be “pulled back in again” (*MS* 181). Fahim proposes that Gerald’s growth lies “not in politically naïve idealism, but rather in the alliance of empirical action and inner growth” (95). Moreover, Walker asserts that “the interdependence between Emily and the Narrator that finally grants this limited ordering power” which also gives them another choice besides “solipsistic individualism and rash, mindless collectivity” (107).

The fabular ending is not just an escape from reality, but it is also a chance for a reconciliation with the past and the chance to produce new forms of collective existence for the future. Flax explains that such “transitional phenomena help us to play with, tolerate, appreciate, or imagine ways to remake the variety of relations, authority, and rules we find present in the external world” (342). Hugo has been there, looking at the dissolving wall “as if at last what he wanted and needed and knew would happen was there, and he was ready for it” (*MS* 181). The walls that restrict them are at last broken and the house roof is growing into a “forest floor” (*MS* 181). They meet their “official father, her larger laughing gallant mother, and the little Dennis, the four-year-old criminal clinging to Gerald’s hand” (*MS* 182). When the iron egg breaks and falls apart, the scene that the Narrator visited before appears again: people are “bending to lay matching pieces of patterned materials on a carpet that had no life in it until that moment when vitality was fed into it by these exactly-answering patches” (*MS* 181). When ambivalent feelings are accepted, the hateful mother and crying daughter disappear. People are shown to be part of the organic unity of the universe which folds up and disappears with nature when they step into it.

This transformation takes place in the realm behind the wall, which could be the any forms of art and religion, or spiritual transcendence. The appearance of the deity and Emily’s being transmuted into a new self is intended by Lessing perhaps

to illustrate her acceptance and transcendence of the fate of female.<sup>11</sup> Flax proposes that, within the transitional position, “we can suspend the demands of both internal and outer realities, to see things anew” (342). Although Gerald still hesitates, the children cling on to his hand to lead him forward. He also takes up his responsibility by walking to a new world.

The dystopian world and the reconstruction of new communities reflect Lessing’s contemplation about every possibility of the formation of “intersubjectivity” in the physical world. The juxtaposition of different spaces, however, conceptualises that “intersubjectivity” exists in a way that transcend time and space. The constant reparation between inner and outer worlds allows the expansion of imagination and cultural transformation. The “care” represented in a reciprocal way represents a greater possibility to create interactive relationships between each other.

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<sup>11</sup> Flax explains the transitional phenomena: “They also enable us to move back and forth within multiple realities, including those of others as well as ourselves, and to tolerate ambiguity and ambivalence without losing a sense of individual location and responsibility” (342).

## Chapter Seven

### The Transformation of a Body, Created in Different Positions:

#### The Position of a Body

#### in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*

### 1. The Challenge to Normalcy through the Body of the Other

Ben, the protagonist in *The Fifth Child* (1988) and *Ben, in the World* (2000), is presented as an outsider in society, largely, at least initially, because of his distinctive appearance and behaviour. Ben's unidentified abnormality always raises many doubts and fears in those around him: similarly, Lessing keeps the reader in the same state of doubt. Lessing herself mentioned in an interview that the form of Ben's story may be seen as analogous to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, though its fantastic premise is made more realistic in her own novel (62). Unlike Frankenstein who in Mary Shelley's story is intentionally created by his maker, Ben, in Lessing's story is the natural – though also 'planned' - fifth child of an ordinary family. Similarly to Frankenstein, Ben is also the embodiment of his parents' misguided idealisms, though neither recognise this until the end of the novel. The other characters around him are equally inconclusive about what kind of creature Ben is, or if Ben is really different from themselves. Susan Watkins argues that "we are unable to secure or anchor our response to identity in terms of the well-worn distinction between the animal and the human; we are equally unable to find a safe home in familiar genres" (150). Ben's existence reminds readers that those who are treated "differently" in society, such as those with disabilities or from racial minorities or rejected for particular mental or bodily or behavioural "traits," characterise the excluded who are not accepted by the inclusivity constructing dominant group. Following Lessing's concern about humanity and the self's relationship with others in her essay "A Small Personal Voice," Ben seems to represent a kind of "objective correlative" concept of everyone's loosely conceptualised idea of the unaccepted and unacceptable "other." Watkins argues that Lessing intentionally chooses to work with the forms of minor genres of "urban

gothic, picaresque and disaster narrative technique . . . in unfamiliar and disturbing ways” (119). In other words, Lessing finds in forms of ‘minor’ literature the means to represent the deterritorialised and the excluded. Always critical and committed to exposure of dominant exclusionary narratives, Lessing’s work is “explicitly political” because “minor literature has a partial relation to nationality both linguistically” and “generically” (Watkins 120).

Ben’s “being in the world” is also about the mode of his body’s existence in the world and how this informs his “psychology” and transforms his behaviour through his interaction with people around him. Ben’s behaviour demonstrates Simone de Beauvoir’s idea that human beings are constructed and disciplined towards “civilisation” by the family and by social pressures. Furthermore, Lessing seems to reflect issues about the body that were raised in the 1980’s feminism that extended de Beauvoir’s work.<sup>1</sup> Grosz suggests that the “subject’s exterior is psychologically constructed” and also that the “social inscription of the body’s surface constructs a psychical interior” (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 381). The human body is always seen to be already entwined with acculturation and civilian life. As Butler also suggests in *Gender Trouble*, the “‘body’ often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (175). In effect, she is elaborating on Foucault’s idea that the body functions as a kind of ‘medium’ in the formation and dissemination of cultural values and the idea of civilisation. How Ben is treated as a consequence of his physical difference is as important to his psychological development as the physical details of his appearance: in *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*, Lessing gives more detailed attention to the former as the vehicle for intersubjective construction of meaning than to the latter.

The blurring of the normative sense of the distinction between animal and human that Ben’s body arouses seems to redefine the assumed boundary of the body. Butler’s conception of “performance” makes the body not only something that passively accepts cultural impositions of meaning, but one that also actively

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<sup>1</sup> Lynda Birke mentions in her “Bodies and Biology” that many feminists such as I.M. Young, Judy Butler and Elizabeth Grosz in 1980 try to think through the living body and move beyond social constructivism and try to transcend the mind/body dichotomy through phenomenological approaches emphasising the lived body (43).

transforms the meanings and terms of a culture. Normally, she says, we view “the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed—that is fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 166). Diana Coole analyses the way that Butler distances herself from de Beauvoir’s “nature/culture, and hence sex/gender, opposition that had proven so fertile to second-wave feminism” (206). Butler’s perspective—her poststructuralist riposte—is that “these gendered, naturalistic discourses are then used to legitimise sexual difference as a rigid either/or” and thus to maintain “the opposition that associates woman with nature and it is still therefore sexually hierarchical” (Coole 206). Ben’s body might therefore be viewed as offering a kind of possibility for re-examining and reshaping our attitude to the human body.

In the process of finding out what Ben is really like in his journey, the story clearly reflects how “otherness” arises from being treated as different. Ben is unable to establish any sense of common fellowship as long as he sees himself in terms of an “otherness” through the gaze of people in his community. In addition, Ben’s body is also reacting against those who are treated as others in the world. His body can be seen as presented in terms of the kind of “relational positionality” which has been proposed by Susan Friedman and that suggests ways of performatively constructing more permeable boundaries between races and ethnicities. Friedman suggests that the narrative of relational positionality stresses “the non-unitary, indeterminate, nomadic, and hybrid nature of a linguistically constructed identity” (17).<sup>2</sup> It reflects Butler’s idea that the body’s existence is not “a static or univocal fact,” and it is rather “as a modality of existence, the ‘place’ in which possibilities are realised and dramatised, the individualised appropriation of a more general historical experience” (“Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description” 86).

Although published in the late eighties, *The Fifth Child* begins in the sixties, with a generation in search of individualistic freedom, and it ends in the late

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<sup>2</sup> Friedman explains that the concept of relational positionality began to emerge during the 1980s and was rooted in feminist object relations theory, which has emphasised how the formation of identity, particularly of women’s identity, unfolds in relation to desire for and separation from others (16-17).



seventies, a more conservative period. Its mediation of the pursuit of the ideal family allows readers to reconsider the construction and political uses of family values, as well as the expectations that thereby arise of the maternal role. From *The Memoirs of a Survival* to *Ben, in the World*, Lessing engages the idea that people always look for a change in the form of a society, but ignore the need to change the stereotype of “care,” assuming it to be based on an inherent and unchanging instinct. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben’s situation in the family raises the problem of what form care should take and how it might be expressed and who should take the responsibility for care: all of this is suggested even in the family name “Lovatt”. From the first, the dramatic physical suffering of Ben’s mother and her antagonistic relation to the developing foetus during her pregnancy, challenge stereotypes of the caring mother which is central to traditional concepts of care. She “was bruised—she knew it; inside she must be one enormous black bruise . . . and no one would ever know” (FC 59).

Furthermore, this kind of care also reflects how we relate to and treat our environment. While Ben’s reactions are different from what people expect, his responses also offer an opportunity to reconsider the constituted interaction between people. Grosz’s re-examination of Darwin’s concept of gradations is useful here for his work showed that there is no fundamental difference between human beings and other living beings in the natural world. However, in order to divide themselves from the animal, human beings try to redefine the world from their own perspective and concepts. In *Becoming undone, Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, Grosz mentions that “Darwin understood the extent to which man has ordered the natural world according to his own various interests” (15). Viewed from this perspective, Ben’s difference makes him not only the outcast of his family but also an outcast from the world because he disturbs the normal boundaries, being neither human nor non-human; his effect is that of being uncanny, encouraging the intersubjective responses to him as if to the abject. When he is brought to the forest in Brazil, however, Lessing makes clear that his cruel treatment in the scientific experiment reveals the arrogance of a civilisation that has deprived itself of a connection to and identification with a broader idea of the natural. Jayne Glover claims that “Lessing addresses relationships between human

beings, between humans and animals, between humans and nature or the environment, and between humans and the spiritual” (90-91). But when nature is deprived, by being transformed into an objectified or commodified domain—so that Ben’s body is simply an object for lucrative scientific research—then the earth can no longer nurture human beings or provide for them a habitus, a realm of care, and this impacts on the fate of Ben as much as his day to day relations with other humans. Ben’s being in the world, is also Lessing’s version of the Heideggerian question, the question aimed towards everyone: how we are going to “be in the world.” Can people equally respect every being existent in “the world”? How and where are the lines drawn; what are the consequences for our relations to humans and other creatures?

## **2. A Failed Family Romance: a Monster Mother, a Grotesque Child**

In *The Fifth Child*, Ben’s existence in the world is the consequence of his parents’ dream of creating their own individualistic kingdom by building up a large family “because of their demands on the future” (FC 13). While the so-called newly progressive society appears for them chaotic and threatening, they try to retreat into a manufactured idyll of family life, the private sanctuary and shelter from neo-liberal forces. Ben’s father, David, looks for a wife who is naturally “maternal” because he could never find this characteristic in his own mother (FC 19). Emily Clark mentions that Harriet’s “desire for a large family is based on her belief in the family itself, a belief that she perceives as being threatened by social changes” (176). As interpersonal relationships appear only ever threatening in the outer world, the Lovatts try to create their own micro-universe in their domestic world. Like good liberals, they believe in the possibility of separating the private from the public. But the outer world then becomes even more threatening and paranoid relations and assumptions increasingly creep into the sanctuary. David says that “Everything could very well be taken away” (FC 22). Bad News is everywhere: “nothing to what the News would soon become, but threatening enough” (FC 22). Penelope Lefew-Blake mentions that “they would shield themselves and their children from the ugliness of the world known as ‘progress’, including the violence,

the sterility, the wasteland of emotions ‘out there’” (116). Watkins proposes that this family romance, represented in the gothic convention “of the return of the repressed, is deliberately deployed in order to generate a critique of 1980s Conservative Britain and its defensive focus on family values and fear of inner-city social unrest” (153). It also reflects the political strategy of Margaret Thatcher, who insisted that “there is no larger [a] social group other than the family,” and suggested that the source of social problems was a consequence of “individual and family breakdown” (Watkins 153). For Harriet and David, it has been “hard preserving their belief in themselves when the spirit of the times, the greedy and selfish sixties, had been so ready to condemn them, to isolate, to diminish their best selves” (FC 29). Yet their insistence on their ideal appears to conform to the spirit of the sixties as well. Waugh proposes in *Harvest of the Sixties* that “the sixties provided less the opportunity to cement social unity through participation in a national culture than the chance to pursue individual or subcultural paths to liberation from it” (9). They have tried to defend their own “stubborn individuality” which was “chosen, and so obstinately, the best—this” (FC 29). They insist on rationalism, a way to criticise the irrationalist liberalism of the 60s, and a reflection of their moral superiority. However, their individualism is a delusion and only reinforces their participation in the dominant collective spirit of their historical moment, a moment that appears now as “a record of the confusions of a liberalism forced to reassess its very foundations” and also signalling “the inadequacies of its inherited liberal ethics” (Waugh, *Harvest* 70).

Their dream about building up “big family” in the forest seems to assume the issues of “nurture” and “nature” related to the maternal body, especially when they avoid contraception because of their sceptical attitude towards bio-medicine, and their idealised concept of “nature” as being “good.” Butler proposes that Merleau-Ponty’s argument against a “naturalistic account of sexuality” is significant to feminist considerations concerning the normative view of sexuality (“Sexual Ideology” 86).<sup>3</sup> However, she proposes that “sexuality is itself formed through the sedimentation of the history of sexuality” (“Sexual Ideology” 91). Harriet

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<sup>3</sup> However, Butler argues that Merleau-Ponty’s description of sexuality is under the assumption of “heterosexual character” (“Sexual Ideology” 86).

experiences the alienated process of her body when she passively accepts her body as simply reproductive material. When Harriet and David first make love in their future house, Harriet “was overwhelmed by his purposes . . . he was making love with a deliberate, concentrated intensity, looking into her eyes, that made her accept him, his taking possession of her” (FC 15). She is frightened by his intentions and at that moment suddenly experiences the room becoming “a black cave that had no end” (FC 16). When Harriet repeatedly finds herself pregnant, she seems to have no control over her maternal body. Borrowing conventions from the Gothic style, Lessing shows Harriet experiencing her body as mysterious and as alien to her as the room, where Harriet says, “there’s something progenitive about this room, I swear it” (FC 25); David says that “it’s this room, I swear it’s a baby-maker” (FC 41).

Their idealism eventually becomes an overloaded burden for each family member. Coole proposes that “Merleau-Ponty shows how failure to recognise the entwining of mental and material phenomena results in an oscillation between idealism and realism” (41). Coole explains Merleau-Ponty’s antipathy towards the rationalism of humanism in social-collective life. The Lovatt’s idealism is even based on the traditional assumption that males are responsible for the material support of wife and family and females should simply fulfil their duty to maintain domestic order. But David is unable to support this ever-expanding family and is therefore dependent in turn upon his father’s wife, whose upper class life-style he so despises. Harriet too must ask for help from her mother, and even her sister, unable alone to manage the endless domestic labour required to manage the house and its growing number of children. In Lessing’s portrayal of the enormous amount of money and resources required for this unrestricted expansion of their family, she seems to imply the infinite development of Late Consumer Capitalism as it exploits and draws on inexpensive labour. The members of the family are carefully characteristic of the British class system and seem to represent a kind of internal microcosm, a fractal reiteration of the larger macrocosm. Coole explains that according to Merleau-Ponty, “the economy is itself ideological,” since it “bears the symbols and habits of a particular way of being and serves as a material repository of its practical categories” (44). David’s ideal of individualism is even registered in his insistence that each baby should have its own room regardless of his own

limitations on resources. The family situation appears to reiterate Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the arrangements of Western democracies, viewed as a place where "many of their practices are violent and dehumanizing, with the economically exploited and the colonised being particularly obvious victims" (Coole 52). While everyone is required to tolerate the burdens of the Lovatt's insistence on their right to expand and reproduce, they are also fascinated by and initially drawn into the seductive circle of this living testament to the continuation of the great domestic biological dream of family. Harriet's giving birth is part of a ritualised Victorian dream and Harriet insists on preserving Victorian practices such as inviting the midwife to her house instead of going to a hospital.

### **2.1. A Monster Mother**

It seems that not only Harriet's maternal body but also her maternal role are affected by the arrival of this fifth child. In order to maintain the atmosphere of a happy and welcoming family, Harriet plays the Jungian "great mother" figure not only psychologically but also physically. She experiences her routine physical illnesses as intolerable tortures while she is pregnant with Ben. In "Feminism and Motherhood: O'Brien vs Beauvoir," Reyes Lázaro discusses women's alienated feelings towards their reproduction from the perspective of Mary O'Brien and Simone de Beauvoir. She proposes that de Beauvoir acknowledges the fact that "the female reproductive consciousness can be alienated, because many women come to see themselves in the way in which they are viewed by society" (100). Habituated in the past to suppressing her physical discomforts, this fifth pregnancy, however, makes Harriet's physical feelings more real than ever and the physical pain and discomfort seem to interrupt her usual positive anticipation of the new child. This fifth child becomes an "enemy" that Harriet has to fight and her growing dislike of the baby even before birth is deemed by all as improper so that she also has to suffer social disapprobation. When only a five month old foetus, Ben is already so active that it seems as if the foetus will "tear its way out of" his mother's womb (FC 49). Being unable to perform the role of 'perfect' mother, Harriet is therefore deemed to be the betrayer of the dream in which society provides itself sanctuary from the harsh realities of neo-liberal economics, the dream that requires

her, even in the late twentieth century, to continue to be an Angel in the House, where “she was breaking the rules of some contract between them: tears and misery had not even been on their agenda” (FC 45). As well as suffering from the alienated feelings towards her own body, she is distanced by the people close to her because of this unexpected situation. Amazed by this tiny creature “showing such fearful strength,” in his wife’s belly, David feels that Harriet is “possessed, had gone right away from him, in this battle with the foetus” which he could not share (FC 49-50). Moreover, even her doctor does not recognise her pain as unusual, so that Harriet, whose own subjective experience is so different and unacknowledged by all around her (and who knows that she is not a “child-rejecting mother,” or a “woman rejecting maternity”), is therefore haunted by the idea that she is carrying something alien, haunted by “the horror of mothering one very specific [kind of] child” (Clark 178). The frequently raised question is what kind of creature he is. Harriet imagines a kind of *Frankenstein* scenario with echoes too of Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau*:

Phantoms and chimeras inhabit her brain. She would think, when the scientists make experiments, welding two kinds of animal together, of different sizes, then I suppose this is what the poor mother feels. She imagined pathetic botched creatures, horrible to her, the products of a Great Dane or a borzoi with a little donkey; a tiger and a goat. Sometimes she believed hooves were cutting her tender inside flesh, sometimes claws. (FC 52)

Harriet is able to medicate herself to relieve some of the physical activity of the baby: she “grunted, or groaned, and then suddenly sat up, or scrambled out of bed and went doubled up out of the room, fast, escaping from the pain” (FC 49). She then tries to return to her normal family life where everyone is so eager to welcome her back, though they continue to ignore “her tenseness, her tiredness” (FC 53). Harriet’s severe physical pain is ironically contrasted with the aloof attitude of her family; her pain is so extreme that her sense of bodily transformation might be seen as a reaction to her own physical exhaustion: if her body seems not her own but something that tortures her, then the baby too might begin to seem like a

fiendish alien thing. When this idyll began, Harriet and David thought they could control nature; they had no sense what having many children might do to their lives. Nature seemed to be taking its revenge. Birke, however, a feminist biologist, acknowledges the usefulness to biologists of post-structuralist concepts such as Grosz's "body as social and discursive object" in showing how bodies are never simply inert flesh but also places and experiences inscribed with meaning. Once the body is acknowledged to be more than flesh, however, Birke sees the possibility of transcending normative political assumptions about bodies, in the idea that the "body is not part of passive nature ruled over by an active mind but rather the body is the ground of human action" (43). Drawing on Donna Haraway and Emily Martin's research on "changing images of the immune system," Birke argues for the importance of developing the issues around the idea of the "lived body" as a biologist by paying further attention to the "body's interior and its processes" and also "bodily development" in the realms of cultural production (43). She proposes that "we need to insist on thinking about the biological body as changing and changeable, as *transformable*" since all our "cells constantly renew themselves, even bone" (Birke 45). Birke's concept seems radical, but it seems reasonable in explaining Harriet's situation. Her distorted perception of her maternal body as alien, as something outside of her own volition, even seems to echo her mother's neo-Darwinist view that the limitless reproduction in some poor countries is a consequence of the economic struggle to survive.

Harriet eventually becomes an unknown creature in her family. During story time one night, David mentions a fairytale about a girl who gets separated from her little brother in the forest. When she tries to drink water from a pool, she sees a girl's face that "she had never seen in her whole life," a strange girl with "a nasty smile" who is trying "to reach up out of the water and pull her down into it" (FC 56). Through the story Harriet realises that she has become an evil like figure with "frightening eyes," reminiscent of the gaze of the Medusa. Beth Newman mentions Freud's reading of the Medusa which suggests that "her gaze may be an even more significant aspect of the horror she provokes" (451). Here, the magical image that "materialises" the family's fear of the failure of the mother figure is explained by David as "when something that wasn't there suddenly is there" (FC 57). This

magical girl provokes horror in their children and David himself is also speechless and stunned. In "Enfant Terrible: *The Fifth Child*," Rubenstein argues that Ben's existence represents "Lessing's preoccupation with the imperfect institution of the family and the relationships between parents and children, with the 'good' woman who maintains domestic order and with the connections between the individual conscience and the collective" (22). But most critics fail to connect this reading of the maternal body to Thatcherite politics, controversies over the ethics of care and the post-structuralist feminist reading of the body, all of which have shaped the rise of disability studies and contemporary discussions of the role and nature of care.

## 2.2. A Body of the Other

Ben's body appears to be very different from that of the ordinary or normative body, and his more "primal" perception and action disturb the normal interaction between self and others. Clark mentions that "*The Fifth Child* is exemplary of the ways in which narrative depends upon bodies of difference, and how these bodies cannot be easily disassociated from each other" (183). In *The Fifth Child*, Ben's bodily life is closely bound to that of his family and the decisions they make about his destiny. He appears over-energised, which seems to be the cause of the severe pain experienced by his mother after her five pregnancies. His appearance does not conform to the usual baby features when he is born. He has "a heavy-shouldered hunched look, as if from his eyes to his crown," and his hair grows "in an unusual pattern from the double crown where started a wedge or triangle"; besides, his hands are "thick and heavy, with pads of muscle in the palms" (FC 60). Ben's appetite is never appeased so his mother's breasts produce "more milk than they ever had had to do" and her chest swells "into two bursting white globes long belong the next feed" is due (FC 64). However, Ben drains "every drop in two or three minutes" (FC 64). His great strength as well as his aggressive drives seems to break down the usual template of tender mother and little baby. He cries and bellows when they put him in a cot "in the hope that Ben would be made social, friendly" (FC 68). Avoiding relying on his mother, it appears that he is even more eager to grow up quicker than the normal child and, when he at last stands up



by himself, his expression even surprises his mother as one of “a cold triumph” with “eyes gleaming with hard pleasure” (FC 73).

One of the major problems is that he is unable to react to others’ kindness and to behave affectionately to advances from his siblings and his mother; Harriet feels that he is a child “no one could love” (FC 69). Clark mentions that “Ben’s corporeal difference is marked primarily by his physical inconformity to the aesthetics of a ‘real’ baby or child, but even more by his inability or unwillingness to exhibit appropriate affective behaviour towards his family members” (181). Ben’s lack of affection towards others appears to be an extension and “*reductio ad absurdum*” of his parents’ egoism. LeFew-Blake explains that “Ben represents the wilful, tormented, unrestricted side of man, a side which David and Harriet have denied all of their lives” (117-8). Similarly, his inability to become part of the group might be read as a negative correlative of the Lovatt’s escapist fantasy of setting themselves outside of the parameters of the social world. He is also different from his little brother, Paul, who always hungers for his mother’s attention, and “nothing in his touch or his look ever seemed to say, This is my mother” (FC 73). Compared to Amy, the child suffering from Down’s Syndrome, who looks different but is accepted because she is affectionate and attaches herself to people, Ben is simply seen as defective and violent. Lenard Davis states that disability presents itself to ‘normal’ people through two main modalities: “function and appearance” (11). When Ben is only “six years old,” he looks “much older” and you could “almost take him for a little man, not a child at all” (FC 126).

### **2.3. Whose Fifth Child?**

Ben’s birth raises the question of what a family should look like and what limitations a family can reach before it begins to break up or fall into dysfunction. The idyllic image of the perfect family appears to be broken by the existence of a problematic child, but the child might be seen as simply a symptom of a family that is already broken. His birth requires the family to acknowledge and recognise the collapse of its fairytale dream. Rubenstein suggests that Ben “catalyses questions about boundaries and limits, including moral and social questions about the construction of normalcy, family life and maternal responsibility” (“Doris Lessing’s

Fantastic Children” 71). The Lovatts were once proud of their immunity to fashion, to the shifts in the external social and political world, for this is “outside their fortress, their kingdom, in which three precious children were nurtured, and where so many people came to immerse themselves in safety, comfort, kindness” (FC 30). LeFew-Blake explains that this “fifth pregnancy, however, comes as an invasion of the fortress from within” (116). The feelings of “safety, comfort and kindness” seem to be challenged when Ben arrives.

Ben seems to become the living embodiment of otherness, including Harriet’s own corporeal sense of herself. Ben’s birth is more akin to the articulation of a protest against the world. After his birth, he fails to cry, “except for a first roar of protest, or perhaps surprise” (FC 61). When Harriet asks everyone in the hospital to call him “Ben” without discussing this with David, she seems to protest at his “banging” inside her body. But not until Harriet’s breasts are badly bruised by Ben’s biting, can David gradually come to accept Harriet’s responses to this child. Harriet’s hurt feelings are also made visible through these bruises. Clark mentions that this function of making these hurt feelings “visible” forces readers to see “the feminine and maternal body” that is “marked as ‘other’ including disabled bodies” (181). In *The Fifth Child*, it is Ben’s especially visible existence that “makes the maternal body visible” (Clark 182). Again, Harriet’s suffering is not easily admitted by others in her community. When she shows the doctor her bruises, she is described as a mother who has taken “a dislike to a child” (FC 67). It seems that people try to ignore problems that they prefer not to acknowledge as existing: that maternal love might not be innate and determined. Ben’s extraordinary physical strength seems to smash into the surface calm of the family and Harriet becomes painfully aware of how people’s expressions change as they are “confronting this phenomenon,” describing him as “a goblin or a dwarf or something” (FC 68). After their holidays, all Harriet can remember is “how they all looked at Ben. There would be a long thoughtful stare, puzzled, even anxious; but then came fear, though everyone tried to conceal it. There was horror, too” (FC 70). Davis explains that “disability is a specular moment. The power of the gaze to control, limit and patrol the disabled person is brought to the force. These responses can include horror, fear, pity, compassion and avoidance” (11).

The hostile reaction towards both Ben and herself from their family and friends makes Harriet feel as if she is guilty for giving birth to this special child and especially “when they had seen him, because of the way they looked at her afterwards” (FC 74). Harriet tells David that “I suppose in the old times, in primitive societies, this was how they treated a woman who’d given birth to a freak. As if it was her fault. But we are supposed to be civilized” (FC 74). Actually, Harriet and David have not learned to accept that Ben is special. They both feel that Ben’s difference “had invaded their ordinariness which had no defences against him or anything like him” (FC 71). However, they ignore the fact that both “normality” and “abnormality” are aspects of ordinariness and that norms are products of social construction and can be reformulated or resisted. At the beginning, Harriet tries to show him the same love she shows for her other children, “to make him ordinary” (FC 69). However, “not once, did he subside into a loving moment” (FC 69). It seemed to Harriet that she “spent her life trying to understand what Ben was feeling, thinking” (FC 81).

The family gradually becomes the “cage” which confines Ben behind “bars” when he is suspected of causing harm (FC 73). The house is no longer attractive to people for vacations: “whoever he was looking at became conscious of that insistent gaze and stopped talking; or turned a back, or a shoulder, so as not to have to see him” (FC 75). Rubenstein argues that Ben, as the “transgressive Other, is embodied not as an abstract concept in the social body but as an agent of disintegration within the privileged intimate space of family life itself” (“Fantastic Children” 71). This contradictory cruelty of the family ironically reaches its extreme when they decide to send Ben to an institution. Lefew-Blake posits that “Doris Lessing has always been interested in how children reflect both the nakedness of our souls as well as the vulnerability of society as a whole” (115). The two families are like a microcosm of the broader society. Both David’s wealthy father and bourgeois mother decide to provide support to send Ben off. Harriet’s mother, Dorothy, deems Ben to be “catastrophic” for the whole family since Harriet no longer has time for her other children and her husband (FC 88). David does not even admit that Ben is his child. Angela, Harriet’s sister, who gave birth to Amy, a child with Downs’ Syndrome, defends Harriet and says, “sometimes when I’m with

you, I understand everything about this country" (FC 89). Ben's fate, even within his family reflects the social sanctions imposed on those who appear different to what is considered to be the norm or 'normal'. The family is part of a broader social institution that narrows the definition of normal and natural.

It is a "love" beyond the personal or even the maternal role that in the end forces Harriet to rescue Ben from the institution. Harriet decides to get him back "not because of love, or even affection, that she thought of him" but "it was guilt and horror that kept her awake through the nights" (FC 94). But this concern for Ben only incites anger in the rest of the family and she is "treated like a criminal" (FC 94). When Harriet arrives at the institution, she sees many patients who are physically abnormal; Ben appears as one of them, treated like an animal, echoing a Frankenstein-like appearance and paralyzed by drugs: "his pale yellow tongue protruded from his mouth. His flesh was dead white, greenish. Everything—walls, the floor, and Ben—was smeared with excrement. A pool of dark yellow urine oozed from the pallet which was soaked" (FC 99). But at this moment of great extraordinariness, Ben also looks "more ordinary than she had ever seen him," because she feels for him, feels he is "pathetic: she had never seen him as pathetic before" (FC 101). Clark observes of this response that "It also disrupts idealised notions of maternity or the maternal instinct" and "her choice to continue mothering him is presented as exactly that: choice, not instinct" (184). It is not maternal instinct that drives her to take care of him, but her sense of responsibility to a suffering creature. Isabel C. Anievas Gamallo mentions that Harriet's own condition of motherhood appears to reject "the double archetype of the mother as the terrible castrating and controlling figure and as the idealised and virtuous Madonna" (118-119). While she decides to bring him back, the staff in the institution responds with incredulity "as if she were part of the phenomenon that was Ben, of the same nature" (FC 101). Bringing Ben home, Harriet now axiomatically destroys the old picture of a perfect family as well as of herself as a perfect mother. As Clark suggests, "in this way Harriet herself undermines her earlier pronouncements about the naturalness of families and maternity itself" (184). From henceforth Harriet will need to spend all her time caring for Ben and so sacrifice her role of being a caring mother to the rest of the family. She thinks that

she is shielding her other children “from Ben while she re-educated him for family life,” but they think she has gone off “into alien country, with Ben” (FC 108). David feels more betrayed by Harriet because she starts to take the contraceptive pill, when they once felt that this was “deeply wrong . . . to tamper with the processes of Nature!” (FC 111). However, they are unwilling to accept its negative aspects. Pickering explains further that “they have too narrow a view of its operations, ignoring its relation to necessity” and “they have slighted history, whose relation to necessity they have chosen to ignore” (194).

Ben seems to be Harriet’s single responsibility, not only in the family, but also in society. While Ben can find no acknowledgement from others, Harriet too is unable to find someone to discuss Ben’s special situation with her, even when Ben goes to school, which represents the beginning of his path to full socialisation. However, Harriet gradually realises that “authorities would never recognise this, or acknowledge that they did” (FC 117). Harriet is so eager to have her tiredness recognised and treated that she visits a doctor and hopes “at last someone would use the right words, share the burden” (FC 124). She hopes that she could be “acknowledged, her predicament given its value” (FC 124). But again Harriet is blamed for not bonding with her child and when she protests to the doctor, “what did you see” and “you *saw* him, didn’t you?” She asks for Ben’s unusual nature to be recognised and spoken of (FC 127). However, none of them would like to approve that they have never seen someone like Ben. Ironically, only those staff in the institution, who were handed with the abandoned children, could realise Harriet’s impasse. In the eyes of those jailors, as Clark argues, that “Harriet’s narrative is, then, finally authorised both within and outside of the text by this revelation and visualisation of Ben’s otherness” (182).

Lessing recognises how people often confine themselves within their own prisons for fear of the unknown. LeFew-Blake mentions that Harriet’s “efforts to rationalise Ben are akin to man’s constant desire to understand and satisfy the will, a desire which leads to more torment since such understanding and satisfaction are impossible” (118). She sees what she expects: “a dark fixed stare that reflected what the woman was feeling, which was horror at the alien, rejection by the normal for what was outside the human limit” (FC 128). Harriet gradually grows unable to

take all the blame that is directed at her, especially from her family, and she begins to feel she is being treated like a “scapegoat” who has destroyed the family. Watkins suggests that Harriet therefore effectively takes Ben’s place as the scapegoat and “this mobility in the figure of the ‘other’ within the family unit is more disturbing than the simple fear of Ben” (155). However, David continues to think that they have always taken “responsibility” for what they believe in . . . and continues to ignore how he has left the responsibility to Harriet while he continues stubbornly to insist on the unique myth of himself (FC 142). At the end of the story, Harriet senses that Ben is unlikely to ever find acceptance, because it would take, “someone in authority, who would then have to take responsibility” (FC 158). The truth is only admitted by outsiders such as “his mates,” and those like him who he is likely to encounter while criminalised “in a police court” (FC 158).

### **3. A Disciplined, Transformed Body: a Space for Cultural Inscription and Psychological Interaction**

#### **3.1. A Disciplined Body**

Ben’s controversial body-figure seems to raise questions about possible reconsiderations of what is meant by being human. While Ben tries to look for acceptance in his surroundings, he also internalises those prejudices projected onto him because of his difference from the outer world. One consequence of his Frankenstein-like behaviour is that he internalises others’ disgust as his own sense of shame and then defends against this feeling by projecting anger back at the world. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben is represented as hostile and cruel in the eyes of others and his mother can barely intuit what he really thinks: she finds it almost impossible to make inferences about him, to read his mind. It is never proved whether Ben killed the animals or if he intentionally tried to hurt his brother: simply, we do not know if his hostility is innate or if he is driven by fear as he reads the intentions and behaviour of others around him as expressions of disgust. Not until in *Ben, in the World*, through his personal point of view, are readers able to enter his inter-subjectively constituted world. Ben’s appearance and personality are actually transformed and differentiated from those around him. His “being in the world” is also about the mode of his body’s existence in the world and this

transforms and informs his “psychology” and behaviour. Although he seems to be the victim in this society, Lessing uses the figure of embodiment to consider whether it is possible to escape the confines of “natural” corporeality in culture and society. Ben firstly has been forced to adapt himself to his family to become a “human body” after he is sent back from the institution. Grosz proposes that a human body is “a body that coincides with the ‘shape’ and space of the psyche, a body that defines the limits of experiences and subjectivity only through the intervention of the (m)other and, ultimately, the Other (the language—and rule-governed social order)” (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 104). He sees how other children “moved, sat down, stood up; copies how they ate” and he learns from the older ones because they are “more socially accomplished” (*FC* 83). Lefew-Blake mentions that “literally, Ben mimics reality, he shows his family what they are in essence” (84). Just like others staring at him due to his difference, he observes and tries to fix himself into this alien world through mimetic “watching”.

When the children watched television, he squatted near them and looked from the screen to their faces, for he needed to know what reactions were appropriate. If they laughed, then a moment later, he contributed a loud, hard, unnatural-sounding laugh... When they became silent and still with attention, because of some exciting moment, then he tensed his muscles, like them, and seemed absorbed in the screen—but really he kept his eyes on them.”

(*FC* 83-84)

He follows their actions mechanically, “copying them for safety” (*FC* 109). This imitation is similar to their pastime of watching TV all the time, a way to imagine a different “being in the world” and to escape from the world with Ben inside. Paul escapes into the television world, “watching restlessly, moving about as he watched and ate, and ate...” (*FC* 129). His never satisfied appetite reflects his need for psychological security, as he expresses his feeling of missing his mother’s attention. Although Ben tries hard to act like his siblings, who are well educated and sophisticated, he cannot help behaving “in some savage fit he could not control” (*FC* 117). He tears “the raw chicken apart with teeth and hands, pulsing with barbaric strength” (*FC* 117). Aware of being inappropriate, for the first time he calls

himself “poor Ben,” which seems to reveal a window that has been concealed from them (FC 117). After this event, the family starts to break up further, since his older brother and sister decide to leave home and remain at the boarding school.

Harriet realises that he could never be educated like “normal children,” although he could be taught to be “a part-social being” (FC 117). Disliked by his siblings, he is, however, able to relate well to the gardener, John, whom he comes to rely on and trust. Ben therefore slowly acquires a new sense of belonging and becomes part of “the group of young unemployed” (FC 111). When he is with the group, Ben expresses a kind of “exultation” or “ecstatic” feeling that Harriet has never seen in him before (FC 113). He begins to learn to control his physical strength, recognising that otherwise he will be sent to the institution again. When he is taken to the hospital for another check, the threat is “reinforced” and Ben is “subdued,” “not like a child with its mother, but like a frightened dog” (FC 128). In this process, Ben learns to realise his own physical abnormality and he tries to tame and normalise it.

Ben’s inability to communicate makes Harriet feel distanced and alienated. Crossley proposes that “the key medium of most social inter-actions, for Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, Shutz and Mead, is language” (38). Harriet tries in every way to educate him but realises that he can barely understand things, even the content of a TV program, though he can mimic it, repeating the story after Paul has talked about it. For Harriet, his inability to understand stories seems to be something not normal for a human. Meanwhile, she “could not make out what he wanted, what he felt” (FC 140). For Harriet, Ben is always “alien” to her when compared to Paul who is more difficult, but viewed as “a normal ‘disturbed’ child” (FC 129). For Merleau-Ponty, “thoughts and language are two sides of the same coin, he argues. Each needs its ‘other half’ for its own existence” (Crossley 39). It is through language that “thinking is an activity which takes place only by way of shared (intersubjective) action” (Crossley 39). Without language, and given Ben’s strange bodily physique and suppression of gestures, Harriet can derive no emotional feedback from Ben, and she can only guess that Ben might have the same feelings as herself. Whenever Ben is irritated by Paul’s teasing, Harriet feels that the effort she makes “to humanise him drove him away into himself, where he . . . but



what?—remembered?—dreamed of?—his own kind” (FC 139). One time she finds him crouching alone in the attic. She is compassionate towards his restricted soul when “she saw the Ben that [in] this life he had to lead kept subdued” (FC 140). His world seems mysterious because “all she could see was the obscurities of an attic that seemed boundless” and “she was rigid with horror” (FC 141). Lefew-Blake suggests that Harriet “reaches the conclusion that Ben is of a completely different origin than her other children” (119). While his siblings indulge themselves in the world “behind” modern technology, that TV, Ben is a creature who reminds people of the dark past.

Ben is taken to the heart of the chaos from which Harriet and David have tried to escape and this darkness has now invaded the house. With his new gang, he begins to experience adventures in the outer world and to get involved in riots and crime in the city, though he is described as less “fevered” than his companions (FC 152). When Harriet sees Ben and his new gang hovering in her kitchen, she remembers how the family image is built around the changes of the dining table. The expanded dining table was a symbol of their extending “family life,” when they were “brave innocents” at the beginning (FC 155). In that scene, she sees “the table lengthen, and widen, and the faces mass around it, always smiling faces, for this dream could not accommodate criticism or discord” (FC 155). Ironically, this table is bought from “a butcher’s table,” which “had had a rough, much-cut-about surface” but waxed by David and herself (FC 154). Their lively family feast is placed on a cruel surface, invisibly laden with the ghosts of slaughtered lives, but they ignore such associations. Ben eventually becomes one of the victims at the table, though he is regarded as “the alien, the destroyer” (FC 156).

Pickering argues that Harriet mediates “between a cosmic evolutionary perspective and an individual personal one” (195). On the one hand, since she is the one who gave birth to him, she is still eager to know how Ben feels about her, so she “would put into her gaze these speculations, these queries, her need, her *passion* to know more about him” (FC 156). On the other hand, she realises that he possesses a different “sense” which can read their minds (FC 156). She differentiates him from herself as a “race that reached its apex thousands and thousands of years before humanity” and she also believes that the vitality of his

people is so strong that it might make “new races, which had flourished and departed, but perhaps has left their seeds in the human matrix, here and there, to appear again, as Ben had” (FC 156). In this way, she tries to unload onto him the responsibility for what he is. LeFew-Black mentions that Harriet convinces herself that “he is indeed a continuation of a previous essence, one that will continue on its irrational and frenzied course” (119). She believes that Ben and his gang will eventually disappear from the circle of the family (FC 159).

Unlike his mother’s expectation that Ben would “join the underground” and “live off his wits,” Ben must always fight against his fear of civilisation. Ben’s body becomes what Foucault calls a kind of ‘medium’ in the formation of civilisation. He tries to ‘normalise’ his behaviour in order to avoid being sent back to the institution that imprisoned him like an animal. Ben’s body learns obedience through the discipline of society. For the cultivation of his family, Ben is forced to be “made” to be like most normal people.<sup>4</sup> In the city, many places remind him of the image of “a cage” that once imprisoned him physically whilst these places also suggest to readers the idea of the prison of the group mind, whether “territorial, national or generic” (Watkins 121). He also realises from his personal experiences that he can never beat the social system. He tries hard, “shaking those bars with both of his strong fists, and they have not given way at all,” but the action only shows “how little use his strength was” (Ben 22). Philip Barker explains Foucault’s concept that discipline is not directed “at the intensification of its subjection” but “at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful” (56).

Although Ben tries to ‘discipline’ himself to the rules of society, he is still regarded as animal-like because of his physiognomy and behaviour, and is also treated like an animal for his lack of an official identity certificate. Trying to make a living for himself on the building site, he is, however, unable to obtain his salary when his money is stolen by his workmate. Everyone expects him to act ferociously like an animal, but he alone knows that he must not fight back when “they all set on him”; he must repress his rage so as to avoid unleashing his immense strength (Ben

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<sup>4</sup> Katherine Dunn proposes that “Olympia at one point states that ‘...a true freak cannot be made. A True freak must be born’” (Dunn 20).

30). Ellen Pifer suggests that Ben resembles Frankenstein, “the monster he is semiotically constructed to be” (143). And, as Foucault observes, “society employs this border or site between the normal and abnormal to ‘discipline and punish’ the latter” (Pifer 143). His self-image is constructed by himself and others, but the boundary between these two is impossible to unmask; he recognises himself as an animal from people making animal sounds and actions to mimic him. After grabbing his pay, his workmate gibbers like a monkey as a kind of mockery. Ben remembers then what he had previously seen in the zoo and tries to look for a companion there. He moves “from cage to cage looking at beasts whose names he had been called, ape, baboon, pig-man, pongo, yeti” (*Ben* 28). He has internalised those images and is eager to look for “something like himself” (*Ben* 28). Grosz mentions Roger Caillois’s research on the phenomenon of mimicry in the insect world. She mentions that “Mimesis is particularly significant in outlining the ways in which the relations between an organism and its environment is not clearly distinct from the organism but is an active component of its identity” (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 88).<sup>5</sup> When walking in public spaces, he tries to make himself invisible so as not to be “noticed” by “drawing attention to himself” for being different (*Ben* 40). He is constantly aware of the gaze that reflects how he is threatening and unusual. Night is preferable to day: when wandering on the street, “the dark was his home, night was his place,” and people did not look at him so threateningly at night (*Ben* 277-7). But through this internalised gaze, he finds that he is an outcast from this world.

### **3.2. The Boundary between Animals and Human Beings?**

But as he grows older, Ben becomes more noticeable, his behaviour and his eating habits, for example, stand out more. His physical needs are so strong that “his hunger hurt and threatened him,” the need for “meat” and the smell of “the rawness of blood, the reek of it” (*Ben* 27). Aside from his bodily needs, Ben’s different expressive ability also distinguishes him from others and often raises the

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<sup>5</sup> Grosz explains here that many of Lacan’s ideas of imaginary anatomy are derived from Roger Caillois. However, Grosz proposes that for Lacan, the “‘cortical mirror’ is a psychological rather than physiological or neurological postulate” (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 87).

question of whether or not Ben is human. Since his means of expression is so different from others, people can barely understand him. When he is in fear, he would 'grin', showing his white teeth, yet the facial expression is normally read as a smile. His grunting expression is viewed as unacceptable, as though he were an animal. Men usually distinguish themselves from animals by their rationality; Ben is therefore seen as irrational. However, according to Darwin's idea, "the supposedly most uniquely human characteristic, language, along with all of the arts and all moral and intellectual accomplishments, is animal in its origins, sources, and forces" (Grosz, *Becoming Undone* 18). But man does not want to acknowledge his similarity with animals: only to accentuate the difference and his own uniqueness.

When he is at Mary Grindly's farm, however, Ben is able to establish a special communication with the animals. He finds reciprocal comfort with them at night. He might stand "by the cow with his arms around her neck, nuzzling his face; and the warmth that came into him from her"; or he might sing "a little grunting song to the stars, or her danced around, lifting his feet and stamping" (*Ben* 18-19). Ben's special kind of expression echoes the most unusual element in Darwin's understanding of language, that "language finds its origins neither in communication nor in defence," and "it begins as a form of sexual allure, a mode of enhancement and intensification, as a musical form that only gradually develops itself into a language" (Grosz, *Becoming Undone* 18-19).

Therefore, it is no surprise that Ben's sexuality is also direct and unpretentious. When he meets Rita, a prostitute, rather than fearing him she is impressed by the directness of his behaviour. But the first time she sees him, Rita too feels "*That's not human,*" not only because of his hairy appearance but also his animal-like behaviour: when he stands, his big shoulders bend, appearing like a "barrel chest," with "the dangling fist" and his feet are planted apart (*Ben* 42, 43). However, she comes to realise she is not so different from Ben in her need for and attraction towards his primal desire and animal ways that seems to blur the distinction between herself and him (*Ben* 37). She thinks, "yet if he wasn't human, what was he? A human animal, she concluded, and then joked with herself, Well aren't we all?" (*Ben* 43). Watkins mentions that "Lessing uses Ben as a device to

question how we define humanity, and how we separate ourselves from the animal and the atavistic" (156).

It is ironic that while his animal-like appearance is not accepted by most people, his "posh accent" from his family is unacceptable to his gang (*Ben* 14). Pifer proposes that "who can say that [Ben's] nature is other, alien or nonhuman, when his actions, speech, and conduct are indistinguishable from those of his cohorts, who merge with the undifferentiated mass" (146). Ben even learns to repress his anger when he nearly kills someone when provoked and hit by his gang for failing to guard their motorcycles (*Ben* 15) and he decides to leave the gang rather than become a criminal. It seems that sometimes the behaviour of human beings is even more barbarian than that of animals. Unlike Ben's tender interaction with animals, people around him seem to repeatedly behave towards him with cruelty and lack of care.

#### **4. The "Relational Positionality" of the Different Bodies**

##### **4.1. The Body in the "Relational Positionality"**

In *The Fifth Child*, Ben's story is mainly narrated by his mother; however, in *Ben, in the World*, his situation is revealed through other perspectives, where his journey starts with his searching for his birth certificate: this is the beginning of his journey to discover his identity in the world. But only when he meets those who really care for him and accept his uniqueness can Ben acquire a sense of "identity" and an ability to care for others. Grosz mentions that "For the subject to take up a position as a subject, he must be able to situate himself as a being located in the space occupied by his body" (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 89). He is always looking for 'the place' where his body might become situated. Although leaving his family, he still has feelings of 'love' towards his mother, since he knows that she stood by him and saved him from the institution and brought him home. It is his love towards his mother that leads him to look for this similar emotion from people around him. For him, "kindness" means people "really did see him" and "as if they took him into themselves" (*Ben* 45). While his mother thinks that he has drifted off with his gang to find greater excitement, he actually stays with them because of

their need of him: because “inwardly he was mature” (*Ben* 14). He leaves the gang and starts his own journey when he feels himself no longer loved and cared by them.

Ben’s body actually performs a kind of “relational positionality . . . within a relational framework, identities shift with a changing context, dependent always on the reference” (Friedman 17). After leaving home, he is firstly found by the Grindlys and stays on their farm. Similar to the Lovatts, these farming people have chosen to live on their own land and they refuse to adapt to metropolitan life; on the other hand, like Ben, their isolated and degraded life makes people regard their farm as a “disgraceful place that tended to be forgotten by everyone” (*Ben* 16). Ignoring social standards, the Grindlys live according to nature and that allows Ben to live in a kind of independence. Making use of his strength, he not only nurtures the animals, but also becomes the carers of the elderly. Seeking love rather than financial reward, he recognises that Mary is “good to him” and “never cross to him” and that she provides the means for his survival in food, shelter and clothes (*Ben* 18). When he is cared for, he learns to care. However, Ben is forced to leave this life when Mary passes away.

But he subsequently becomes involved with Mrs. Biggs, a poor and lonely old woman, who offers him warm physical contact that makes him feel totally accepted. When he sleeps in the same bed with her, she realises that he only asks for “company,” like a dog (*Ben* 12). She too feels that “he was not human” and the way he prowls to grab food is like an animal, but she still accepts his ways. Her love towards him is beyond what a family could give, and she believes that if she “could be good to Ben—so Ellen Biggs saw it—then his family could too” (*Ben* 13). She even concludes that “he was Ben, he was himself—whatever that was” (*Ben* 12). But she persuades him to go home to get his birth certificate from his mother since her old age pension is not enough for both of them. Feeling reluctant to face painful memories, Ben is therefore persuaded by Mrs. Biggs’ generosity to go home and see his mother: “because of the kindness of that old lady, he had remembered the other kindness, and understood that was what it had been: she like the old lady, had not hurt him, she had come to rescue him from that *place*” (*Ben* 22-23). However, this affection does not last long when he realises that his family has

moved to a new house, which they announced is “not big enough” for him, and nor have they informed him of the new address (*Ben* 25). When he looks for his mother in the park, the place on the bench where he used to sit next to his mother has now been taken by his brother. He feels so angry that he turns away because “until this rage, this hate, left him alone he could not go anywhere near his mother” (*Ben* 24). He feels painfully stricken with tears but does not realise what they signify. Returning to Mrs. Biggs’s home, he finds that Mrs. Biggs has been ill, so he takes care of her and the recognition he receives from her is more than any official birth certificate might have provided. This is “a happy time, the best in Ben’s whole life, looking after the old woman, even taking her clothes and her bedclothes to the laundrette, cooking up dishes from frozen to feed her” (*Ben* 35). Care is no longer only performed through female figures, but also through Ben, and this suggests the possibility of “the fluidity of situational identity” that Friedman proposes (18). Sadly though, he must leave Mrs. Biggs because of economic constraint and he is unable to find a place for himself because is unable to obtain official social identification. When he leaves the old woman, he is now a complete outcast; he now “had no home in this world” (*Ben* 35).

#### **4.2. Transforming the Body by Mimicry**

The regulations and disciplines of society are exposed as absurd when Ben is used as an instrument for criminal purposes. Ben returns to Rita’s place, where he can obtain food and a place to stay. But as another victimised body, Rita has become the criminal accomplice of international traffickers. Persuaded by Rita’s friend and co-worker, Johnston, to bring drugs to France, Ben senses danger and malicious intent. However, the idea that he might thus obtain a passport lures him because it will provide something to “show a policeman, or a foreman on a building site” (*Ben* 43). Moreover, Ben craves acceptance by society. In Foucault’s analysis, however, selfhood and subjectivity are more profoundly maintained through individual self-surveillance rather than physical constraint or official paper sanction. Foucault proposes that an “inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that is his own overseer, each individual

thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself" (Bordo 253). When Ben sees his passport, it is the first time that he feels "as if arms" from this country "had been put around him" (*Ben* 45). This feeling of inclusion is similar to the description of how Mrs. Biggs and Rita "took him into themselves". However, he senses "a strong, dangerous male smell" from Johnston, but he agrees with their proposal only because Johnston says that he will be "real grateful" to him for his favour; these words have "the same effect on Ben as the old lady's" (*Ben* 73). Ben's physical uneasiness in the new strange environment is calmed by the word "blanket" that reminds him of Mrs. Biggs' comfort towards and praise of him" (*Ben* 63).

After safely arriving in France and successfully completing the drug business, however, Ben's own self-surveillance is "blacked out" by the machinations of these people, symbolised by his vulnerable eyes that require the sunglasses to protect them from the strong sunshine. Seeing his own reflection in the shop window, he is so scared precisely because he cannot see his eyes and thinks they "have gone" (*Ben* 68). He now literally crouches in darkness and hides himself from others. Mikhail Bakhtin suggests in his description of the grotesque body, that "the eyes have no part in these comic images; they express an individual, so to speak, self-sufficient human life, which is not essential to the grotesque" (316). When Ben needs to put on the dark glasses, it seems that he loses the kind of selfhood that allows him to speak for himself. His obedience to their plans is reminiscent of Foucault's argument that "discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (Barker 57). However, Ben, who only wishes he could go home with his official certificate and be expected by someone who "would smile when they saw him" (*Ben* 74) becomes a rootless wanderer. Rita has left and even Mrs. Biggs is dead, so there is no one in the UK awaiting his return: there is no home. He feels so "loose and weightless and unbelonging he could drop through the floor or float about the room" (*Ben* 76). Richard, who accompanied Ben to France, finally recognises that "their situations in the world were similar" (*Ben* 75). They are outsiders abandoned by the world. Richard, like Ben, looks forward to the possibility that he might "live like [a] free man, not the hunted thing he had been all his life, waiting for the law to put its hand on his shoulders" (*Ben* 75).



Ben's lack of identity and his grotesque body are like blank paper waiting to be filled with whatever is projected onto him. Bakhtin mentions that "the grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (317).<sup>6</sup> With his passport, he is Ben Lovatt, thirty-five years old and from Scotland. He can only prove the reality of his identity with his passport and it "seemed all that stood between him and being nothing—without it who would know that he was Ben Lovatt, from Scotland" (*Ben* 79). When in France, people "evolved their own ideas about Ben" (*Ben* 79). When Ben is left helpless and alone in the hotel, the director, Alex excitedly starts to plan to make a film about him in Brazil, about a "throwback" of some kind who defies identification as human or animal. Watkins mentions that "contempt for elite art forms and the idea that the picaresque's own life is his art form is pushed to extremes" when Ben is forced to stare at himself in the film. The image brings him waves of "bafflement, of wonder, of excitement" (*Ben* 82). At the beginning, Alex wants to shoot the film in a forest "where the history was as ancient and savage as in Europe" (*Ben* 83), but still wants to use the perspectives of modern civilisation to look at the ancient world. As Ben's script is composed, his own ideas are disregarded and his presence is even regarded as a kind of interference in their intentions (*Ben* 95). They want to "make a story" in which Ben is objectified as an alien, a creature from a primitive life. They would "stare deeply at Ben, frowning, but not seeing him" (*Ben* 97). Ben's anger and uneasiness peaks when they fail to take him to his home as promised but move on to another unknown place. Unable to express his feelings in language, Ben can only use his body: he "thuds" his head on the wall in protest, and "that thudding: it was awful, it spoke direct to the nerves of anyone listening, it was not possible to ignore it" (*Ben* 99). By hurting his head, Ben's act is a kind of "mimicry" of what these people think of him: they ignore what is in his mind. So his action is akin to what Homi K. Bhabha suggests in *The Location of Culture*, whereby it is a kind of "mimicry" which is no longer the "narcissistic identification" with others, but where

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<sup>6</sup> David Mitchell mentions that "one of the center pieces of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque crystallises around his notion of "fusion" where "monstrosity" accumulates an expansive series of references and meanings" (358). See Mitchell 348-65.

“the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (89).<sup>7</sup> This room for creativity has become “a cage” in which to imprison Ben (*Ben* 100). For Alex, Ben is no longer the muse from the savage world who is so mysterious and inspiring, but Ben’s recalcitrance is viewed as “the block, a lock on their creative imaginations, when they thought of him what they heard was the bump, bump, thud, thud, of his head on the wall” (*Ben* 114). So they turn their attention from Ben to the undeveloped and uncorrupted Indian tribe in a further attempt to fulfil their imaginations about the uncivilised world.

Ben realises his exclusion is so absolute there can be no companion who might share his sense of difference. Escaping alone to the beach, he sees crowds “who knew how to be together, all the same as each other even though they were of different colours, sizes, shapes—no one stared at them for their strangeness” (*Ben* 101). His anger finally explodes when he is again cheated by thieves, but instead of revelling in his physical strength, he feels unable any longer to face the “cruelty, viciousness, the intention to hurt him” (*Ben* 104). Alex’s girlfriend, Teresa, is the only character who tries to understand his sorrow as he seems to shrink to the size of a small baby needing care. Teresa is able to respond because Ben’s predicament reminds Teresa of her own refugee life. Like Ben, Teresa and her family needed to take refuge in the city and, living as a prostitute and experiencing the transformation of her own body, she too has come to recognise how one gains recognition in a capitalist society: “With a nice dress and shoes and the price of a drink a pretty girl from one of the worst slums in the world could sit at a table outside a fine hotel and no one would say a word” (*Ben* 108). Luckily, Teresa does not feel as rootless as Ben because “at least she had been looked after” by her family and she yearns for “her mother’s strong arms” to protect her from “the dangers that surrounded her” (*Ben* 112). That is also how she tries to guard Ben. Teresa intends to transform her terrible past by making friends with a well-

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<sup>7</sup> Bhabha mentions that his analysis of mimicry “is not the familiar exercise of dependent colonial relations thought narcissistic identification that, as Fanon has observed, the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem” (88).

educated person, Inez, in order to prove herself to her mother. After their visit to her primitive home, Teresa gains recognition and moral forgiveness from her mother. She is no longer the “disgraced girl” who is forced to betray her body but has now become one of “the clean pretty women” like Inez (*Ben* 120). Teresa performs the transformation of the body so as to gain social respectability, but because of her admiration for Inez’s knowledge and education, she goes on to betray Ben in a way that she did not anticipate in herself. She cannot muster the inner strength to resist Inez’s suggestion of bringing Ben to a laboratory. Teresa is in awe of the word “science” because “she knew nothing about all that” and “Inez’s education was to her a wonder, something distant and unreachable” (*Ben* 121). She tries to guard Ben and fights against those who are “authorities” and “superiors” in both knowledge and power. When she realises that she does not have sufficient power to protect Ben, she can only warn them that Ben is “a person of Britain” (*Ben* 137), though she has no personal sense of national protection and had never even “imagined such a degree of concern by a government for a little people” (*Ben* 143). Teresa’s own country has never taken care of her and she needs to get her own identity by buying certification, like Ben.

While Ben is eventually kidnapped and imprisoned in a scientific institution with animals in cages, the feeble distinctions between culture and the primitive, between civilisation and barbarism are cruelly visualised in Lessing’s depiction of Ben’s situation. Watkins argues that people attempt to “quantify the difference between themselves and Ben as that between the primitive and the cultured or the animal and the human” (129). Grosz proposes that humans use many ways to divide themselves from the animal, in “an oppositional structure, that denies to the animal what it grants to the human as a power or ability: whether it is reason, language, thought, consciousness, or the ability to dress, to bury, to mourn, to invent, to control fire, or one of the many other qualities that has divided man from animal” (*Becoming Undone* 12). When Ben knows that people want to research him, he asks, “why I am different from everybody?” (*Ben* 125). Grosz puts forward Darwin’s argument “that the differences between man and other animal species are differences of degree, not differences in kind, and that the differences between the races and cultures of mankind are likewise differences of degree and not kind”

(*Becoming Undone* 16-17). Therefore, the lives in the world are related and have the same origin. However, human beings always forget this and do not respect other living beings in the world. Grosz argues that Darwin thus broadens the idea of difference, “without the central organizing principle of identity—not a difference between given things, a comparison, but a difference which differentiates itself without clear-cut or separable terms” (*Becoming Undone* 17). This blurred separability echoes that “relational position” that Friedman proposes. While Ben is regarded as a kind of “throwback—from a long time ago,” they do not really treat him as a human being. In his first experimental testing in the laboratory, he is expected to behave like an animal—“to pee in front of them all” (*Ben* 132). He is even caged with other monkeys and animals. This cruelty evokes pity from those who have spoken to him because “this yeti, this freak, was a polite sort of creature, almost like ordinary people: he should not be treated like this” (*Ben* 140-141). When Ben is “unclothed,” the scientists also unmask the civilisation which has put on its humanity like the clothes “since he was born” (*Ben* 146). Actually, Ben has “crystallised” the activity in the buildings and he has brought “the unease, the shame” to those workers in the institution” (*Ben* 141). Pifer notes that “from Berlin to Buenos Aries, Madrid to Los Angeles, Lessing’s narrator warns that contemporary culture has become increasingly distracted and indifferent to its own besieged humanity” (146). After this treatment, Ben realises he would never be accepted as like other human beings and he is “filthy and shivering” like “a poor helpless defeated creature” (*Ben* 147). When he is released from the cage by Teresa and Alfredo, he seems to will a degradation to monkey status and he makes “a leap out of her arms and out of the window and into the dark” (*Ben* 147). The tragic situation of those living lives in the science institution reflects the cruelty and indifference of our civilisation towards the wider environment and its inhabitants. The institution where “human beings make our civilization” is full of “a howl, a terrible sound, from that hell which is multiplied all over the world” (*Ben* 147).

### 4.3. The Position of the Body

Ben needs a place in the world where he could be accepted for his disparity. When he hears Alfredo telling him that he has seen people like him, he is so surprised that “his eyes all gratitude, tears were rolling down into his beard, and he was pressing those great fists together: he seemed to have been lit from within by fires of joy” (*Ben* 126). On their way to the institution with Alfredo, they see some people gliding with a parachute. Ben envies them because these people could fly freely in the sky without fear. Alfredo understands very well that “not only Ben, but Teresa too, must be feeling oppressed by the rich clever world where people could leap off into air under umbrellas and feel safe, because their lives had always been safe” (*Ben* 130). However, whenever Ben tries to adapt himself to his family, or the environment, he only sees his own difference. He says to Alfredo, “I don’t have any people. I’m not like my family—at home. They are different from me. I’ve never seen anyone like me” (*Ben* 126). Grosz suggests that Darwin’s ideas of “‘numberless gradation’, of the ‘finest gradations’, of ‘no fundamental difference’ anticipates one of the most profound and motivating of concepts in twentieth-century thought and beyond” because he does not try to make the superior or inferior classifications (*Becoming Undone* 17). Even though Ben has proved his ability to survive, even to take care of others, he still cannot be a member of society because of his difference. People always see him differently because he does not fit into their world perfectly, but they actually seldom try to adapt to his world. On the last night, on his way to look for his people in the mountain with Teresa and Alfredo, Ben is dancing and singing to the stars. He seems to communicate with nature, and he says, “They’re talking! . . . They are singing to us!” (*Ben* 173). When they try to enter Ben’s world and “open their minds to what Ben could hear,” they seem to “hear a high crystalline whispering, a tiny clashing” (*Ben* 173). In his ceremony of worshipping nature and singing “his hymn to the heavens,” Ben seems to be the one who can really accept the whole world “with his arms outstretched and his head back, silent, looking up and up” (*Ben* 173). Bakhtin proposes that “the grotesque body is cosmic and universal” and this body “can merge with various natural phenomena, with mountains, rivers, seas, islands, and continents. It can fill the

entire universe" (318). While led to the top of the mountain, Ben sees his people in the pictures on the rock, not carrying any weapons, only musical instruments, which represent Ben's own love for music. He strokes the "outline of a female who seemed to be smiling at him. Then he bent forward and nuzzled at her, rubbing his beard over her, and letting out short cries that were greetings" (*Ben* 175). Nevertheless, he also recognises his isolated situation when his people disappear with the sunlight. Now, he can hardly go back to the original world where his sense of selfhood is constituted out of the reactionary gaze. Ben turns away, therefore, to leap down the mountain and Alfredo prevents Teresa from stopping him, for he recognises the cruel fact that no one could relieve Ben's sadness or share its sources with him. The scene in which Ben falls down the hill reminds readers of the scene of the sky divers. He has also sought the freedom to fly freely for the rest of his life and can feel secure and without fear when at last he flies into oblivion.

The positioning of Ben's body and its meanings seems to be left intentionally open to the reader's interpretation. His grotesque body appears to be vicious and threatening at the beginning and yet throughout it is the vehicle for his interaction with and responsiveness towards the needs of people around him. Again, Lessing's concern about "care as reciprocal" allows Ben's body to perform a relational positioning in the world. Ben's body actually externalises or acts out the psychological needs of each person around him, in their multiple reactions to the world. The intersubjectivity represented by Ben's body therefore opens up an open space for people to reflect on what are really their and other creatures' needs in the world. Lessing has created an imaginary world of intersubjectivity which awaits recreation through concretisation in the reading experience itself, understood as a process of intersubjectivity.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to interpret Lessing's work through the concept of intersubjectivity, used by Lessing as a way to reconsider one's relationship with the world and of finding ways to break down the boundaries between self and others, as well as between self and the world. Through the consideration of intersubjectivity, this thesis echoes Waugh's claim about the need to search for alternative subjectivities that emphasise "maintaining connection and intersubjectivity"; these subjectivities lay beyond the "Enlightenment concepts of subjectivity as autonomous self-determination" opposed by feminism and postmodernism - as well as beyond "the dissolution of human subjectivity" in Postmodernism (*Practising* 202). It is difficult to place Lessing in any specific literary movement. Her focus on inward looking development, as well as the search for an ideal vision through art (like Mark Coldridge's vision in *The Four-Gated City*), seems to reflect the Modernist spirit, which has been read as presuming that art offers us "precisely that illusion of utter self-determination" (Waugh, *Practising* 200). But in many of her novels, especially for example *The Golden Notebook* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, Lessing engages in a fragmentary subjectivity which seems more postmodern. However, in all of her work, the focus seems more on how to organise disconnected experiences than on the idea of a transcendental or ideal truth.

The work for this thesis began by considering the writing of Melanie Klein because of her emphasis on introjection and projection between inner and outer worlds as the basis for subjectivity and the assumption therefore of a fundamental model of intersubjectivity as being human. Klein's emphasis on the pre-Oedipal period and the concept of "ambivalence" towards the love object performs a kind of "being-in-the world" through imagination. In *The Grass Is Singing*, Mary's ambivalent feelings towards black people are projected, as fear and hidden attraction, onto her black servant, Moses, so that she is drawn to cross the tabooed restricted space between the white hostess and the black servant. Gambaudo comments that "Klein's work has opened the door to new ways of considering subjectivity" and her analysis of the pre-Oedipal period provided "a new

methodology to articulate human archaic experience and its difficulties” (100). Klein’s psychoanalysis, and that of her followers such as D.W. Winnicott, who also embrace object relations theory, emphasise the importance of connected experience rather than the pursuit of autonomy and separation that is emphasised in the Freudian conceptualisation. The potential space mentioned by D. W. Winnicott, is a buffer zone, between the infant’s inner world and outer world, and it is seen to allow the creative mobility that is needed for the development of culture. It thus becomes the space of refuge for the narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, a place to encounter the conflict between the personal and collective. The dystopia in the outer world reflects the need for inspection of the personal inner world as a way to move forward. The idea of intersubjectivity, developed by cultural feminists, such as Jessica Benjamin, in the 1970s, is oriented to the recognition of the ‘other’ existing outside oneself, instead of claiming that “other” as an extension of oneself. Its emphasis is on relationality not separation. Chodorow suggests that “the desire for radical disidentification with the mother,” especially for boys, requires “a culturally reinforced masculine investment in denial and separation” (Waugh, *Practising* 203). Therefore, Carol Gilligan’s ethics of care, adopted by post-structuralist feminists, develops this kind of relational position as another way to deal with transnational and trans-cultural issues.

Klein’s emphasis on the pre-Oedipal period allows more exploration of an emergent subjectivity before the Oedipal phase and therefore before the construction of the symbolic order that Lacan emphasises. Kristeva adopts Klein’s theory to “replenish our ambitions for freedom in the more rugged and more archaic regions of the psyche, where the *one* identity cannot *be*” (Gambaudo 393). In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, the male protagonist experiences the process of abjection of his psychological fear towards the female which is constructed in the collective consciousness, then re-unites with the collective, represented as a transparent Crystal, to achieve the recognition that he is part of the collective. Beata Stawarska mentions that the analysis of the psychoanalytic unconscious “can move beyond the subject-centred perspective of classical phenomenology to which



Merleau-Ponty continued to adhere in his early work, notably *Phenomenology of Perception* (68). In addition, the recognition of unconscious impersonality is a way to refuse “to be captured by the ‘I think’, so it decentralizes the conscious epistemic subject of classical phenomenology” (Stawarska 68-69).

The thesis has gradually revealed that Lessing’s inspection of madness under the influence of R. D. Laing echoes Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the phenomenology of perception. The inner journey is often accompanied by physical symptoms, which are related to existential feelings in the world. In the introduction to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, Laurie Spurling starts with R. D. Laing’s description of schizophrenia: seen to be characterised by “a series of deep slips: between the self and the world, between the self and others, and within the self” (1). In *The Divided Self*, from the perspective of existential phenomenology, Laing illustrates the transition from a “sane schizoid way of being-in-the world to a psychotic way of being-in-the world” (17). His psychiatric writings focussed on the patients’ existential physical feelings, their sense of “embodiment and unembodiment,” which reflect the experience of a divided self as a mode of being in the world. But he emphasises that these feelings of alienation or of disembodiment are ways of coping with a hostile environment and “the split in the experience of one’s own being into unembodied and embodied parts is no more an index of latent psychosis than is total embodiment any guarantee of sanity” (Laing, *Divided* 68). In *The Grass Is Singing*, the unembodied feelings sustain Mary whose will begins to falter under the conflictual circumstances and the effects on her of her husband’s behaviour. In *The Four-Gated City*, through her feelings of disembodiment, Martha tries to transcend through disassociation her emotional and physical constraints and to escape her solipsistic world through spiritual assent. However, another of her male characters, Jack, in *The Four-Gated City*, is seen to be imprisoned in his embodied feelings of hatred and he adopts his body as an instrument of revenge on the world. Spurling suggests that in the post-atomic era, there has been a need to look for “a mode of understanding that can come to terms with these fragmentations and splits and offers some kind of diagnosis (=seeing-

through) of our contemporary lives” (1). Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “embodied consciousness” provides a route to break down the dualism and the split between “mind and body, reason and emotion, masculine and feminine” (Spurling 1). To recognise the entwining phenomenology of the mental and material world is a way to overcome reductionist dualisms.

Merleau-Ponty draws on Melanie Klein’s concept of “ambivalence” in which anxiety and conflict are embodied in the subject’s interaction with the outer world. In *The Primacy of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty analyses “The Child’s Relations with Others” using Melanie Klein’s idea of “ambivalence.” Merleau-Ponty proposes that “psychological rigidity,” as a kind of pathological symptom of the infant, arises in response to “the over authoritarian environment.” so that the rigid subjects lack the “ability to confront squarely the contradictions that exist in their attitudes towards others” (*The Primacy of Perception* 103). Furthermore, “psychologically rigid subjects” show a kind of “perceptual rigidity” that appears as a difficulty in adjusting their attitudes in order to accept “a new account of new aspects of a problem” (Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* 105). In contradistinction, “as opposed to ambivalence, ambiguity is an adult phenomenon, a phenomenon of maturity” where one might accept the positive and negative aspects of a thing or state of being (Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* 105). Merleau-Ponty thus concludes that “in subjects whose intellectual ambiguity is strong it often happens that the emotional foundation is much more stable than in other subjects” (*The Primacy of Perception* 105). Stawarska comments that Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of psychoanalysis “engages philosophical reflection and psychoanalytic theory in a critical as well as illuminating reciprocal relation, which transforms both traditions of enquiry from within by helping to refine and revise their basic concepts” (69). In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, the professor Charles Watkins suffers from the symptoms of amnesia as a result of his consistently rigid attitudes to the world and people, represented by Lessing as a consequence of the severe regulation of his experience during the infantile period and also his repressed doubt about his career.

Lessing experiments continuously with the novel form in order to explore abnormal psychological development. From the mystic reportage in *The Grass Is Singing*, to the surreal ending in *The Four-Gated City*, and the inner journey of the amnesiac male protagonist in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, madness is represented as a breakdown of the habitual understanding of reason and the rigid confinement of human beings, their imprisonment in solipsistic worlds or ideological prisons. Often this inner madness is literally projected onto the external world as a physical wall, projected as personal notes and political clippings, embodying inner and external conflicts, as in *The Four-Gated City* and *The Golden Notebook*. The surreal juxtaposition of both inner and outer worlds in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, appear as imaginative ways to “enrich the sensibility and expand the consciousness, so that the reader will feel that everything before him is beginning again and is taking on a new meaning” (Adonis 78).

Lessing’s political concerns, her Marxist critiques of Camus and Sartre, for example, seem to echo Merleau-Ponty. His ambivalence towards “Kantian liberalism,” in particular, is criticized for proclaiming a universal morality – the categorical imperative, instead of concerning itself with practical political concerns. Coole suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s political attitude reflects the need to accept ambiguity and this leads to his opposition to rationalism in politics, especially to those forms it takes within “liberalism and capitalism.” Merleau-Ponty rejects “a form of idealism that rips principles from their material contexts while reducing politics to impotent moralism or a clash of civilizations” (Coole 51). He criticizes the contradictions of Western democratic values while the expansion of Capitalism is “violent, and dehumanizing, with the economically exploited and the colonized being particularly obvious victims” (Coole 53). Lessing’s earlier writing about the colour bar similarly reflects her concerns about the violent effects of colonisation. She points out the irony that colonial intellectuals who effect such violence yet look for guidance from Romantics such as Shelley and Byron, or Burns and Dickens, to pursue the spiritual freedom which is opposed to the rationalism of “The Age of

Enlightenment" (Lessing, *SPV* 17). In *The Golden Notebook*, therefore Lessing stages a kind of self-debate with her own political concerns about Marxist theory and rationalist politics and its violent effects when imposed on human beings. In order to stage such a debate, she has to revolutionise the form of the novel, its means for associating the personal and the political, truth and fiction, in order to show there is neither any pure rational form of the political nor an ideal form of the novel.

"The embodied consciousness" that Merleau-Ponty's proposes provides a route for later feminists to consider their situated nature in the world through reflection on the role of embodiment in intersubjectivity and the uses of the unembodied as a means to dissociate from constraints that might perform a kind of revolutionary or cathartic "madness." Simone de Beauvoir too had adopted the philosophical perspective of phenomenology - of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty - in order to view subjectivity in relation to the body as "a situation" in the world and "the instrument of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor for our projects" (*The Second Sex* 61). According to Merleau-Ponty, the locus of subjectivity is in the *body*, instead of in the mind or consciousness, yet in the Western philosophical tradition, thinking is associated purely with mind: "all meaning was *ipso facto* conceived as an act of thought" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 147). But the experience of the subjective body is what distinguishes personal consciousness from the universal constituting consciousness of theory. Some feminist theorists such as Iris Marion Young, however, have argued in "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality," that there is still a gap between the aims and practices of existential phenomenology and those of feminist theory. She proposes that a woman often experiences her body as "a *thing* at the same time that she experiences it as a capacity"; there are, accordingly, three contradictory modalities of feminine motility: "an ambiguous transcendence, an inhibited intentionality, and a discontinuous unity with its surroundings" (Young 58). In *Martha's Quest*, the young Martha starts her individual journey, as we have seen, from her awareness of her physical consciousness, but she comes to experience alienation from her body and

subsequent passivity in her relationships. Her “freedom-in-situation” is eventually ambiguous since it is a freedom that is in need of the recognition of others, as de Beauvoir argues. Young explains that women experience “ambiguous transcendence, a transcendence which is at the same time laden with immanence” because a woman often does not “trust the capacity of her body to engage itself in physical relations to things” and thus “lives her body as a burden” (Young 59). Lynda, in *The Four-Gated City*, who denied inclusion in the family and the broader culture because of her special physical perceptions, in turn rejects conformity to the social expectations placed on the female body, especially those of being a wife and a mother; but she can only retreat into her inner consciousness in order to fight against her impersonal antagonists. Harriet, in *The Fifth Child*, on the contrary, is at first content with, even proud of, her maternal body. Nevertheless, it is not until the birth of the fifth child, that she starts to realise her body is situated in a world that is more than an extension of her own will. This is the world, inhabited by her husband, family and friends that sets up fierce expectations of what an ideal mother should be.

In *Ben, in the World*, Lessing seems to challenge the possibility of transcending the “lived body” and to “move out from the body in its immanence in an open and unbroken directedness upon the world in action,” which is Merleau-Ponty’s conception of transcendence as the opening up of horizons of possibility (Young 59). Ben’s grotesque body, which blocks his way to free action and to fluid interaction with others, seems to provoke a similar critique of Enlightenment epistemology “as rooted in the instrumental domination of the inert object (body, world, nature, woman), by a detached and transcendental subject (mind, self, science, man) (Waugh, *Practising* 190). Ben’s attempt to assert his will through his body, however, guides him towards those who might offer “care” and “affection,” and he is transformed finally according to the needs of people around him. He eventually breaks down the limitations on himself, but conversely discovers that there is no place for him to situate this “otherness.” His changing body seems to play out the kind of idea of the body offered in the post-structuralist feminism of

Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz who suggest that the self is constructed through the performances of the human body and that mind, body and environment are in constant interaction with each other and form a dynamic complex system. While he is stripped of the protection of political and social institutions, his being-in-the-world seems to be formed and performed according to his relation with other “beings” in the world. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, “our experiences are interconnected and reveal to us real properties of the thing itself, which is much as it appears and not some hidden substance that lies beneath our experiences of its appearance” (Baldwin 20).<sup>1</sup>

Lessing tries to explore the further possibilities of human beings when viewed from this kind of perspective. The inner journeys explored in her work are often accompanied by dreams, imaginings and visions. The confrontation of the past in the dream is often the first step in facing the unconscious and also in awakening from the hidden political consciousness. In *Intersubjectivity and Transcendental Idealism*, James Richard Mensch explains Husserl’s concept of the formation of self-transcendence intentions in which “the parallel between memory and empathy” is considered as “a general form of looking inward” (189). Husserl proposes that: “Transformation, the transformation of the ego amidst the transformation of consciousness and the transformation of the correlate of consciousness. All this is inseparably one. All this is memory” (Mensch 290). In *The Four-Gated City*, Martha’s first step towards awareness comes from remembering her past. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the encounter with the past is important for bringing about a sense of reparation in the present. Lessing’s careful consideration of how to represent memory in *The Golden Notebook* is also a way to crystallise this phenomenological idea of consciousness. Again, though Lessing does not proclaim her identity to be that of a fellow phenomenologist, this kind of perspective is also apparent in her interests in Sufism which “believes itself to be the substance of that current which can develop man to a higher stage in his evolution” (SPV 133). Lessing’s emphasis on imagination and her on-going search for transcendence has

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas Baldwin 1-36.

sometimes been read by seeing her as a latter-day Romantic. However, her concern for the self's relationship with the collective is shown in the way that she gives her protagonists the capacity to develop a more advanced consciousness through the everyday, the mundane life, instead of their achieving transcendence through purely visionary experience or neo-Platonic forms. Adonis explains that in the world according to Ibn "Arabi": "imagination" exists in the world of "*al-jabrut*" (potency), which conjoins with the "absent world," a world of "true meaning" and "of reason," and the world of presence, "of literal representation and the sense" (63). The "potency" proposed here, close to D.W. Winnicott's idea of potential space, also offers the experience of cultural transformation. In this world, meanings "take on images" (Adonis 63); in Martha's world, she imagines and even dreams of many visions of a future life, which also appear in Mark's book. Lessing also represents these visions through her changing genres. Adonis suggests that form is "a crystallization of the inner dynamic, or it is a visible thing through which and in which the inner world is revealed" (188).

Intersubjectivity in Lessing's work is depicted as the "six-dimensional map which included the histories and lives and loves of people" as in *The Four-Gated City* (FGC 21). The carpet in the impersonal world of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* comes alive when it is patched together from small pieces from each person. The transcendental crystal and also the ideal city are achieved through the consistent effort to recognise the self's relationship with the collective, from the inner (un)consciousness to the outer forms of social and political representation. Each of these is composed, through the different journeys, of the struggle to take one small step at a time – the image of the boulder pusher invoked in many of her works. Mary, struggling to step only a few paces outside the small house of her torture; Martha, from South Africa, to the streets of London and the madness basement of Lynda, to the telepathic world after the cataclysm; Watkins, from his archetypal inner journey to the real world he has forgotten, as well as the Narrator, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, from present to past, from internal world to impersonal world; Ben, across nations, from Britain to Europe to South America. Most of these

journeys end returning to the reality of the present, knowing it in all its being and possibility for the first time, which is the most important concern for Lessing.



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