A Sense of Place in Selected African Works by Doris Lessing Read in Conjunction with Novels of Education by Contemporary White Southern African Women Writers

by

Eva Shireen Hunter, M.A.

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a more intensive reading of certain works by Doris Lessing set in Southern Africa than has yet been attempted, and reads them, for the first time, in conjunction with a particular literary lineage within Southern African letters, the novel of education by white women. The works by Lessing chosen for discussion are: two short stories, "The Old Chief Mshlanga" (1951) and "Sunrise on the Veld" (1951), the first two volumes of the Children of Violence series, Martha Quest (1952) and A Proper Marriage (1954), and Lessing's autobiographical account of a return visit to Rhodesia in 1956, Going Home (1957). Those by the other Southern African women writers--all of which, with the exception of Gordimer's The Lying Days have received virtually no critical attention to date--are: Nadine Gordimer's The Lying Days (1953), Jillian Becker's The Virgins (1976), Carolyn Slaughter's Dreams of the Kalahari (1981), Lynn Freed's Home Ground (1986), E.M. MacPhail's Phoebe and Nio (1987), and Menán du Plessis's A State of Fear (1983).

This study examines the crisis of identity of an adolescent girl protagonist recounted in these works, such discussion being focussed, in particular, by means of the writer's representation of the land, whether as veld, bush, farm, or garden. The land, whether represented metaphorically or realistically, has suggested itself as a device for focussing discussion since it is, (i) central in the attempts of Lessing's protagonists to negotiate identity and commitment within Southern Rhodesia, and (ii) a central topic in colonial writing. Furthermore, since

these the protagonists of these narratives are (with one exception) adolescent girls, it has been deemed pertinent to introduce Simone de Beauvoir's argument that the natural world is of particular importance to women writers (and their protagonists) during adolescence.

The study defines where these writers break new ground, and where they reinforce, either by repetition or by omission, reactionary ideas, as their protagonists negotiate local identity or citizenship--or fail to do so. Lessing, for instance, influenced by Olive Schreiner, directs her critique of colonialism by means of the devices of the antipastoral mode, a mode that results in her protagonists inhabiting an empty landscape which denies them dialogue and reciprocity, and Lessing herself failing, in some respects, in her authorial project of representing Southern Rhodesia and its inhabitants mimetically instead of in terms of settler mythopoesis. The other writers, all writing after the Second World War--and all, except Slaughter, living in a South Africa that has seen a shift from a rural- to an urban-based economy--attempt negotiation not with a landscape but with dispossessed black South Africans. However, representation of the natural world, or lack thereof, has continued to provide a useful device for analysis of individual works and their comparison with each other, enabling judgement to be made on, for example, the degree of political awareness each writer brings to her work studied here.

A feminist critical approach is used that is concerned with race and class, yet takes into account the insight of psychoanalytic theory that views consciousness as historically constructed to reflect ideology. My approach also acknowledges that it is impossible to have full knowledge of the potentially

unlimited consciousness that shapes conscious thought. Race, class, and gender constructs are viewed as interacting with each other, and as taking their place as features of the subjectivity of narrator, characters, and reader as constructed within the writing.

Attention is paid to matters of particular concern to feminist critics, for example, the representation of female friendship, the use--or omission--of heterosexual pairing as closure, and the attitude to mothers and motherhood conveyed in the narrative.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this study lies in the confluence of four factors: (i) my abiding interest in Doris Lessing's work;[1] (ii) the fact that in Lessing's writing set in southern Africa the natural world provides a site where her protagonists engage with issues of identity and commitment; (iii) Simone de Beauvoir's argument in The Second Sex that nature is of particular significance in western women's writing due to the marginalisation of women in society and culture; and, (iv) the fact that the land as metaphor and experience is a central topic in South African white writing.

The land as metaphor and experience has been a recurrent and focal topic in writing produced in South Africa, as in colonial letters elsewhere. J.M. Coetzee and Annette Kolodny have demonstrated the centrality of the land in the letters of the colonisers and their descendants in South Africa and the United States of America. The three important genres that Coetzee distinguishes among the major white writers in Afrikaans and English in South Africa until World War II are, for example, narratives of exploration and travel, pastoral novels, and landscape poetry.[2]

But the land, as part of the natural world, is also a concept frequently tied to cultural notions of femininity. Western dualistic thought identifies 'woman', and 'femininity',

with 'nature', and opposes her to 'man', 'masculinity', 'mind', 'rationality', 'civilization', all of which are rated as superior. The land (and, metonymically, 'Africa' or 'America') may be referred to as 'she', and seen as waiting, like a woman, to be ploughed and possessed by a male explorer and conqueror. Kolodny has traced nearly five centuries of persistent and repetitive land-as-woman symbolization in The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (1975),[3] finding connections between such symbolization in writing by men and the rapaciousness in history of Americans toward their continent.

The link between the natural and the feminine, an androcentric imposition, has been accepted by women writers. Yet, they have, says De Beauvoir, used it in a specific way:

> Nature is one of the realms [women writers] have most lovingly explored. For the young girl, for the woman who has not fully abdicated, nature represents what woman herself represents for man: herself and her negation, a kingdom and a place of exile; the whole in the guise of the other. It is when she speaks of moors and gardens that the woman novelist will reveal her experience and her dreams to us most intimately.4

In this study I focus on what I term a sense of place in selected writing by white women, published since the Second World War and set in southern Africa. The word "place" refers predominantly to the writers' shaping of a home-in-the-world--an individual, social, and cultural identity--for her protagonist(s); secondarily, it refers to geographical

environment, the meaning of the author's mimetic and symbolic treatment of such environment, and the sort of interaction her character(s) establish with it. In Lessing's works, for instance, her protagonists are intent on negotiating a satisfactory relationship with the land itself as part of their quest for social and cultural identity, and this characteristic of her writing links her to the South African pastoral and antipastoral writers identified by Coetzee.[5] The "great" antipastoral writer in South Africa is Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), whose influence Lessing has acknowledged:

> What influenced me [when reading African Farm (1883) at the age of fourteen] was the fact that she wrote about Africa in a way you could take seriously. Because I had been reading all the English classics of which my parents' bookshelves were full, and it hadn't really come home to me that there could be serious literature about Africa. So that was the influence. It started me off thinking about Africa in a new way, writing about Africa.6

Subsuming her own and Schreiner's settings under the generic term "Africa"--an act of incorporation likely to have been facilitated by the historical connections between South Africa and Southern Rhodesia and their geographical proximity to each other--Lessing adopted certain important features of Schreiner's vision for her own work.

In the South African antipastoral tradition, as in Lessing, the colonial farm is viewed as an anti-garden, a dystopia, set in a landscape which is composed of space, rock, and sky.[7] Further features common to these writers are that they pose the question

of the landscape: "Is there a language in which people of European identity, or if not of European identity then of a highly problematical South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa?"; and, should the silent, empty land show some sign of life, it does so as "some giant or monster from the past, wordless but breathing vengeance" on behalf of defeated tribes.[8] The following is Lessing's version of such a creature:

> [Martha] dropped back into a hot sleep, and dreamed she was back in 'the district' standing at the edge of Mr. McFarline's great gold-eating pit. But it was abandoned. It had been abandoned centuries before. The enormous gulf in the soil had been worked by a forgotten race which she saw clearly in her dream: a copper-coloured, long-limbed, sharp-featured people, tied together like slaves under the whip of a black overseer. . . . But near to where she stood was a projection into the pit. . . . She stood at the extreme edge of the pit . . . . examining the deep-layered rock. Fold after fold, the growth of the earth showed itself in the side of the pit, a warm red showing the living soil at the top, then the dead layers of rock beneath. She saw that the projection into the pit was not dead, but living. It was not an animal's paw, but the head and the shoulders of an immense lizard, an extinct saurian that had been imprisoned a thousand ages ago, in the rock. It was petrified. The shape of the narrow head, the swell of the shoulders, was visible. . . . Martha looked again and saw that its eye was steadily regarding her with a sullen and patient query. It was a scaly ancient eye, filmed over with mine-dust, a sorrowful eye. It's alive, she thought. It's alive after so many centuries. And it will take centuries more to die. (RS 95-96)

It is part of my intention in this study to give a fuller reading of some of Lessing's work set in Africa that has yet been

attempted. The reading will distinguish traditional and innovative features of Lessing as a colonial writer, but it will also, in response to De Beauvoir's cue as to the special importance of nature to women writers, examine Lessing's depictions of her protagonists' relations with the natural world--veld, farm, and garden--for what they reveal concerning matters of gender.

It is further part of my intention to provide a context for comparison of Lessing with contemporary white women writers in the subcontinent. Schreiner's influence upon Lessing, and the fact that African Farm is a novel of education, have encouraged me to adopt as context that generic lineage within South African letters that begins with Schreiner and runs through Lessing and Gordimer to Menan du Plessis, the white female novel of education. Further encouragement to adopt this context lies in a phenomenon of contemporary South African letters: the fact that apart from the large body of fiction by Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, a high proportion of all serious novels by contemporary South African white women writers--not a large category, it is true--are novels of education, with markedly autobiographical content.[9] The context established has, however, been extended to cover one contemporary novel set not in South Africa but in Bechuanaland, then in Botswana. Carolyn Slaughter's Dreams of the Kalahari, to my knowledge the sole novel depicting white girlhood in Bechuanaland, concludes with its protagonist constituting for herself an African identity in which a vital ingredient is her role in assisting refugees from South Africa's unrest. Defining the corpus examined in this way, enables me to concentrate on important examples of Lessing's African writing, while comparing them with a specific lineage in

contemporary southern African letters.

De Beauvoir claims that nature is especially valuable during adolescence, the time during which the young adult must negotiate entry into the social world and its prevalent culture.[10] Since novels of education typically trace the process by which an adolescent enters society, then such novels provide appropriate ground for testing the applicability to local examples of De Beauvoir's claim that a woman writer utilises depictions of nature to "reveal her experience and her dreams to us most intimately." However, while Lessing's work is set in the period between the two world wars, the other writers all set their novels in the post-World War II period, a period that marked consolidation in South Africa of the shift begun prior to the war from a rural-based to an urban economy. In these later novels, veld, farm, and landscape recede into the background or disappear altogether. Furthermore, loosening of ties with any metropolitan 'home' led to the realisation among English-speakers that negotiation of a local nationality, if not identity, lay in accommodation with black South Africans, and not the landscape. Even 'nature' as garden does not always feature in any significant way in some of the South African novels, yet, a focus on the writers' depictions of the natural world, or absence of such depictions, has provided a useful way of examining their particular development of a sense of place, as local nationality if not identity, for their respective protagonists.

The works by Lessing examined in detail are: in Chapter 2, the short stories "The Old Chief Mshlanga" (1951) and "Sunrise on the Veld" (1951), both of them collected in This Was the Old

Chief's Country (1973); in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively, Martha Quest (1952) and A Proper Marriage (1965), the first two volumes of the novel-sequence Children of Violence (1952-1969); and in Chapter 5, Going Home (1957). Chapter 3 focusses on Martha's social quest; Chapter 4 on the sexual politics of her career. Although the context I have established for my reading of Lessing includes only novels of education by the other writers, three works by Lessing have been selected that are not in fact novels but that are, nevertheless, pertinent to the intensive and comprehensive discussion of Lessing's exploration of the problems of identity and commitment in Rhodesia: these works are the two short stories "The Old Chief Mshlanga" and "Sunrise on the Veld" and the autobiographical Going Home. The short stories both recount an adolescent rite of passage, while in Going Home Lessing reflects at some length on the persistent significance for her of her childhood home. Furthermore, although it is the first two volumes of Children of Violence series, Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage--which begin when Martha Quest is fifteen and eighteen years old respectively--that receive detailed attention, I do make brief reference--where doing so will clarify or substantiate comment on Lessing--to the last three volumes of the series.

Chapters 6 to 9 focus on Gordimer's The Lying Days (1953), E.M. Macphail's Phoebe and Nio (1987), Carolyn Slaughter's Dreams of the Kalahari (1981), Jillian Becker's The Virgins (1976), Lynn Freed's Home Ground (1986), and Menán Du Plessis's A State of Fear (1983). Apart from Gordimer's The Lying Days, these novels have, as yet, received virtually no critical attention besides short reviews.

It might be possible to attribute the prevalence of autobiographical novels of education to the tendency of novelists

to start their career with such a work (leaving aside short stories, articles, and essays). Two of the writers, Freed and Macphail, have each so far published only the one novel, while Plessis published her second in 1989. Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage are Lessing's second and third novels, Gordimer's her first. Carolyn Slaughter's Dreams of the Kalahari and Jillian Becker's The Virgins are, however, although based on the writers' childhood experience, neither of them first novels. There is, in fact, another factor at work here.

Michael Wade approaches the phenomenon of the novel of education in South Africa by way of the significance of its excessive detail, the weight of "evidence," specifically in Gordimer's The Lying Days; this is a fault, too, of Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage. Both Gordimer and Lessing will, with experience, select detail with more discrimination, but Wade says that more is involved than lack of skill. The scrupulous particularity arises, he says, from the South African writer being forced to negotiate a difficult "journey," to a point where the knowledge gained incorporates acknowledging complicity in the suffering of black South Africans. The journey cannot, says Wade, be evaded.

> It is interesting to note, in passing, how [Gordimer's] two 'serious' male contemporaries, Abrahams and Jacobson, were forced, each according to his own gifts and abilities, of course, to the same recourse [of making this "journey"], though in both cases after the unnecessary squandering of a certain amount of creative energy, and also in both cases in the wrong order. Jacobson reaches the point in The Beginners (1966), his fifth novel; and Abrahams in Return to Goli (1953) and Tell Freedom (1954), which are at the same time more directly autobiographical and more selective of the evidence than either The Beginners or The

> Lying Days. The point that is being made is that the South African novelist is unable to liberate himself sufficiently from the effects of his environment (that is, from a bewilderment of possibilities) to do artistic justice to any aspect of South African reality until he has undergone this experience, which is the experience of writing a book like The Lying Days or The Beginners. The Beginners is an accumulation of virtually all the evidence, a scrutiny as remorseless as it is subjective, and a partial submersion of the standard temptation of the novelist to 'tell the truth' until some sort of basis for an attempt to do so emerges from the welter of facts and feelings.[11]

As Lessing's tribute to Schreiner reveals, in Southern Rhodesia, too, she faced the lack of a cultural tradition that was engaged with immediate experience in such a way as to enable reflection and judgement on both living and art. In Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage Martha is frustrated by the vacuum she finds in fiction and works of social science when she searches for some representation of the sort of life she is living and observing others live.

For Gordimer's part, in The Lying Days Helen, having read W.H. Auden and Eliot, Pepys and Smollett, Hemingway, Donne, D.H. Lawrence and Chekhov, also casts about in a cultural vacuum, and, as she does so, declares the implicit determination of her author to remedy that emptiness:

> But in nothing that I read could I find anything that approximated to my own life; to our life on a gold mine in South Africa. Our life was not regulated by the seasons and the elements of weather and emotion, like the life of peasants; nor was it expressed through movements in art, through music heard, through the exchange of ideas, like the life of Europeans shaped by great an ancient cities, so that they were Parisians or Londoners as

> identifiably as they were Pierre or James. Nor was it even anything like the life of Africa, the continent, as described in books about Africa; perhaps further from this than from any. What did the great rivers, the savage tribes, the jungles and the hunt for huge palm-eared elephants have to do with the sixty miles of Witwatersrand veld that was our Africa? The yellow ridged hills of sand, thrown up and patted down with the unlovely precision that marked them manufactured as unmistakably as a sand castle; the dams of chemical-tinted water, more waste matter brought above ground by man, that stood below them, bringing a false promise of a river-greenness, cool, peace of dipping fronds and birds--to your nose as you sat in the train.. . . We had no lions and we had no art galleries, we heard no Bach and the oracle voice of the ancient Africa did not come to us, was drowned, perhaps, by the records singing of Tennessee in the Greek cafes and the thump of the Mine stamp batteries which sounded in our ears as unnoticed as our blood. (LD 96-97)

Wade says Gordimer's "diagnosis" here, " echoes a theme that runs," also, "through William Plomer's writing on South African subjects" and is found in Jacobson, in "highly mannered but nonetheless effective form," in "the symbolism of the house and its library and other contents in A Dance in the Sun, as well as more directly expressed in The Beginners."[12]

> The problem is a complex one for South African writers, especially the white ones who write in English, and are thus part of a tradition that includes Forster and George Eliot, and insists on the values of European liberalism as at least a touchstone applicable to the situations that novelists attend to.
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> . . . . . .
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> For Helen as for Nadine Gordimer herself the artistic search is not just for something to say, but for the right thing; not only the most telling and appropriate words and judgements but the correct spiritual vocabulary

in which to frame them.13

Colin Style, a poet born in Zimbabwe, has said, "The identity crisis is a cliche of writing about the whites in Africa. Nonetheless, repetition does not detract from basic truth.. . ."[14] The writer cannot simply jettison European cultural traditions--she has been enculturated in those traditions, which have, by now, in any case become part of the country's total cultural milieu--nor is it necessarily desirable that she attempt (in the unlikely event of her being able to do so) to write from 'within' any indigenous African culture.

New relationships are being forged between traditions originally imported and those indigenous. While Lessing, retrospectively, inscribes the impossibility of succeeding at the task, the inevitability of failure to claim possession of a valid form of cultural expression and so insert oneself into the cultural and social life of Southern Rhodesia, Gordimer, like Coetzee, has already negotiated in distinguished fashion, from within South Africa, relationships between the European tradition and local experience. As Stephen Clingman's reading of Gordimer's oeuvre reveals, Freud, Marx, Kafka, Lukács, Georg Buechner, and Walter Benjamin, amongst others, have helped to shape her ideas in her fiction and criticism.15 And one of the devices adopted by Du Plessis, a student of linguistics, is to use a cross-section of South African voices to represent the cultural complexity of the country.

The questions raised and answered, then, in the following study of depictions of the white adolescent girl's education include:- What attitudes to culture and society are revealed through the protagonist's encounters with veld, farm, or garden?

Do such attitudes constitute a critique of the cultural world of the fiction? of its social world? Is nature, for the young girl, "a kingdom and a place of exile" as De Beauvoir suggests? If so, what sort of kingdom/place of exile does she find, and what does this reveal about her cultural and social position as perceived by herself and her creator? What role does the natural world play, if any, in the protagonist's rejection of or entry into Southern African society? Are there any conditions for entry into society? If so, what are they, and whose are they? What is the narrator's attitude to, and what stance is the reader invited to adopt toward, the protagonist and the social world she accepts or rejects?

As Wade says, the problem for the South African writer of finding the "right" thing to say, in the most appropriate "spiritual vocabulary" is especially complex for those white writers who write in English. This is due to their marginalisation not only by virtue of their race and their Eurocentric enculturation, but also to their not being Afrikaners. Their uncertainty as to their claim to be South Africans is partly something that has been thrust upon them, partly theirs by virtue of an inheritance that has carried with it certain advantages and privileges.

Afrikaners have forebears who began to arrive in the country in 1652. Furthermore, Afrikaner nationalism specifically counters the typical colonial perspective that sees a metropolitan centre as 'home', taking pride, instead, in an inherited, and inherent, right to claim to belong to, and own, the country. This feature of the South Africa's political life not only leaves English-speakers feeling marginalised by what appears to be the real historical encounter--that between still-dominant Afrikaners and

black Africans, it also calls into question whether the South African situation can correctly be termed 'colonial'.

Neither colonial in the classic sense, nor post-colonial, South Africa might seem to merit the term "neocolonial." However, South Africa is different from those African countries, such as Kenya and Nigeria, where, due to persistent cultural and economic domination by foreign 'great' powers, the term "neocolonial" become more accurate than "postcolonial" to describe the state of affairs.[16] South Africa's particular variety of neocolonialism Coetzee has defined as "possession of . . . [a] less and less transigent internal colony,"[17] others, like the historian Colin Bundy, prefer the term "colonialism of a Special Type" (or, "CST").[18]

Lessing's pre-independence Southern Rhodesia is a colonial country, as is Slaughter's Bechuanaland (although Emily Jones returns, after a miserable spell of exile in London, to postcolonial Botswana). Insofar as the South African novels are concerned, they convey change and variety in the degree of loyalty felt toward 'England' or South Africa. 'England' plays no role at all in Du Plessis's novel. Not only is she younger by more than a decade than any of the other writers--and ties with any metropolitan centre have loosened among all English-speakers of her generation--she also, like her protagonist Anna Rossouw, has an Afrikaner father. In the novels set in the Fifties, however--those by Becker, Freed, Gordimer, and Macphail--'England' remains a powerful structuring absence for characters and author. But, while two of the authors, Becker and Freed, write, through their protagonists, of alienation to the point where exile (or a return 'home' to England) becomes the inescapable choice, Gordimer and Macphail do not--a variation

that reflects the authors' choices in their own lives, since Becker and Freed left South Africa, while Gordimer and Macphail have remained.

For South African white women writers in English the negotiation of a sense of belonging in the country of their birth is, then, often tortuous. While an English (or French, or American, or Chinese) writer may encounter marginalisation due to her gender and, perhaps, class, she will not encounter it, in the country of her birth, by virtue of her inherited culture and language. The intention, nevertheless, is not to exaggerate, glamorise, or cast a veil of mystification over the dilemmas these writers confront; too many South African writers have felt compelled to choose exile, some have been forcibly banned and exiled. Cosmo Pieterse said in 1971:

> . . . many South African writers, from Olive Schreiner to Don [sic] Jacobson, have had to leave South Africa to find their fame--and, some would say, their feet. South African writing in English stands significantly in the sign of exile. It is easy to choose a dozen names at random among South African poets who now live and often write outside their country of birth: William Plomer, Anthony Delius, Sydney Clouts, Mazisi Kunene, Breyten Breytenbach, Jeni Couzyn, Lewis Nkosi, Tulley Potter, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Elizabeth Eybers. Their reasons for exile are various; they include South Africa's political climate, the Republic's censorship, the available audience, the need to pit oneself against international standards. Sometimes the exile is self-imposed; sometimes it is enforced: but it is exile, not the grand global tour. As a result, much South African poetry is now a poetry of the committed exile, the work of the 'ex'-South African who writes, not, as many earlier South African poets did, with a sense of spiritual exile from a European home, but out of a conviction that something is rotten under the Southern Cross.19

The intention is, then, to attempt to give full value to the nature of the dilemmas raised, and to investigate with a sympathetic eye some writers' answers to questions like Where does one begin? Or, phrasing the question differently, What subject position may one adopt in relation to one's audience, and to the fictional world depicted? When the doubt reaches even further back, the question may become Dare I begin at all? Dare I claim identity as a South African, or African, (who is a writer)? Do I even belong here? If so, what do I do? And, moving forward to the Nineties, the questions become Where do we go from here? and, What is my place in the future likely to be?

My choice of works studied and of method being grounded in feminist literary criticism, it is necessary to locate some of the important influences upon the variety of feminist literary criticism I use--influences such as poststructuralist thought and psychoanalysis--and, at the same time, to define the scope of certain categories I employ. The most prominent of these categories are identity, difference, black, white.

South African feminist and gender studies have been influenced by Anglo-American and French theory and criticism: accordingly, they have felt pressures towards an over-restrictive feminism emanating from both bourgeois liberal and socialist feminist practice. Liberal humanist practice, with its goal of an essential human identity, has been averse to insights of psychoanalytic theory, while socialist practice, in its concern with class and race, has denounced emphasis on the subjective

consciousness and on 'formalism', or aestheticism.

Toril Moi, strongly influenced by the feminist deconstructionist Julia Kristeva, is, in Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (1985), concerned to defend crucial insights of psychoanalytic theory against liberal and socialist rejection.[20] And Cora Kaplan, in an article, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," articulates the wish to retain the concern with class and race characteristic of socialist feminist practice, yet move beyond.[21]

Moi emphasises that particular insight of psychoanalytic theory which views consciousness as historically constructed to reflect ideology, and which therefore demands acknowledgement that it is impossible to have full knowledge of the potentially unlimited unconsciousness that shapes conscious thought.[22] Further, unconscious desires and fears are viewed as shaping and interacting with a complex multitude of cultural, social, and environmental factors to produce consciousness. Even the science of the individual psyche, then, then generates the decentring of the personal subject in favour of the pattern of codes.

One consequence for literary practice of accepting the existence and the role of the unconscious is that fiction may be seen as providing the critic with access to those attitudes and workings of ideology that are not consciously held.[23] So it is that Moi can see herself, as she argues for admission of the insights of psychoanalytic theory, as promoting a more (and not less) political feminist literary criticism.[24]

Moi also, like Kaplan, points to limitations of socialist practice: the adoption of the "Lukacsian" view that "politics is

a matter of the right content being represented in the correct realist form"--and that therefore oblique formal and stylistic methods, and the expression of fantasy and desire, are necessarily regressive and self-indulgently bourgeois, has led feminist critics to underrate the political possibilities of formal aspects.[25] Moi cites the case of Virginia Woolf, the nature of whose challenge in her fiction to conventional mores and attitudes has been undervalued.[26]

Moi's emphasis on the political function of formal techniques, Kaplan's on a semiotic perspective, direct the critic to the political implications of each aspect of narrative strategy, such as perspective (or point of view), choice of first- or third-person narration, and the closure of the plot. Alert the critic, too, to 'gaps' or 'fissures' in the text, to the text's 'contradictions', to silences that signal accommodation to a prevalent ethos.[27]

In exposing the white, male, and heterosexual ethos in writing apparently apolitical, post-structuralism has bolstered the enterprise of the feminist critique. Alertness in Western feminist literary practice to the limitation of a feminist scholarship based on essentialist concepts has come by way of the intellectual climate created by poststructuralist criticism, deconstruction in particular.[28] The attack on the fundamentals of bourgeois liberalism, especially upon liberalism's complacency at the certainties of self, identity, will, and the authentic power of choice, reaches back, however, to Structuralism. Deconstruction followed Structuralism's lead in removing the personal subject, or consciousness, from the centre, where it commanded inordinate authority, to the periphery, there to become a tool of the linguistic codes it had mistakenly believed it

controlled. Deconstruction also sharpened the sceptical eye that critics cast on language and meaning, although its adherence to the stance of perpetually deferred meaning is inadequate to the judgement of literature, as of life (for one must, finally, relinquish the luxury of perpetual, nimble deferment, to choose, judge, commit oneself).

Alertness to essentialism and its dangers is of crucial importance in this country, where, due to the almost bewildering diversity of cultural and social forms and to shamefully great disparities in wealth and power, gender studies and feminist literary criticism can only progress on the recognition that just as there is no 'pure', 'genuine', 'real' woman, so there is no 'real' African woman, or 'real' white woman, or 'real' white South African woman.

Kristeva, suspicious of the concept of identity, refuses even to define woman,[29] but western feminists have tended to perceive women elsewhere in terms of their own vision of the present and the future. (Recent criticism of the women's movement in the United States of America has included the charge that it lost touch with the reality and needs of even its own working-class women.[30] Failure to distinguish between women's different economic or cultural circumstances may be the consequence of ignorance but it may equally arise from the ideal of affirming a global sisterhood. The well-intentioned search for common ground may then lead to the imprecision of essentialism.)

Trinh T. Minh-ha, a filmmaker, in an article infused with post-structuralist terms and entitled "Not you/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," says that not only western feminists have fallen

into the trap of essentialism when defining identity, and difference:

> The further one moves from the core [of identity] the less likely one is thought to be capable of fulfilling one's role as the real self, the real Black, Indian or Asian, the real woman. The search for an identity is, therefore, usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernized.31

One 'postcolonial' critic who does fall into this trap is Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. Promoting the concept of "womanism" as being more appropriate than "feminism" to describe black women's writing in English, she suggests that "the ultimate aim of womanism" should be the "unity of blacks everywhere" under the "enlightened control of men and women."[32] Yet, a far more likely development than that of a pan-black identity cohesive enough to overcome national differences (in opposition to white domination) is one envisaged by Aihwa Ong. Ong builds upon a view held by Albert Memmi when she says that in "repossessing themselves, the colonized will be nationalistic, not internationalistic (i.e. under Western hegemony)."[33] And Ong upholds a suggestion made by Edward Said when she adds that "a new way of transnational solidarity is not through assimilating the Rest into a common unity, but by renouncing our utopian, libertarian vision"; this renunciation would mean, for feminists, says Ong, their recognition o "other forms of gender- and culture-based subjectivities," and their acceptance "that others often choose to conduct their lives

separate from [any single] particular vision of the future."[34]

The challenge, then, to a feminism that would stay vital and knowledgeable is to avoid stereotyping in its analysis and, in its goals, the setting up of universal, or even transcultural, standardization. This entails, as far as South Africa is concerned, resisting pressures that bear from both inside and outside the country, and from positions to the left as well as the right of the political spectrum, on the term 'whites' as on the terms 'Africans' and 'blacks'.

Yet, I must acknowledge chromatism in my own categories. To use chromatism--defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as the "visible difference in skin colour"[35]--as a basis for making categories is to use the discourse of racism. Claiming to oppose racism, I am complicit with it.[36] My defence is to make a further acknowledgement, and this is of the metaphysical nature of the categories black and white and the provisional nature of my starting-point.

Moi defines the strategic usefulness for feminists of deploying conceptual terms one acknowledges to be metaphysical:

> My . . . view is that such conceptual terms [as 'masculine' and 'feminine'] are at once politically crucial and ultimately metaphysical; it is necessary at once to deconstruct the opposition between traditionally 'masculine' and traditionally 'feminine' values <u>and</u> to confront the full political force and reality of such categories. . . . To impose names is . . . not only an act of power, an enactment of Nietzsche's 'will-to knowledge'; it also reveals a desire to regulate and organize reality according to well-defined categories.. . . [T]his is sometimes a valuable counter-strategy for feminists.. . .37

It is in an attempt, then, "to confront the full political force and reality of such categories" as black and white in South Africa at present, that I deploy them. The experience of most black women in this country is usually distinctly different from that of most white women. Typically, they encounter each other on either side of the divide created by the relationship of maid and madam. White women have, furthermore, had their political edge blunted by privilege. The common benefit of having a black servant is only one advantage that dulls their sense of their own oppression and that of other women. Feminism as purveyed through popular magazines may even widen the gap between white and black women. The encouragements from America and Britain toward more personal fulfilment have had definite appeal for white (usually bourgeois or petit bourgeois) women; but urban black women are unlikely to resist their 'roles' as wife and mother in search of greater personal autonomy, when their daily lives are lived in poverty in black ghettoes, their husbands are likely to be unemployed or in jail for activism, and their children are, perhaps, in a school guarded by security police or on the streets with a gang. (Their rural counterparts' husbands, meanwhile, are likely to be absent, migrant labourers.)

This does not mean they are not oppressed <u>as women</u>. Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography <u>Call me Woman</u> (1985) spells out the necessity for black women to assert their interests in the face of the inferior legal, economic, and social status assigned them by their own menfolk as well as the state.[38] Black women occupy the bottom rung of the social and economic pecking order.[39] They gained the tool of literacy later than their menfolk, and only in the last twenty-five years have they begun to publish in their own voices. The first white woman writer to achieve note,

Schreiner, did so in the Eighties of the nineteenth century, and black men have been published, as journalists, essayists, poets, and fiction writers, since the 1950s.[40] As late as 1984, a collection of critical articles on and statements by South African writers featured nine black men but only one black woman writer, Bessie Head--who wrote from exile (while a critical essay focussed on a black woman's story written for her by a white sister.[41]

A second reason--besides the social and economic differences between black and white women--for my adopting chromatic categories, is that apartheid is a system, not yet dismantled, of separation as well as one of inequality. The forcible separation--in workplaces, churches, schools, sportsfields, hospitals, parks, restaurants, cinemas, beaches, on public transport, and in separate residential areas--of a population comprised of peoples with many diverse origins has prevented the sort of social interaction conducive to understanding, familiarity, tolerance, and liking. Further, the official suppression of information in this country has promoted ignorance. Government curbs on investigative initiative in journalism, together with the fiction, maintained until 1990 by the state-run radio and television services, that a superior, white, Christian civilisation was facing the combined onslaught of savage Africa, decadent West, and godless, rapacious Communism, have left many whites unprepared to accept that wrong has been done or that blacks are human beings with needs and aspirations similar to their own. Pamphlets, films, and books that reveal the wickedness and waste of apartheid have been banned. (Blacks, for their part, find it hard to view those who cause their suffering as fully human.)

Given the differences in experience between white and black women, and the current climate of ignorance, it is potentially most useful, as well as realistic, at this stage of both feminist literary studies in South Africa and the country's political life, to begin with defining differences--as well as the similarities that there are. The ultimate aim is not to emphasise division, apartheid, but to counter it. Difference, says Trinh, need not be "opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness." "Difference," she maintains, "does not necessarily give rise to separatism."[42] The concepts 'black' and 'white' are, then adopted for the sake of a strategically useful position from which to engage with the historical reality within which these concepts exercise their force.

To summarise, my intention in this study is to adopt a feminist critical practice that resists stereotyping in its methods and 'universal' standardization in its goals; that also acknowledges the role of the unconscious in transmitting and reflecting ideology--by which individual subjectivity is historically shaped--and that, therefore, admits into its readings ideology which is unconsciously revealed. My practice acknowledges, too the potential political functions of fantasy and desire, of form, and of narrative strategies. Insofar as gender is concerned, it is seen as constructed not as some form of fixed entity apart from class and race, but as a lived construct existing in interaction with notions and attitudes about class and race. The unconscious workings of (unfixed) identity are seen as the constructs through which the ideologies of gender, class, and race are lived. This means, where my critical practice is concerned, that class, race, and gender take their place as features of the subjectivity of narrator,

characters, and reader as shaped within the writing.[43]

NOTES

[1] On the use of the first person pronoun in this sentence and elsewhere, a more personal style has been made acceptable in literary studies by feminist theorists and critics. Cf. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "My Statue, My Self: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," in Shari Benstock (ed.), The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings (London: Routledge, 1988) 67.

[2] J.M. Coetzee, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (Sandton, Tvl: Radix/Century Hutchinson, 1988); Annette Kolodny, The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina, 1975).

[3] Kolodny ix.

[4] Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex Trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (France, 1940; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 719.

[5] Coetzee 4.

[6] Interview with Eve Bertelsen, in Bertelsen (ed.), Doris Lessing, SA Literature Series 5 (Isando, Tvl: McGraw-Hill, 1985) 93. Lessing also pays tribute to Schreiner's influence in the Afterword she wrote for the 1968 reprint of African Farm, and in the character of the admirable, efficient Mrs. Van of A Ripple From the Storm. Mrs. Van undergoes the "intellectual revolution" that turns her into a social democrat after reading African Farm as a girl (RS 208).

Information on editions of primary works used is contained in the bibliography. Abbreviations used when quoting from primary sources are as follows:

This was the Old Chief's Country TOC

"The Old Chief Mshlanga"	CM
"Sunrise on the Veld"	SV
Martha Quest	MQ
A Proper Marriage	PM
A Ripple from the Storm	RS
Going Home	GH
The Marriages Between Zones, Three, Four, and Five	M
The Lying Days	LD
Phoebe and Nio	PN
Dreams of the Kalahari	DK
Home Ground	GH
The Virgins	TV
A State of Fear	SF

[7] Cf. Coetzee 4, 7.

[8] Coetzee 7-8, 10.

[9] The body of depictions of white girlhood in South Africa has recently been enlarged by two of the daughters of Ruth First and Joe Slovo. The film "A World Apart" is Shawn Slovo's account of her experiences as the daughter of activist parents, Ties of Blood (1988) is her sister, Gillian's, version. Two novels (of substance) by white South African women published in recent years that are not coming-of-age novels, are Sheila Roberts's Jacks in Corners (1987) and the Chameleon Press reprint, also in 1987, of Daphne Rooke's Mittee, originally published in 1951.

[10] Cf. De Beauvoir 385-87, portion of which is quoted in Chapter 4 of this study.

[11] Michael Wade, Nadine Gordimer, Modern African Writers (London: Evans Bros, 1978) 6.

[12] Wade 20.

[13] Wade 20.

[14] Colin Style, "Going Home: Post-independence Zimbabwe and Colonial Whites in the Literature of Southern Africa," Contrast 15.4 (1985): 68.

[15] Cf. Stephen R. Clingman, The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History From the Inside (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986) 119, 121, 174, 178, 186, 187, 188, and 191, for instance.

[16] Cf. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood (1977) and Ama Ata Aidoo's No Sweetness Here (1972). Slaughter has a white character say: "'All that's happened in the rest of Africa is that there is just a new breed of white masters--Marxist masters, French, Chinese, or whatever. They call them advisers now, or experts, but they're still the new masters. And let me tell you, none of them will be any better for Africa or the Africans than the old colonials were'" (DK 255-56).

[17] Coetzee 11.

[18] Colin Bundy, "Colonialism of a Special Kind and the South African State: A Consideration of Recent Articles," Africa Perspective 23 (1983): 76, 90 n. 2.

[19] Cosmo Pieterse, ed., Seven South African Poets (London: Heinemann, 1971) xi. One could add to Pieterse's list his own name, as well as those of the seven poets he selects, Dollar Brand (now Abdullah Ibrahim), Dennis Brutus, Choonara, C.J. Driver, Timothy Holmes, Keorapetse Kgositsile, and Arthur Notje. The following, not all poets, also have left SA: Perseus Adams, Jack Cope, Bessie Head, Christopher Hope, Roy Macnab, Rose Moss, Mbulelo Mzamane, Sheila Roberts, Zoe Wicomb. With the exception of Breytenback, Couzyn, and Eybers, all write (or wrote, when alive) in English.

[20] Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1985) 9-11. Moi has confirmed the depth of her interest in Julia Kristeva by editing The Kristeva Reader (New York: Columbia U P, 1986).

[21] Cora Kaplan, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," in Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, eds., Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism (London: Methuen, 1985) 146, 151-152, 174-75.

[22] Cf. Moi, Sexual/Textual 28.

[23] The writer Claes Andersson goes so far as to say, "I believe it is important to realise that writing as a creative act is controlled only to a quite marginal degree by rational, conscious and goal-oriented forces and motives." And: "A basic condition for creative writing is the activation of subconscious, preverbal layers of the personality and their utilisation in the creative process." "Six Theses on Literature and Realities: Literature and Exhibitionism," Books from Finland 21 (1987): 135. Kaplan identifies a further contribution made by the concept of the unconscious and the psychoanalytic view of sexuality as, "to dissolve in great part the binary divide between reason and passion that dominates earlier concepts of subjectivity," 174.

[24] Cf. Moi, Sexual/Textual 8-18, 44, 95-96.

[25] Cf. Kaplan 146-149, 174; and Moi, Sexual/Textual 8-10. Intertextuality, a term Moi says Kristeva coined, is a useful concept in understanding the relationship between 'gaps' and 'fissures', often part of the unconscious ideology of a text, and their context (Moi 155-56). M.M. Bakhtin, in his essay "Discourse in the Novel" points out that cultural meanings circulate through large-scale structures, involving codes and patterns of signification that occur in many different texts and

contexts. The complexity of a literary work is constructed through its interaction with other texts, its intertextuality, for it is obvious that a text is not created solely out of real-life experience: the novelist is familiar with the kind of literary organization of experience that is a novel. See David Morse, "Author-Reader-Language: Reflections on a Critical Closed Circuit," in Frank Gloversmith (ed.), The Theory of Reading (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1984) 88-89. A literary work gains its meaning through interaction with other semiotic systems besides texts, or, to resort to S.E. Fish's terminology, it is within an interpretive community that a text finds meaning.

[26] Cf. Moi, Sexual/Textual 7, 9-15.

[27] Comments on elements of narrative strategy in this study owe much to F.K. Stanzel's A Theory of Narrative, Trans. Charlotte Goedsche. Preface Paul Hernadi. (Goettingen, W. Germany, 1979; Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1984). Insofar as closure of the narrative is concerned, Rachel Blau DuPlessis's Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1985) has been useful, while Susan Sniader Lanser's The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U P, 1981), which deploys a speech act-structural model to combine detailed analysis of narrative strategies with a feminist perspective, has provided understanding of other aspects important in transmitting the politics of a text, such as the identity and authority of the narrator, authorial presence, and the narrator's stance in relation to character and reader.

[28] Such poststructuralist critics include, besides Spivak and Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Helene Cixous, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes.

[29] Cf. Moi, Sexual/Textual 163. Kristeva does so in "La femme, ce n'est jamais ça," Tel Quel, 59, Automne, 19-24.

[30] Cf. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 107-41, 173-78, 297-98. Hewlett charges that, instead of seeking to gain concrete social benefits, the movement confined itself to the principle of equality, and, as a result, left American women still penalised by their society, especially insofar as the bearing and rearing of children is concerned.

[31] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," Inscriptions 3/4 (1988): 71.

[32] Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English," Signs 11.1 (1985): 71.

[33] Aihwa Ong, "Colonialism and Modernity: Feminist Representations of Women in Non-Western Societies," Inscriptions 3/4 (1988): 89. Ong attributes her observation to Albert Memmi's The Colonized and the Colonizer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

[34] Ong 90. For Said's suggestion, Ong cites "Orientalism Reconsidered," Race and Class 2, 27.23 (1985): 1-15.

[35] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," Oxford Literary Review 8.1-2 (1986): 235.

[36] As Spivak says, the problem of being involved in complicity even while "declaring opposition," since one's discourse becomes characterised by the field engaged with, is one of the problems forming "the substance of deconstructive concerns" (226). The other problems she defines as being "that 'truths' can only be shored up by strategic exclusions . . . by denying the possibility of randomness, [and] by proclaiming a provisional

origin or point of departure as ground . . ." (226).

[37] Moi, Sexual/Textual 160.

[38] Ellen Kuzwayo Call Me Woman (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1985); see, among many instances, pp. 12, 261.

[39] Cf. Garry Wills's review of The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume IV: From the American Revolution to World War I; Part 1, Slaves and Liberators, Part 2, Black Models and White Myths by Hugh Honour. The art in question is pictorial. Citing a famous discussion of blacks by Thomas Jefferson (Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XIV), Wills says Jefferson exposes "a seductively symmetrical law that makes the male orangutan prefer the black female, in a kind of chain reaction of male aspiration up the ladder of being--the visual completion of which hierarchy would make white males aspire to female angels". Wills,"The Dark Legacy of the Englightenment," New York Review of Books (30 Mar., 1989): 9.

[40] Dorothy Driver, "Reconstructing the Self: Black Women Writers and the Autobiographical Text," Staff Seminar Paper, English Dept, U of Cape Town, Sept. 1988, 1, 2.

[41] Cf. Margaret Lenta's article, " A Break in the Silence: The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena," in M.J. Daymond, J.U. Jacobs, and Margaret Lenta (eds.), Momentum: On Recent South African Writing (Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal, 1984) 147-158. The men featured in this publication were: Daniel P Kunene, Zakes Mda, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mongane Serote, Ahmed Essop, Mafika Gwala, Es'kia Mphahlele, Essop Patel, and Richard Rive.

[42] Trinh 73. Trinh applies the "practices of [her] notion of difference," to "the veil as reality and metaphor" and to silence. Of the veil, a practice repugnant to westerners, she says: "If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so

does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance. Difference should neither be defined by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture. So that when women decide to lift the veil one can say that they do so in defiance of their men's oppressive right to their bodies. But when they decide to keep or put on the veil they once took off they might do so to reappropriate their space or to claim a new difference in defiance of genderless, hegemonic, centered standardization" (73). Perhaps. However, an overwhelming fact of life in countries where the veil is worn would appear to be "men's oppressive right to [women's] bodies," with any pressure of "genderless, hegemonic, centered standardization" paling by comparison. Cf. Hilary Mantel's novel Eight Months on Ghazzah Street (London: Penguin, 1989). (Mantel lived in Saudi Arabia between 1982 and 1986). Frances Shore is sophisticated and humble enough to understand that the women friends she makes among the Indians and Saudis do not, just as she does not, wish to desert their culture for the values of another. Yet she finds life claustrophobic and cruel in a theocracy where men and women are forbidden to touch in public, women are cloistered and segregated (comparisons are drawn with South Africa), and couples found guilty of adultery are executed by beheading and stoning. It would be a sign of true western decadence to extend any notion of 'tolerance' to such practices, and the veil "as reality and metaphor" is, at present, intrinsic to the sort of society that holds them dear.

[43] Cf. Kaplan 147-49.

CHAPTER 2

DORIS LESSING: "THE OLD CHIEF MSHLANGA" AND "SUNRISE ON THE VELD"

In two short stories, first published in 1951, Lessing focusses on adolescent initiation in the bush, the young person gaining in the course of the narrative a more informed, and problematic, perception of the relation of white settlers with the Rhodesian land and with its other inhabitants. "The Old Chief Mshlanga" has a female protagonist, "Sunrise on the Veld" a male, and comparison of the two stories facilitates understanding of the connections Lessing was making between constructs of race and those of gender, and the extent to which she was critical of the operations of gender in settler life, at this early stage of her career.[1]

In "The Old Chief Mshlanga," Lessing counters the settler myth that the land was empty before their arrival by inserting white usurpation of the land from its original inhabitants. She further underscores her protest against such dispossession by entitling the collection in which this story appears This Was the Old Chief's Country , and by closing the story with the narrator's announcement that once again the Chief and his people are to be displaced (CM 24). However, she also sustains in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" certain aspects of the empty land myth, and makes use of other Eurocentric myths connected to that of the empty land. The most prominent of these other myths is the garden myth--a myth linked to that of the empty land by means of the supposed newness, freshness, and malleability of terrain viewed as untamed

wilderness--while yet another myth she subscribes to in this story is that of the identification of black persons and the veld, both partaking of a joyous, unspoilt harmony now lost to the settlers. In "Sunrise on the Veld" she challenges the aspect of the empty land myth that assumes white settlement means the importation of more virtuous attitudes into wild terrain, but sustains the symbolic identification of woman and nature in order to make her critique.

Anthony Chennells, in an article entitled "Doris Lessing and the Rhodesian Settler Novel" (1985), delineates five main myths in the four hundred novels written about white Rhodesia:[2]

> (a) The only important human developments on the plateau had been accomplished by a non-African people whose monuments could be seen in Great Zimbabwe and the 'ancient' gold mines. In 1890 Rhodes and his men were doing no more than rescuing the land from black savagery and inertia, and restoring it once again to Europe. (b) The Ndebele were the whites' natural allies on the plateau because, while acknowledging the whites' natural superiority, they regarded the vast majority of Rhodesia's people with contempt. This myth developed fully only after the Ndebele had been defeated and their economy totally shattered. (c) Before the arrival of the whites, the plateau was an empty wilderness which they were at liberty to shape as they pleased, and which would allow more wholesome traditions to develop than those they had inherited. (d) Rhodesians were a new nation. It was only a matter of time before this was recognised in their being given their sovereign independence. (e) A cultural and biological gap yawned between blacks and whites which was impossible to bridge. The obvious mythopoesis of this gulf was to show blacks as savages or, in some of the early novels, as animal-like creatures of the veld. What little contact most of the novelists would have had with blacks was as farm or domestic workers, but only occasionally do blacks appears in these roles in the novels.[3]

Chennells's purpose in this article is to distinguish Lessing from other Rhodesian settler writers in their use of the mythopoesis conventional up until the time she published The Grass is Singing in 1950. Lessing is not much concerned, as he says, with the Great Zimbabwe or Ndebele myths, even though she does subvert both. Instead she concentrates on refuting the settlers' claims (1) that they are founding a new egalitarian nation and (2) that there is an unbridgeable gap between blacks and whites.[4] As far as the myth of the empty land is concerned, he finds Lessing contributing to it, but reshaping it.[5]

The notion that the land was empty, and even when not entirely empty in need of 'taming', buttressed the self-righteousness of the white colonisers of southern Africa. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, trekkers mounted ridges and penetrated valleys and plains sure that the Father had chosen them to inherit this piece of His earth and rescue its bounty from its barbaric state. During the nineteenth century, the British intruded with their particular version of a civilising mission, a version far superior in their eyes to any the Boers could offer. Later, as Rhodes dangled the carrots of gold and diamonds before London's politicians and senior civil servants, he firmed up their conviction that only the pax Brittanica could guarantee Christian virtue and European orderliness in the subcontinent.

Lessing (as has been said) refutes, in her fiction and autobiography the idea that Africa's land was ever unpopulated, recording instead the dispossession of the original inhabitants by conquering whites, yet she does subscribe in her fiction to that aspect of the empty land myth which entails the notion that the African continent is unformed, and, as such, offers to

settlers a potentiality for fulfilment and adventure no longer available in Britain or Europe. Her subscription to this aspect of the empty land myth is, says Chennells, one of the most distinct marks of Lessing's Eurocentrism, and marks her difference, too, from those black writers who have celebrated Africa's cultural achievements before colonisation.[6]

Lessing starts "The Old Chief Mshlanga" by immediately announcing her engagement with the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas involved in defining her position as a colonial writer in opposition. She does so by writing of the difficulty for someone steeped in European culture in, first of all, perceiving, and then interacting with the Southern Rhodesian natural world just as it 'is', mimetically, unmediated by myth. (A young girl (unnamed) is for two paragraphs the focalising consciousness and then becomes identical with the I-narrator.)

> A white child, opening its eyes curiously on a sun-suffused landscape, a gaunt and violent landscape, might be supposed to accept it as her own, to take the msasa trees and the thorn trees as familiars, to feel her blood running free and responsive to the swing of the seasons.
>
> This child could not see a msasa tree, or the thorn, for what they were. Her books held tales of alien fairies, her rivers ran slow and peaceful, and she knew the shape of the leaves of an ash or an oak, the names of the little creatures that lived in English streams, when the words 'the veld' meant strangeness, though she could remember nothing else.
>
> Because of this, for many years, it was the veld that seemed unreal; the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language. (CM 13

Similarly, Lessing starts the Children of Violence series by

contrasting her adolescent protagonist's encultured perception of her surroundings with the actuality of her childhood home.

> In the literature that was her tradition, the word farm evokes an image of something orderly, compact, cultivated; a neat farmhouse in a pattern of fields. Martha looked over a mile or so of bush to a strip of pink ploughed land; and then the bush, dark green and sombre, climbed a ridge to another patch of exposed earth, this time a clayish yellow; and then, ridge after ridge, fold after fold, the bush stretched to a line of blue kopjes. The fields were a timid intrusion on a landscape hardly marked by man; and the hawk which circled in mile-wide sweeps over her head saw the house, crouched on its long hill, the cluster of grass huts which was the native compound huddled on a lower rise half a mile away; perhaps a dozen patches of naked soil--and then nothing to disturb that ancient, down-peering eye, nothing that a thousand generations of his hawk ancestors had not seen. (MQ 8)

Cultural alienation for the girl protagonist in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" ("the veld . . . seemed unreal") connects with social barriers: the girl's mother makes it "even impossible to think of the black people who worked about the house as friends," instead, she teaches her to fear them (CM 14). But a turning-point in the girl's perception of herself and her environment does come about, when, at the age of fourteen, she meets Chief Mshlanga, the previous ruler over all the land in the district. The Chief's "air of dignity" checks her in her thoughtless bullying of "natives." From that time, she says,

> When I saw a native approaching, we offered and took greetings; and slowly that other landscape in my mind faded, and my feet struck directly on the African soil, and I saw the

> shapes of tree and hill clearly, and the black people moved back, as it were, out of my life. (CM 17)

The "black people [move] back," "out of [her] life," for now she endures another kind of estrangement. Earlier in the story when she says that "[t]he black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks" she is describing the ignorance of a child enclosed within the physical, cultural, and social milieu imposed by its parents. As she moves beyond the parental milieu, this particular child enlarges her worldview, becoming, with adolescence, more self-conscious about her relations with both geographical environment and black persons: "it was as if I stood aside to watch a slow intimate dance of landscape and men, a very old dance, whose steps I could not learn" (CM 17). In the earlier simile, however, the connection between "black people" and "the trees and the rocks" was only their shared remoteness; the later phrase has "landscape" and "men" identified one with the other, in a harmonious union, a "dance," which is, furthermore, "very old."

In order to remedy her estrangement the girl visits the village in which Chief Mshlanga and his people dwell. Her way lies through a valley, which lies beyond the boundaries of her parents' farm, and which she is entranced to discover is a "completely fresh type of landscape." Yet, in the middle of her rapture the girl, "used to the farm," begins to experience a series of disturbing feelings, the first of which is fear (CM 19).

> . . . not a human soul but myself.
> I was listening to the quick regular tapping of a woodpecker when slowly a chill feeling seemed to grow up from the small of my back to

> my shoulders, in a constricting spasm like a shudder, and at the roots of my hair a tingling sensation began and ran down over the surface of my flesh, leaving me goose-fleshed and cold, though I was damp with sweat. Fever? I thought; then uneasily, turned to look over my shoulder; and realised suddenly that this was fear. It was extraordinary, even humiliating. It was a new fear. For all the years I had walked by myself over this country I had never known a moment's uneasiness; in the beginning because I had been supported by a gun and the dogs, then because I had learnt an easy friendliness for the Africans I might encounter.
>
> I had read of this feeling, how the bigness and silence of Africa, under the ancient sun, grows dense and takes shape in the mind, till even the birds seem to call menacingly, and a deadly spirit comes out of the trees and the rocks. You move warily, as if your very passing disturbs something old and evil, something dark and big and angry that might suddenly rear and strike from behind. You look at groves of entwined trees, and picture the animals that might be lurking there; you look at the river . . . spreading into pools where at night the buck come to drink, and the crocodiles rise and drag them by their soft noses into underwater caves. Fear possessed me. I found I was turning round and round, because of that shapeless menace behind me that might reach out and take me; I kept glancing at the files of kopjes which, seen from a different angle, seemed to change with every step so that even known landmarks, like a big mountain that had sentinelled my world since I first became conscious of it, showed an unfamiliar sunlit valley among its foothills. I did not know where I was. I was lost. (CM 19-20)

Despite the African-ness of the setting, the fear described here is, in one aspect, not culturally specific. A young untried person steps into the unknown, alone, with no defences against the dangers of the elements. The valley setting in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" recalls literary environments across the world in which unhoused, unaccommodated humankind confronts the natural world, and its demons.

But the story does also oppose the valley to the protected

environs of the farm. Entering the valley, the girl explores more of what is termed "Africa." And what she discovers at its centre is what Marlowe discovered at the centre of the jungle in The Heart of Darkness (1902), a village inhabited by black Africans. What is sought for within this social unit is, in turn, a Chief, a potential (male) guide and protector. (In the case of Lessing's story it is a black male guide, not a white one.)

The protagonist of "The Old Chief Mshlanga" seeks refuge, in the village, from the "loneliness" that was added, as she proceeded on her way to the village, to "the fear." This loneliness is so intense she calls it "a terror of isolation" (CM 20). All she receives from the Chief, however, is "silence" (CM 22).

> I walked away from the indifferent village, over the rise past the staring amber-eyed goats, down through the tall stately trees into the great rich green valley where the river meandered and the pigeons cooed tales of plenty and the woodpecker tapped softly. The fear had gone; the loneliness had set into stiff-necked stoicism; there was now a queer hostility in the landscape, a cold, hard, sullen indomitability that walked with me, as strong as a wall, as intangible as smoke; it seemed to say to me: you walk here as a destroyer. I went slowly homewards, with an empty heart.. . .
>
> (CM 22)

On her return journey, "fear" and "loneliness" are superseded, by "a queer hostility" in the landscape. Unfocussed, atavistic fear is overtaken by a more specific threat linked to the girl's growing awareness that she is one of the

"destroyer[s]"; and her sense of guilt then affects the way she perceives and reponds to the landscape.

However, while phrases like "queer hostility," "cold, hard, sullen indomitability," and "seemed to say to me: you walk here as a destroyer," convey protest against white domination, they also sustain the identification between land and black people noted in the earlier phrase "slow intimate dance of landscape and men." Clearly, Lessing does not intend to reduce the humanity of the tribespeople to the level of the sub-human, nevertheless she does here contribute to this, the fifth myth defined by Chennells, that of the cultural and biological gap. Further, her identification of land and people constitutes the latter as 'other' in terms of her particular vision: valley and villagers, described to the reader through a filter of protest, lose their particularity as <u>this</u> geographical space and as <u>these</u> inhabitants when attached to abstractions such as "indifferent," "queer hostility," "indomitability," and "intangible". Joseph Conrad used a similar technique, similar abstractions even, when he transformed the journey he himself had taken up the Congo into a fictional passage into a <u>moral</u> landscape--at its "heart," the "horror" of the reflected, European soul.

But, Lessing's vision (like Conrad's) reflects more than protest against dispossession and exploitation consequent upon white conquest. At first the valley promised comfort, with its enclosed space, soft grass, and pigeons cooing tales of plenty. On the girl's return she mourns something she has lost--the promise of potential union with a maternal African space.

When Kolodny traces the land-as-woman metaphor in United States letters to the present date she starts with settler

documents dated as early as 1500. Kolodny's Lay of the Land (1975) shows how 'new' territory can become a symbolic space in which the European tries to rediscover that state of grace associated with Eden, or Arcadia.[7] Such elevated motives mingled with grosser drives to make land in distant continents highly desirable to European settlers.

The desire to experience a fresh land not merely as a site of possession and domination but also as a garden of refreshment--as comforting as the protective maternal embrace--is a desire traceable in mythologies other than the Judaeo-Christian. The revival of this impulse toward that original, nurturing space, as it related to the course of history in North America had, however, says Kolodny, "one radically different facet: this paradise really existed."[8] So, too, potentially, could southern Africa have presented itself as a paradise to European eyes. Coetzee says that study of documents and travellers' accounts reveals that it failed to do so.[9] In the southern regions of Africa, as in the North American continent, Europeans settled in a land fertile, extensive, and, by all the standards they knew, sparsely populated. In both continents, neither cities, stone-walled fortifications nor armoured soldiers stood in their way; instead, there were peoples whose unclothed limbs, simple technologies, and subsistence economies left them relatively easy to dislodge and liable to be viewed via notions of Adamic Man. But attitudes to the two continents diverged, says Coetzee.[10] While North America presented Europeans with a forward-looking vision of human perfectibility, Africa--which could not function as a 'new' world, for it was viewed as the oldest--raised, instead, the perils of Man relapsing into barbarism.[11] In South Africa, the spectre of submergence in a brute past has been used

to shore up arguments for the maintenance of the supremacy of whites (civilised and Christian) over black, and for the necessity of separateness. These arguments have had a resurgence of vitality among the South African rightwing, in 1990, in response to government moves toward acknowledging the right of black South Africans to share political power.

With Africa viewed as the old, rather than a new, land, the garden myth has had a feeble life in white South African letters, and, as vehicle for the myth, the pastoral, retrospective genre rather than the utopian has been favoured.[12] White writing in Afrikaans contains fabrications of an idyllic white farm of the forefathers, hierarchical and patriarchal, as well as peaceful.[13] However, while all pastoral is conservative rather than progressive, the subcontinent has also produced protest versions of pastoral, or antipastoral. Schreiner was identified in the previous chapter as both the author of the original South African anti-garden myth, The Story of an African Farm, and as a decisive influence upon the way in which Lessing viewed and wrote about the subcontinent. Schreiner's imprint is detectable in the "dream topography" inhabited by Lessing's characters--who wander alone between a harsh, vast sky and empty veld, with a pitiless sun overhead--and in the residual pastoral or utopian settings to which her characters resort in "The Old Chief Mshlanga," Martha Quest , and A Proper Marriage .[14]

In "The Old Chief Mshlanga," especially as the girl is entering and leaving the valley, and while she is still close to the "boundary" of the farm, the words used to describe her experience carry a burden of feeling and perception that reflects a Eurocentric vision of paradise.

> . . . I had entered a completely fresh type of landscape. It was a wide green valley, where a small river sparkled, and vivid water-birds darted over the rushes. The grass was thick and soft to my calves, the trees stood tall and stately. . . . [A] hot morning with pigeons cooing throatily . . . and . . . the wide green park-like valley. . . . (CM 18-19)

> I walked away from the indifferent village . . . down through the tall stately trees into the great rich green valley where the river meandered and the pigeons cooed tales of plenty and the woodpecker tapped softly. (CM 22)

Words such as "park-like," "stately," and "meandered" would be more appropriate to describe an English landscape, possibly of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century, and "stately and "meandered" inevitably stimulate an echo of Coleridge's idyllic spot, Xanadu. (On the other hand, the words used to depict the village, once it is reached, are appropriate to a southern African environment, "thatched huts," "mealies and pumpkins and millet," "goats," "kopje" (CM 20).)

The garden has decayed, although as yet the corruptness of western ways has not spread to the tribespeople, who remain passive victims. (In The Heart of Darkness, on the other hand, they conspire in cannibalism and greed.) In The Grass is Singing Lessing will create a black African character who murders a white woman, in revenge. Moses is no match in awesome, sinister power for Kurtz's jungle amazon, yet Moses is propelled by an evil force, part-atavistic, part linked to a seething urge for black revenge, a force that also sets biting insects on an RAF aircraftsman who tries to befriend some blacks in A Ripple from

the Storm (RS 150-53). As in Schreiner, the writer's stance in opposition to racism imbues the veld with a pulsating, vengeful life of its own.

It is from a "landscape" that the "hostility" the girl senses emanates; terrain is distanced, seen, as it were, framed. If "landscape" suggests a perceptual and emotional remove, so does yet another characteristic the short story shares with South African white writing, the positing of the African natural world in vast tracts of time and space.[15]

> And a jutting piece of rock . . . had been thrust up from the warm soil of Africa unimaginable eras of time ago, washed into hollows and whorls by sun and wind that had travelled so many thousands of miles of space and bush.. . . (CM 13)

Africa, the old, 'dark', continent, is associated with the primeval origins of Man; but, as such, it is also, paradoxically, the home of something lost to evolved, civilised Man. In the description of the fertile tribal land remaining to Chief Mshlanga and his tribe there is nostalgia for a lost eden. Such nostalgia, very likely all nostalgia, masks anger at the betrayal of childhood hope.

At work here is Lessing's conformity to an aspect of the myth of the empty land mentioned earlier, the anticipation that the Rhodesian hills and plains will provide fulfilment, adventure, and harmony (the "dance") of a kind no longer possible in western cities and countryside. Together, land and people constitute an image of what might have been. Even though Lessing would have

known little about black African life, it is also true that the story locates the villagers' prime value in a spontaneous fertility and not in their culture or social system. Desire is focussed retrospectively on a hierarchical, agrarian community, and on a male chief's protection and wisdom; desire is not projected into a future in which the land, as it 'is', will be shared more equitably. It is a world imaged in terms of a European consciousness that is both disappointed and without a vision for the future that might incorporate both black persons and white.

Placing the tribe in a vestigial paradise, Lessing draws on an assumption still powerful in western thought in the twentieth century, and this is the superior moral value of the natural and the spontaneous. The shadow of Rousseau's noble savage hovers behind the Chief and his people, whose fecundity and slow dignity the story praises (CM 24). Rousseau's ideas infused the Romantic movement of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries (and surfaced forcefully in the second half of this century, when tens of thousands declared, in the Sixties and Seventies, through such phenomena as hippiedom and flower power, their desire to 'return' to a more 'natural' way of life, hoping thereby to gain a state of wholesome happiness superior to any possible in the city). The desire projected onto the land in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" reflects Romantic attitudes--and those of earlier pastoral poetry. If the pastoral poetry of a more aristocratic world was imbued with self-consciousness, in Lessing as in the Romantics, nature is redolent with consciousness.[16] Yet, the predominant mood of "The Old Chief Mshlanga" is one characteristic of pastoral, elegiac; as in pastoral the story harks after a past imagined as simpler, innocent, more virtuous. In Martha Quest the encounter with nature becomes more typically Romantic, and

even if Martha's encounters in Children of Violence (set in the past in relation to the time of narration) are coloured by nostalgia, they are, until Landlocked, essentially forward-looking, with expectations focussed on the potentiality inherent in those spots of time that are recollected in tranquillity. Martha's ideals and ambition propel her onward and forward from her starting-points of ecstatic merging with the natural world, and her vision of a utopia, a city on a hill.

In "Sunrise on the Veld," collected in the same volume as "The Old Chief Mshlanga," Lessing again submits the rite of passage of adolescent initiation to her purpose of colonial critique.[17] The device of leaving the protagonists of both "A Sunrise on the Veld" and "The Old Chief Mshlanga" unnamed is one that promotes the reader's understanding that the characters and their experiences have a reference that is representative rather than particular ("masculine"/"feminine" experience rather than this boy's/girl's experience alone). The sunrise on the veld, being both the break of a particular day and the dawn of the fiftee year old protagonist's manhood, the reader is likely to understand that any critique made reflects not only on the individual protagonist but also on the values of the social world the young person is about to enter.

The difference in what Lessing criticises in each story is connected to traditional patterns of division according to gender: through the girl Lessing explores the attempt to make satisfactory personal contact with land and people, but through the boy protagonist she writes of the psychology of the will to subjugate and exploit land and people. The boy does not take over the narration of his own story. The fact that the girl does, suggests greater affinity in "The Old Chief Mshlanga"

between implied author and her character than is the case in "A Sunrise on the Veld." Lessing locates herself, through her fictional characters, closer to the (feminine) urge toward empathy and relatedness than to the (masculine) desire to dominate.[18]

The boy is at first arrogant, exulting in a sense of his own omnipotence:

> He felt his life ahead of him as a great and wonderful thing, something that was his; and he said aloud, with the blood rising to his head: all the great men of the world have been as I am now, and there is nothing I can't become, nothing I can't do; there is no country in the world I cannot make part of myself, if I choose. I contain the world. I can make of it what I want. If I choose, I can change everything that is going to happen: it depends on me, and what I decide now. (SV 28)

In the course of that same morning he will, ironically, come to the sober knowledge of "fatality" (SV 30). This happens when he comes across a buck dying an excruciating death as it is eaten alive by ants (SV 29-31). Brutally confronted by the workings of the "vast unalterable cruel veld," he is forced to recognise that "this is what happens, this is how things work," and that he can do nothing about it (SV 30). He then settles into self-satisfaction at his "new stoicism," only to have this disrupted in its turn when he discovers that the buck could not escape the ants because it was injured (SV 31). He realises that this buck might very well have been one of those he had in the past wounded but neglected to track down and kill, and the story ends with his half-accepting his responsibility in the scheme of things (SV 32).

The boy's exemplars are "all the great men of the world" (SV

28); his initial exhilaration is described in 'masculine', and orgasmic terms: "he felt the blood pulsing down his legs and along his arms, and the exultation and pride of body mounted in him till he was shutting his teeth hard against a violent desire to shout his triumph" (SV 27). The veld, on the other hand, is 'feminine' in its curving, passive allure:

> acres of long pale grass . . . sent back a hollowing gleam of light to a satiny sky. Near him thick swathes of grass were bent with the weight of water, and diamond drops sparkled on each frond. (SV 27

The narrative does not undermine the land-as-woman identification; instead, it exploits the conventional symbolization in order to target the violence and callousness latent in the pioneering spirit. The boy's culpability lies in his surveying the veld as space (empty land) upon which to imprint himself and from which to extract the fulfilment of his ego needs, yet the story is a call for responsibility in the exercise of control, rather than a demand for total surrender of the assumed right to possess and dominate.

(When Lessing does create a man who loves his land, he fails as a farmer. Dick Turner, unlike his successful neighbour, Charlie Slatter, does not brutally exploit the soil (or his black labour). But he, like Mr. Quest, and Thomas Stern, is one of the gentler, <u>failed</u> men in Lessing's Zambesia. Dick does not live out the man's story preferred by settler society; and Lessing does not create an alternative, viable story for white men in Southern

Rhodesia.)

The consciousness fabricated in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" conforms with the traditionally feminine in its urge toward empathy and relatedness, while that in "Sunrise on the Veld" reflects the drive to possess and exploit that is typical of the masculine ethos. Just as Lessing does not undermine conventional land-as-woman identification in "Sunrise on the Veld," so she does not criticise the separation of different kinds of experience along gender lines in these two short stories. What she does do is shape land-woman symbolism and the conventional lines of gender division to her critique of aspects of settler society and culture. She also gives to a female protagonist in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" the dignity of exploring the wilderness (although the girl's exploring has none of the athletic vigorousness and exhilaration of the boy's). As in Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage, Lessing uses the consciousness of a girl to evoke her vision of white experience in Rhodesia, and, along with it, the quest for both autonomy and connectedness. By the time she publishes the third novel in the Children of Violence sequence, A Ripple from the Storm, in 1958, Lessing will assign the (white man's) experience of exploration, penetration, discovery, and rejection to a male character (RS 150-52).

The critical task of identifying myth, full-blown or in converted or 'trace' form, may be seen as implying a definite, and polar opposition between myth and what may be termed historical reality, and my own assessment in this chapter of Lessing's 'success' in challenging or reshaping colonial myths, and of the contrary persistence of myth in her work, tends to imply, in its terminology, such an opposition. Lessing appears to move in an area demarcated at one end by the factual and provable, at the

other by the mystifying falsity of the mythical; now she is closer to where 'we' stand, with our hindsight, now she recedes into a more ignorant past. But the decision as to what constitutes reality, and the historical, must always involve selectivity and partiality in terms of particular, enculturated perceptions. Perception freed of cultural patterns is an impossibility, and the psychic content of the group's shared fantasies--however unacknowledged or unconscious these may be--affect, and, to sustain the psychoanalytic terminology, are projected into and onto, the events and the processes that are incorporated into what is termed history.

The critic engaged in identifying myth needs to hold in mind another factor besides that of her own enculturated biases; she must approach the work examined aware of the phenomenon that two beliefs, even when they contradict each other, may exist in tandem. Such double belief, even triple belief, is not uncommon; it is, in fact, especially for those well-educated, a condition of life in modern society. Writers, along with their critics, are forced to choose from among what may appear to be either a hegemony of ideologies or a hodgepodge of beliefs, values, attitudes.

Lessing manifests this phenomenon. She is capable of teasing her own myths, yet only a few pages further on will express a contradictory belief. An example, concerned with the empty land myth, occurs in Going Home, her account of a return trip to Southern Rhodesia in 1956 after seven years' exile in London. She acknowledges that the "passion for emptiness" that she shares with other white persons may only have "meaning in relation to Europe."

> Africa is scattered all over with white men who push out and away from cities and people, to remote farms and outposts, seeking solitude. But perhaps all they need is to leave the seethe and the burden of Europe behind. (GH 11)

And, it is "only when one flies over Africa that one can see it . . the empty continent" (GH 13). She half-knows that Africa is "uncreated" only in relation to the industrialised parts of the globe, yet she continues to define what is "best" in "Africa" as "its emptiness, its promise," and she clearly admires the type of solitary white adventurer whom she thinks agrees with her on this, and so "love[s] Africa for its own sake . . ." (GH 13, 11-12).

There is a third factor to add to any context of discussion of the deployment of myth. If, firstly, all perceptions and definitions are enculturated, and if, secondly, two (or more) conflicting beliefs (or systems of belief) may exist in tandem, it is also, thirdly, true that human worldviews are resistant to change. Kolodny says that

> Students of language, following [Benjamin] Whorf and Edward Sapir, are coming more and more to assert the intimate interaction between language, perception, and action, even going so far, as Whorf does, to argue that once particular "ways of analyzing and reporting experience . . . have become fixed in the language as integrated 'fashions of speaking,'" they tend to influence the ways in "which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels . . . reasoning, and builds the house of . . . consciousness." "And once such a system of meanings comes into being, it is never simply

> abandoned or superseded, as Freud and all other developmental psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated."[19]

This warning serves as encouragement to praise those who, like Lessing, manage to achieve the construction of a new "house" of "consciousness" that extends the imagination beyond its previous boundaries. Lessing is among those who deserve praise, as Trinh expresses it, for "creating a ground that belongs to no one, not even to the creator."[20]

Lessing will circle around the garden myth, her white farms either failed utopias or, as in The Grass is Singing, a nighmarish dystopia. Her protagonists--entangled in difficulties over their whiteness, their culture, and their gender--fail to discover in the Rhodesian veld the maternal matrix, fail, too, to make an accommodation with the country's people, white and black.

NOTES

[1] Both "The Old Chief Mshlanga" and "Sunrise on the Veld" appeared in the first collection of Lessing's African stories entitled This Was the Old Chief's Country (Michael Joseph, 1951). The first volume of the Collected African Stories, also entitled This Was the Old Chief's Country, was first published by Michael Joseph in 1973.

[2] Anthony J. Chennells, "Doris Lessing and the Rhodesian Settler Novel," in Bertelsen, 31.

[3] Chennells 32-33.

[4] Chennells 33-34.

[5] Chennells 35.

[6] Chennells 35.

[7] Kolodny 4, 7, 159.

[8] Kolodny 5.

[9] Coetzee 2-4.

[10] Coetzee 2.

[11] Coetzee 3, 18-19, 26, 32. The scientific community assigns to the continent a place at the origin of (admittedly Eurocentric) evolutionary theory, its decision being based on a number of material findings: hominid skulls such as the Taung in 1924, and the "Mrs Ples" in 1936, for instance, and numerous fossils of extinct animals. It is a widely-held belief among scientists that it was from this continent that anthropoids spread around the earth. Although Western science is clearly not ideology-free, this climate of thought is distinct from (even though it may reinforce), notions of Africa as the place where one might satisfy yearnings for freedom, innocence, and self-

fulfilment in old Mother Africa.

[12] Coetzee 3-4.

[13] Coetzee 4-7, 78-80.

[14] Coetzee 4, 9, 64-66, 75, 81, 168.

[15] Coetzee 7, 64.

[16] For this distinction I am indebted to colleague Ruth Will.

[17] A third initiation story, "Through the Tunnel," appears in Collected Stories Volume One: To Room Nineteen (1978). This story is set in the Mediterranean. An English boy escapes from his mother's protective eye to perform a dangerous swim through an underwater tunnel, escape from which is by means of a crack. Exiting from this symbolic womb ensures his acceptance into a group of more experienced boys.

[18] Judith Kegan Gardiner proposes a 'politics of empathy' as a model of literary relationships in writing by women in Rhys, Stead, Lessing, and the Politics of Empathy (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1989). On Lessing see 1-3, 5, 6, 83-120, 143-155.

[19] Kolodny 148, 154. For a cognitive view of comprehension which views reading as a product of both the text and the prior knowledge and attitudes that the reader brings to it, see Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin, "The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension," in Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (eds.), Gender and Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1986) 3-30. The article considers the implications for this cognitive hypothesis "that men and women may read the same text differently" (3).

[20] Trinh 75.

CHAPTER 3

DORIS LESSING: MARTHA QUEST AND SOCIAL QUEST

The previous chapter noted a connection, in the letters of European colonisers and settlers in North America and Africa, between the myth of the empty land and the tendency to view the land in female terms. The 'new' land of North America and Africa was a space in which the settlers could activate the desire to recover the maternal garden, in its freshness and comforting simplicity. While Elizabethan pastoral, however, was defined by its celebration of the "ideal of contentment," American pastoral, like the African version of the genre, expressed in the metaphor of land-as-woman also the lust, incited by the Virgin's apparent invitation, to insert and possess.[1]

Characteristic of African as of American pastoral is, then, the urge of the (initially) dispossessed to penetrate and imprint themselves upon 'wild' space. The previous chapter traced Lessing's critique in "Sunrise of the Veld" of this particular impulse in the pastoral genre, and her more sympathetic rendering, in "The Old Chief Mshlanga," of the desire to be accepted and succoured by a fertile, enclosed valley--the land in its maternal identity. The desire to conquer land (and people), culturally a masculine trait, is not a feature of Martha Quest's encounters with veld and farm. (Nor can Mary Turner's pitiful efforts to control Dick's farm and his labourers in The Grass is Singing be taken seriously.) Instead, Martha, like the protagonist of "The Old Chief Mshlanga," desires acceptance by

the land--and its black people, since they are linked by the narrative to the land--and access to the adventure and fulfilment it appears to promise. The riches she is searching for are not material: at first she enjoys physical and spiritual rewards in the veld; later, her rewards are more exclusively mental and spiritual.

In early works like "The Old Chief Mshlanga," "Sunrise on the Veld," Martha Quest, and A Proper Marriage pastoral longings vie with antipastoral critique. The Quests' farm is for Martha a site of frustration and alienation, and, to a certain extent, it resembles the dystopian colonial farm in South African fiction, as identified by Coetzee, in being set within a landscape that has a "topography" but no "structure, no detail, no variety, no articulation [so that] this topography cannot be read";[2] in the veld, on the other hand, Martha has "moments" of "illumination" that expose her desire to gain citizenship within a utopian social order in Africa. In A Ripple from the Storm (1958), the third volume of Children of Violence, that desire is finally overcome by critique, as Martha's hope wanes of playing a role in alleviating the cruelty of colonialism, and, to reinforce Martha's judgement, there is the violent rejection, by 'African' land and people, of the generic white man.

Lessing then published The Golden Notebook, in 1962, before moving on to the fourth volume of Children of Violence. In The Golden Notebook, she assessed in a more conscious way than she had done before--through Anna Wulf and her writer's block--the relationship of the writer to her audience and her material. By way of Anna's denunciation, not only of the "nostalgia" of her renderings of life in southern Africa but also of the popular, commercial uses to which her stories might be put, Lessing

arrives, in Landlocked, published in 1965, at a narrative more remote in mood from the sources of its material in Southern Rhodesia (for which Lessing uses the name Zambesia),[3] and more certain, retrospectively, that exile was a necessary choice.

Dates of publication for Children of Violence are: Martha Quest, 1952; A Proper Marriage, 1954; A Ripple From the Storm, 1958; Landlocked, 1965; and The Four-Gated City, 1969. Martha Quest, like the following three volumes, is set in the 1930s and 1940s, and the series began to appear shortly after Lessing left Rhodesia for London in 1949. Most of the final volume is set in the Fifties, the action having by then moved to London, while a coda is set in an indeterminate future sometime after the earth has been devastated by a nuclear catastrophe.

Martha Quest begins with its protagonist chafing at the limitations of her childhood environment. The first ten pages of the novel trace the girl's survey of her parents' farm and the surrounding countryside, then the narrative follows her retreat to a tree in the bush. Here she takes refuge from her intense frustration in mystical experience and her familiar daydream of a city (MQ 13, 16-18). In the manner of the realist novel, the author details the geographical and social constituents of the fictional milieu so as to emphasise the protagonist as their product. At the same time, Lessing introduces elements into Martha's daydreaming that signal such incompatibility between the girl's home and her vaulting aims and ideals that, clearly, she must escape.

When Martha surveys veld and farm at the start of her story she does so sitting on the verandah of her parents' farmhouse. Still physically confined within the ambit of her parents' control and influence, she has already, at fifteen years old,

outgrown their worldview. The conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Quest and their neighbours, the Van Rensbergs, irritates her so much that she "look[s] away from [her parents], over the veld" (MQ 8). Then follows a series of paragraphs on the local topography. These do contain some detail: of the hills and mountains, for instance, to the south, west, and east that encompass the house, which is "raised high on its eminence into the blue and sweeping currents of air" (MQ 8). The "cloudless African sky," however, "[pulses] with light," forcing Martha to "lower her eyes to the bush"; but the bush is "so familiar" that "the vast landscape caused her only the prickling feeling of claustrophobia" (MQ 9). So, she turns to the book on "popular science" on her lap, then to a copy of Havelock Ellis. Forced to move on again by the realisation that both books have "so little to do with her own problems," Martha returns her gaze to the verandah. Having come full circle, she looks "speculatively" at Mrs. Van Rensburg, "who had had eleven children" (MQ 9).

The too "familiar" landscape, although spacious, signals to Martha only lack of potentiality for adventure and fulfilment, while the human aspects of her world frustrate and oppress her. Of the social and cultural components of Martha's milieu, the social codes set by the English and Afrikaans-speaking whites in the colony demand of her attitudes and actions, some of which she despises, others of which she loathes. Antipathetic to white society, Martha is also alienated from the black inhabitants by the "colour bar": as a result, the "farm lay about her like a loved country which refused her citizenship" (MQ 31).

Features of antipastoral can be traced in the representation of the bush as an arid, punitive region in which Martha wanders between the (bosom of) the earth and a pounding, merciless sun,

and in the entrapment of the Quest farm and its inhabitants (like the farm inhabitants in The Grass is Singing and African Farm) within, as Coetzee identifies them, two scales of "nonhuman time and distance," the first of which is a "chronography extending from prehistory to a posthistory after man," the second, the scale of growth of the plants and insects of the Karoo, which throb away in "the monotonous red sand . . . empires rising and falling within the space of a season."[4] Both measures of time, as they did in Schreiner's African Farm, will eventually, in Children of Violence, render all human effort futile.[5] Behind the "ancient, down-peering eye" of a hawk that Martha sees circling above her parents' farm are "a thousand generations of . . . hawk ancestors" all undisturbed by the "timid intrusion" of humans (MQ 8). Dwarfed by massive, overarching sweeps of time and space, Lessing's characters are also threatened by the mysterious vital forces of Africa, forces which pulse away and rise up, at times, to strike--by means of singing beetles and a stabbing weapon at Mary Turner, or by means of painful insect bites at a virtuous leftwinger who would presume to claim to belong in 'Africa' (in Ripple).

European culture, whether transmitted through books or through human mentors (her parents in particular, but also the intellectual and leftwing Cohen brothers at the local store), proffers Martha false or restricted perspectives. Even the Cohens' books of political and social science fail to describe or account for female experience, like her own (PM 31, 73-74). They do not account for the rebellion and confusion Martha feels in response to the cultural expectations that Martha as an adult female will enter into a domestic future and give up the free-ranging physical and spiritual exploration she has until now

enjoyed (MQ 9, 13, 16).

Since Martha has found the settlers and their books inadequate to her high-mindedness, the girl has turned to the veld, where, lying under a chosen tree, she has two sorts of experiences, one of the mystical variety, the other, more voluntary in nature, described as "a familiar daydream" (17-18, 60-62). The essence of the first, epiphanic experience is a sense of integration with the entire phenomenal (natural) world:

> . . . she, and the little animals, and the moving grasses, and the sunwarmed trees, and the slopes of shivering silvery mealies, and the great dome of blue light overhead, and the stones of earth under her feet, became one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms. (MQ 62)

For Martha, "'the moment,'" as she calls this event, is "'incidental to the condition of adolescence'"; she also reflects that "such experiences [are] common among the religious" (MQ 61). These "'moments'" are beyond the human scales of time and space and lack any of the human references of Martha's typical daydream vision, yet they do not serve to render all human endeavour futile. Instead, they constitute for Martha "difficult knowledge," and a "challenge," which, as yet, she is unable to meet (MQ 62). They stand, at the start of Children of Violence, as a touchstone, for the reader as well as the protagonist, of intensity and comprehensiveness of experience, for Lessing sustains, albeit mutedly, their status as a peak of possible attainment when the potency of the natural world is felt directly--even if in a self-conscious way. And, when Lessing

writes in her own voice in the documentary volume Going Home of her return visit to Southern Rhodesia in 1956, it is this sensation of oneness, at-homeness in the veld that she says she has come back to recapture. Further, while the series treats ironically hopes of a perfect social order, the notion of quest itself to which these transcendent moments are connected is not ironised. (In fact, all Lessing's protagonists, whether in or out of Africa, embark on a quest of one sort or another.)

Martha's view that her "'moments'" are "'incidental to the condition of adolescence'" (MQ 61), suggests that they function for her in ways described by De Beauvoir: through them she explores and defines herself, she obtains psychic nurturing, and she senses herself attached to and based in an area both significant and familiar, all as she readies herself for adulthood. The deeply-felt drive in Martha toward ecstasy, complete submission, and trust are the counterpart of the atavistic fear described in "The Old Chief Mshlanga". Martha's fear and ecstasy are exposed, vulnerable, for they are neither contained nor sustained by a framework of religious beliefs or social ideals; they are without the resting places and reference points provided by final values based on a cultural and social milieu accepted with faith and trust.

Instead, even the precious "'moments'" themselves are disrupted, and they are disrupted by internalised images of womanhood--of Mrs. Quest and Mrs. Van Rensberg. These set Martha at odds with herself, and with nature:

> . . . ripp[ing] the fleshy leaves between her fingers . . . [she] thought again of her mother and Mrs. Van Rensberg. She would not be like Mrs. Van Rensberg, a fat and earthy

> housekeeping woman; she would <u>not</u> be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied, like her mother. But then, who was she to be like? Her mind turned towards the heroines she had been offered [in literature], and discarded them. There seemed to be a gap between herself and the past . . . and she sat up.. . . (MQ 16)

When Martha sits up in agitation, shredding leaves between her fingers, she turns toward a field where a "native driver" is whipping on a team of oxen led by a child, and then envisions, against the "unused country" of the Dumfries Hills, her colonnaded city (MQ 17). The narrative moves on immediately to describe Martha sitting once again, a year later, "beneath the same tree," her hands again "full of leaves which she [is] unconsciously rubbing to a green and sticky mess," her head again "filled with the same vision" (MQ 17).

At the age of fifteen- and sixteen-years, Martha is able to respond to the "challenge" of her epiphanies only with a form of daydreaming that leads repeatedly to her vision of a four-gated city (MQ 62). She is somewhat more forward-looking than the protagonist of "The Old Chief Mshlanga," who ventured into a world belonging to an unspoiled and agrarian past, in that she does sets her sights on a <u>city</u> (even if it is an "ancient" one), a city, furthermore, in which barriers of race will no longer exist:

> . . . the pity she refused herself flooded out and surrounded the black child [in a field] like a protective blanket. And again her mind swam and shook, like clearing water, and now, instead of one black child, she saw a multitude, and so lapsed easily into her familiar daydream. She looked away over the ploughed land, across the veld to the Dumfries Hills, and refashioned that unused country to

> the scale of her imagination. There arose, glimmering whitely over the harsh scrub and the stunted trees, a noble city, set foursquare and colonnaded along its falling flower-bordered terraces. There were splashing fountains, and the sound of flutes; and its citizens moved, grave and beautiful, black and white and brown together; and these groups of elders paused, and smiled with pleasure at the sight of the children--the blue-eyed, fair-skinned children of the North playing hand in hand with the bronze-skinned, dark-eyed children of the South. Yes, they smiled and approved these many-fathered children, running and playing among the flowers and the terraces, through the white pillars and tall trees of this fabulous and ancient city.. . . (MQ 17)

The single black child becomes "a multitude"; Martha imposes a vision of order and harmony not (like her mother and Mrs. Van Rensberg) upon a house but upon an entire landscape. Phrases like "to the scale of her imagination" and "lapsed" signal the narrator's judgement as to the weaknesses of the compensatory vision. Martha herself notes the alienness of the "golden mirage" of her "ideal landscape" within this Rhodesian setting (MQ 35). Nevertheless, the girl's ambition is to shape a city and a society, not to make a home. The exaggerated nature of Martha's utopian hopes will finally be exposed when she reaches her four-gated city, an anti-ideal London of the immediate postwar period, where she learns, at last, to trim her visionary expectations according to the limits of the possible. Before this denouement, accomplished in the fifth volume of the series, Lessing devotes nearly four volumes to Martha's testing of her vision in the local Southern Rhodesian town, after she has left her parents' farm.

In the town, unnamed but clearly based upon Salisbury (now Harare), one extrafamilial grouping after another fails to retain

Martha's intellectual and emotional allegiance. As out of place doing secretarial work (poorly) for a firm of lawyers as she is on the fringes of the mindless hedonism of the Sports Club, Martha will reach beyond the orthodox political attitudes of the colony to the liberal Progressive Group, then leaves its prim debates for a circle where, finally, she finds an intellectual and moral home. In between, despite her earlier fierce resistance to any pressure to marry (MQ 18-19), she makes a brief, unhappy sortie into marriage and motherhood, adventures which are the main topic of volume two in the series, A Proper Marriage.

As one of the dozen or so members of the country's Communist party, Martha is challenged to think and act in ways strenuous enough to match her zeal for the absolute. International communism, under the ideological leadership of Russia, seems to her, for a time, to offer a route to a world free of racism and poverty. But Ripple makes quite clear the disparity between the group's ambitious aims and what they can in fact achieve, the narrator's irony reflecting Martha's own growing disillusionment. At this stage of Zambesian politics, given the smallness of the group and the theoretical nature of their beliefs, they cannot possibly make a difference. Yet, as a member of the group, Martha does manage to sustain a sense of continuity with her "moments" of "experience," which "seemed to her enduring and true"; the "calm voice" of Anton Hesse (leader of the group and Martha's future second husband) "link[s] her with those parts of her childhood she still owned," the "moments of illumination and belief" (RS 62).

Not only does Martha, while venturing into communal ethics, find this link through a male leader, it is also given to a male

character--in this same novel--to probe to its utmost extent (as envisioned by Lessing) the potentiality of the veld in relation to social quest within colonial 'Africa'. It is not Martha, but Jimmy, a minor character and one of the RAF members of the Communist group, who has this adventure. Jimmy's euphoric immersion in some long grass, which cradles him, is disturbed by "a sudden outburst of noise, as loud as machine gun fire" (RS 151); the noise is caused by beetles, which bite him, and force him to flee in terror. In the Location, where he next goes, some young musicians, and then Elias Phiri (all of whom are known to Jimmy as "comrade"), spurn his overtures with a mixture of contempt and fear (RS 153-59).

Jimmy's rejection by veld and black Africans is markedly intense. The boy in "A Sunrise on the Veld" discovers horror, but the horror is kept within the bounds of the representational and causal, rather than the symbolic. The narrative does not exclude the possibility that were the boy to take rational responsibility for his actions in the future, repetition of the horror might be avoided. Further, although it is the boy who takes aggressive possession of the maternal matrix, it is the buck that suffers the consequences of his carelessness. In Ripple, the hypnotic repetitions in the description of the grass add symbolic weight to the adventure: something is being described whose whole truth can only be hinted at. Jimmy is not only rejected, he is forcibly and painfully ejected from Elias's home. Black people punish Jimmy. So does the bush, through the biting insects; yet Jimmy had simply enjoyed the sensation of being cradled in a womb-like space of sensuous delights (RS 151). And, Jimmy is a good person, sincere and scrupulous in his socialist values. But, Jimmy is white. Every detail in

Jimmy's adventure is chosen to lead to one conclusion. If even he fails, no white person can succeed. Like Mary Turner, Jimmy is a passive (yet somehow guilty) victim of vengeful 'Africa'.

Nicole Ward Jouve takes Lessing to task for giving the encounter with the veld ('mud') in Ripple to a man, instead of to Martha.[6] Jouve also comments that Jimmy is enacting the experience usually reserved to the white man in Africa: escape, penetration, discovery, delight, possession, horror, exclusion.[7] In the following volume of the series, Landlocked, Thomas Stern will take to its logical culmination the white man's fate--which is to be excluded by Africa and (black) Africans--when he "goes to die among [them]."[8] Jimmy has "the only 'real' 'mud' experience after [Proper Marriage]"; and two men, first Jimmy, then Thomas,[9] take over what is shared by the young girl in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" and the early Martha, the joy of discovery--and the dejection that follows rejection and loss.

Although Martha is allowed to direct much energy at engaging physically and spritually with the bush, lying on and merging spiritually with it in Martha Quest, jumping into a pothole in Proper Marriage (actions symbolic of her search for acceptance and sustenance), there exists a contrary authorial programme, which is to write of the impossibility of her ever succeeding. When Thomas assumes the burden of the ultimate logic of the white man's destiny in Africa (in lessing's terms), Martha is left to choose the only alternative for an white person of conscience, exile.

As evidence of Lessing's covert programme Jouve cites the way in which Lessing writes of her black characters in Children of Violence:

> Peculiarly, it is only in [Going Home] that, through the passing figure of Tobias, the painter, an actual labouring African appears. The first four volumes of The Children of Violence, though they are preoccupied with racial issues, though the existence of the many white characters who appear is based on the labour of the black Africans, ignore that labour. Only the odd 'house-boy' or cook or nanny or waiter are shown, but hardly ever in a working situation. Even in [Ripple], where the 'Marxists' go visiting black townships and distributing pamphlets, actual encounters with blacks are kept to a minimum. Africans, in the four novels that take place in Rhodesia, are there like children, who ought to be seen and not heard: worse, they are barely seen at all. . . . Also, the blacks in those novels are nearly always presented as ideas, as causes. Hardly any of them has any individuality at all.10

Jouve sees in this peculiarity of the black Africans in Children of Violence evidence of Lessing's "partitioning" of the totality of her material, a partitioning she relates to Lessing's writing of the necessity to shed the past, Zambesia, and childhood.[11] In order to suggest that there is no alternative to exile for Martha, Lessing omits material that might contradict this intention.[12] Lessing's work makes an energetic attempt to render environment and people mimetically instead of through settler mythopoesis; yet it retreats from full representation of, and, implicitly, from full acceptance of, Southern Rhodesia as the source of the material upon which it is based. In the vision of the city at the very start of series, black Africans are figured so as to speak on the author's own terms, and even in the 'literal' landscape black Africans are constituted as 'other', serving to convey the subject's, Martha's, indignation and pity. (A similar lack of particularity was noted in the

tribespeople and land in "The Old Chief Mshlanga.") The fate of male characters in the veld reveals the inevitability of exclusion for all whites, including Martha, yet, the Rhodesian bush does retain an aspect of its potentiality for her. Incorporated into Landlocked is a tribute to the continuing inspiration that the veld is for Martha's imagination. The tribute occurs in a passage in which Martha drives across the veld with Jack Dobie, a trade unionist, on her way to visit Thomas's farm. Martha becomes conscious of the change her recent love affair with Thomas has brought about in her.[13]

> Almost at once they were in open country. It was a cold, clear day, with white clouds driving fast overhead. In all directions swept the flattening dry-cold grass of winter, it was all miles of pale gold, then blue-green kopjes, then pale blue sky where the clouds swept. Everything was high, austere and in movement. Across empty miles poured the wind which battered against the lorry . . . she was absorbed by the swooping movement through the high-sparking air. The empty space was opening inside her, and she was gazing into it with passionate curiosity. Martha and Jack, two minute fragments of humanity . . . were only two of the figures that moved, small and brightly lit, against the backdrop, while she watched. She saw Maisie . . . Athen . . . Greece. . . . Turn the scene back two years: Europe was crawling with tiny ants, murdering each other. Turn it forwards: Europe was at peace. . . . Asia was 'at peace' again, though in China great armies still fought. . . .
>
> The empty space swelled up to the great, wind-scoured skies: it was the size of the great landscape, this enormous stretch of country lifted high, high, under a high-pale-blue, cloud-swept sky.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nothing fitted, ridiculous facts jostled with important ones . . . and the empty space dazzled with its growing distances. . . . And the empty space not only contained her and Jack, two tiny ant-like figures, she contained the space--she was the great bell of space, and

> through it crawled little creatures, among them, herself. (L 163-68)

At this point, Martha recalls, again, the "moments of illumination and belief" she experienced as a adolescent in the veld (RS 62); as at those moments, exploration of the space of the veld and the space of the mind interlink. By now, however, Martha's mental space has become more social.[14] It has also gained in both particularity and range. Featured against the backdrop of inner space are friends, lovers, rather than unknown (black) others. No longer are Martha's faculties directed toward a single symbolic structure of mythical timelessness; instead she ranges over recent historical event and across global geographical space. The passage suggests the exhilaration of a creative mind tentatively exploring its newfound knowledge and judgement, enjoying a sense of increase in its power, even if, as yet, nothing 'fits'. Lessing omits from Martha's story the overt option for Martha of becoming a writer,[15] an option which, had it been included, would have gone a long way toward explaining why Martha left for richer cultural and intellectual pastures; yet written into this passage in Landlocked is a retrospective tribute to the veld of childhood as inspirational source. Headily, Martha moves here, there, and everywhere, probing the way in which historical events and persons may be altered by the passage of time, and how narratives and their characters may be altered by the imagination. To the vastness of the space of the veld is added the rush of purposeful movement over it. She is ready to step out of the pull of mud, of the familiar, into the new worlds of London and a writer's life.

Lessing's act of writing, in Martha Quest, of the disabling

effect of Martha's dreamy escape into poetry, the alienation from her life circumstances caused by the girl's reading of novels, the inadequacy of the works of social science to which she has access, ands the narrowness of the cultural expectations of women in relation to romantic love, wifehood, and motherhood (MQ 35), is an act of repudiating the ideology of her culture that regulates middle-class life. The concept middle-class is difficult to define (and it is more precise to speak of middle classes). Usually, though, the defining features include the level and quality of education enjoyed, access to a comfortable level of a society's resources, and, since the last century, centrality to its culture. Martha is, like her author, middle-class in cultural orientation. Martha's main mentor in womanhood has been her mother, who plays Mozart and, when still new to the colony, left visiting cards with her neighbours (MQ 21). True for Martha, too--even if she does live in what is only an outpost of English culture--is the fact that, as Carolyn Steedman says, the "outlines of conventional romantic fiction," adapt readily to her life.[16] Steedman describes how, reading a feminist work such as Ann Oakley's Taking It Like a Woman, she felt a "painful and familiar sense of exclusion" stemming from her own working-class background, and realised, too, that the outlines of conventional romantic fiction could not be used "to tell a life story" like that of Steedman's working-class mother.[17] Clothes, houses, daily occupations, men, all would be different. Lessing is, by heritage, one of those in a class position to enter into the "psychoanalytic drama" prevailing in English culture,[18] and, as a result, her protagonist's task becomes that of resisting the invitation, rewriting the outlines of the drama, writing her own story along new lines.

On the other hand, says Steedman, middle-class women like Oakley are "caught" in their own "terrible exclusion," one that "measures out their own central relationship to the culture," for the myths "tell their story, the fairy-tales show the topography of the houses they once inhabited."[19] Lessing herself writes that the cultural open door presented to Martha, when reinforced by the structures of white society in Zambesia and its ideology of racism, has alienated Martha from her childhood homeland and from its people. And in Martha Quest and "The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange" Lessing records the English settlers' superiority, within the bounds of the white pecking order, over less wealthy Afrikaners, Greeks, and Jews.

While books may have betrayed Martha, they have also been her friends; Martha is not only intelligent, she is also literate, and literary, in tastes. Her literariness is a possession, and a resource; it will enable her to find a niche, in London, within intellectual, leftwing circles. Her centrality to culture ensuring her own alienation, like Martha's, from the "structures of deprivation," Lessing registered very little of black life in Rhodesia, and, in London she only experimented, as In Pursuit of the English (1960) revealed, with belonging to the working-classes. Soon, like Martha, she moved into a position among the professional middle-classes, by virtue of her upbringing, her occupation, and, very soon, her success. Despite being an autodidact, and despite her colonial origins, Lessing moved sideways, rather than upwards, in the social scale into the middle-class occupation of writer. Here, she situated herself as critic, within the discourse of anti-colonialism directed against the country she has left. Her writing is marked, too, with all the contempt of the middle-class

intellectual for the bourgeoisie and their aspirations.

Martha's quest for a social identity that will enable her to keep faith with her values is frustrated for three reasons. She is alienated from the land and its (black) people by her European consciousness. Secondly, her attempt to surmount these cultural and social obstacles through attachment to political groupings fails; none of these groupings is able effectively either to link up with or assist any black movement for liberation, or to resist its own tendency to split. Thirdly, inner conflict and self-doubt over female identity, in a social setting that is rigid and conformist, erode her energy and contribute to a sense of deeply-felt unease impossible to overcome in Southern Rhodesia.

Despite Lessing's insertion of her work into the local culture, despite the exploring, and claiming, of a local literary identity, her work will draw back, markedly so in Landlocked, from the possibilities of accepting a Rhodesian identity for itself, and from accepting for Martha Rhodesian citizenship. Further, despite Lessing's forceful insertion of gender oppression alongside that of race, she does not grant her female protagonists anything like the stature and influence she has herself achieved in her life and work, and, by transferring social quest from Martha to male characters, she writes for Martha a failure stemming from her assigned gender position. Lessing's failure to write a more thorough feminist programme may be linked to her reactionary interpretations of psychic life such as the notions that there is a split between feeling and reason, and that the female psyche, influenced by the treacherous body, is a container of dangerous passion as opposed to the serene (male) control of reason.[20]

Martha moves from earth-based visions and epiphanies, from

such rooted engagement with the Rhodesian bush that the root of a tree can feel like a second spine, to swift rushing over an abstracted veld, as she sheds her past, sheds the 'personal', and rushes toward community in another continent. The potentiality of the veld is relegated to inspirational status, but the potentiality for life and significance in Southern Rhodesia is not allowed to compete with the sense that true meaning lies in England. Yet England cannot be claimed as 'home', and when Lessing discourses on the concept of home in Going Home, she ties it to rootedness in the veld, even as she also claims to feel, now that she is in exile, 'at home' nowhere. Lessing's Southern African writing records a state occupied by those who do not feel at home in the colony in which they have been reared, yet are not English either.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Kolodny 146.

[2] Coetzee 64.

[3] The general area, including parts of Mozambique, was referred to as Zambesia in nineteenth century pioneering documents. Information supplied by G. Haresnape.

[4] Coetzee 64.

[5] Cf. Coetzee 64.

[6] Nicole Ward Jouve, "Of Mud and other Matter--The Children of Violence," in Jenny Taylor (ed.), Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives: Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 101.

[7] Jouve 100-101.

[8] Jouve 101.

[9] Jouve 79-83, 101.

[10] Jouve 99-100. Cf. Coetzee on SA pastoral writing, and its "occlusion of black labour from the scene: the black man becomes a shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then to hold a horse or serve a meal" (5).

[11] Jouve 100, 101.

[12] Cf. Jouve 101-103.

[13] Cf. M.J. Daymond, "Martha Quest: The Self and its Spatial Metaphors," in Cherry Clayton (ed.), Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1989) 163-182. I am indebted to Daymond's reading, particularly for her discussion of the changes in Martha's figuring of space external to and within herself.

[14] Cf. Daymond 178, 182 n. 7.

[15] Cf. Jouve 101.

[16] Carolyn Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives (London: Virago, 1986) 17.

[17] Steedman 17.

[18] Steedman 17.

[19] Steedman 17.

[20] Cf. Kaplan's statement that it was Mary Wollstonecraft who, following the teachings of her mentor Jean-Jacques Rousseque, first "offered women this fateful choice between the opposed and moralized bastions of reason and feeling," 155.

CHAPTER 4

DORIS LESSING: MARTHA QUEST, A PROPER MARRIAGE, AND SEXUAL POLITICS

The matching tendencies in western culture to view the land in female terms and to connect woman with nature reflect and reinforce the ambivalence with which woman is traditionally viewed. In the binary system of thinking characteristic of the west, woman and nature have been connected also with the irrational, the emotions, and the body, this feminine order then being set in the scale against the masculine order, which claims for itself the rational, the law, culture, civilisation, the mind, and the head (of the body, family, country, creation). The cultural yoking of woman and nature makes women's association with the natural world (and with their culture) problematic.[1] When Martha Quest wanders in the veld, she is, like the many adolescent girls of bourgeois European literature noted by De Beauvoir, in retreat from a world in which men are the standard, women marginal.

> [The adolescent girl] will devote a special love to Nature: still more than the adolescent boy, she worships it. Unconquered, inhuman, Nature subsumes most clearly the totality of what exists. The adolescent girl has not as yet acquired for her use any portion of the universal: hence it is her kingdom as a whole; when she takes possession of it, she also proudly takes possession of herself.
>
> . . . . . .

> At home, mother, law, customs, routine hold sway, and she would fain escape these aspects of her past; she would in her turn become a sovereign subject. But, as a member of society, she enters upon adult life only in becoming a woman;she pays for her liberation by an abdication. Whereas among plants and animals she is a human being; she is freed at once from her family and from the males--a subject, a free being. She finds in the secret places of the forest a reflection of the solitude of her soul and in the wide horizons of the plains a tangible image of her transcendence; she is herself this limitless territory, this summit flung up towards heaven; she can follow these roads that lead towards the unknown future, she will follow them; seated on the hilltop, she is mistress of all the world's riches, spread out at her feet, offered for the taking.2

But, if the impulse towards development and exploration of the self in unpopulated spaces is, as De Beauvoir says, the stronger in women because of their marginalisation in society and culture, women writers are then faced with the possibility of reinforcing the identification of woman with nature. And, if woman, and her body, are linked with the natural, and the natural is opposed to and seen as inferior to culture (and whatever is linked to it), then female characters in their association with nature may appear to have a status less than fully human.

This chapter will examine Lessing's shaping, in Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage, of the woman-nature link as it relates to female sexuality and motherhood. Again, as with the empty land myth, Lessing utilises but changes aspects of the dominant mythopoesis so as to serve the purposes of protest; in this chapter her protest against sexual (rather than racist) politics is emphasised.

The epigraph for the first of the four parts of Martha Quest is a quotation from Schreiner, "I am so tired of it, and also

tired of the future before it comes": Lessing announces her alignment with the first person to write from a subject position white, female, and oppositional in colonial Southern Africa. Like Schreiner she presents (with forceful intellect and imagination) a critique of political matters that includes the politics of gender, both writers exploring women's marginalization in culture and related problematic relationship with 'nature'.[3]

Lessing depicts Martha as having to contend with two dangers in the natural world. (Neither danger is related to the fact that Martha, being white, is threatened by 'Africa' intent upon revenge; but then, as pointed out in the previous chapter, Lessing's female protagonists are not intent of conquering and dominating land or people.) The first peril lies in the lure of dreamy sluggishness.

> [Martha] read the same books over and over again, in between intervals of distracted daydreaming, in a trance of recognition, and in always the same place, under the big tree that was her refuge, through which the heat pumped like a narcotic. She read poetry, not for the sense of the words, but for the melodies which confirmed the rhythm of the moving grasses and the swaying of the leaves over her head, or that ideal landscape of white cities and noble people which lay over the actual vistas of harsh grass and stunted trees like a golden mirage. (MQ 35)

Clearly, such wallowing is poor preparation for adulthood, and Martha herself realises she must begin to think and act.

Presented as far more problematic and more dangerous than solitary dreaming, however, is the threat to the prospects for

personal and social quest posed by the cultural identification of woman with nature, and the social expectations consequent upon such identification. In the bush Martha has found temporary relief from orthodox dogmas, including those relating to feminine sexuality; but, paradoxically, 'nature' as a cultural category also steers her toward heterosexual courtship, marriage, and motherhood.

The girl becomes aware of this "pressure" at the age of sixteen, at her first dance. The Van Rensberg's son, Billy, forces a kiss on her, causing her to think that "from outside--came the . . . pressure, which demanded that he should simply lift her and carry her off like booty--but to where? The red mud under the bushes?" (MQ 88) After the episode she notices that her skirt hem is "dragging heavy with red mud" (MQ 88). Lessing enlists the external factor of mud to evoke the influence of her culture's symbolic order. As in "The Old Chief Mshlanga," the narrative conveys both recognition that the way in which a certain phenomenon is perceived is enculturated, and yet partial acceptance of that perception. In the case of the short story the bush was perceived as fearsome; here, mud signifies a taint attached to the sexuality into which Martha has been initiated. Martha, however, scornful of conventional sexual morality, sees her offence as lying not in the carnal experience itself but in the corrupting effect of such knowledge on her sense of her own integrity. She has not resisted firmly enough the pressure to succumb to accepted forms of seduction.

Lessing charges the conventional symbol with the real (with Martha's rebellious thoughts and feelings, hidden from anyone but the reader), so as to register feminist protest. As she did with the empty land myth, she deploys a conventional scenario

(in this case, youthful courtship and seduction) and conventional symbols (here, boy, girl, dress, kiss, mud), so as to reshape her culture's mythopoesis.

The bourgeois western culture into which Lessing inserts her protest has, since the last century, approved of the feminine in a certain form. This dominant, 'good' version of the feminine has been dubbed the Angel in the House. The Angel's virtues, and those of Victorian middle-class marriage, were lauded at length in a series of poems Coventry Patmore entitled "The Angel in the House,"[4] while her destructive effects were first defined and condemned by Virginia Woolf, in 1923.[5] As the Angel's title indicates, she is domesticated woman, and her existence is explained by the accommodation of ambivalent attitudes to woman, and women, by means of the phenomenon of splitting off the 'good' feminine from the 'bad'. To the 'bad' woman is left the domain of Nature, and sexuality. The good woman--whose prototype in the Christian symbolic order is Mary, the mother of Christ, who is yet a virgin--does not normally, in her tameness and confinement, threaten man. This is left to her counterpart, Eve, the assertive, sexual woman who leads man to his doom.

A single verse of Patmore will show why Woolf should have viewed her as an offensive, dangerous exemplar:

> Her soul, that once with pleasure shook,
> Did any eyes her beauty own,
> Now wonders how they dare to look
> On what belongs to him alone;
> The indignity of taking gifts
> Exhilirates her loving breast;
> A rapture of submission lifts
> Her life into celestial rest;
> There's nothing left of what she was;
> Back to the babe the woman dies,
> And all the wisdom that she has

Is to love him for being wise.[6]

Woolf saw that not only were the distinctive qualities of the Angel--rapture in submission, devotion, self-denial, patience, receptivity, the dedication to pleasing--menacing to any creative life a woman might wish to lead--they were also highly useful to the British Empire.[7] Virtuous and spiritually elevated as she was, the Angel's function was to inspire, comfort, and sustain her man, providing for him and his children the refinements of mind, soul, and the hearth, so as to leave him free to carry out the arduous man's task of conquering the world and favouring it with English order and justice.

Woolf politicised the figure of the Angel in the House, and connected her with an imperial programme. So, too, did Conrad, in his critique of Europeans in Africa in The Heart of Darkness. Kurtz's Intended possesses to a formidable degree that devotedness to her man and his cause appropriate to a good wife; however, Conrad suggests that her loyalty has become perverted to the needs of her own ego. She sustains her sense of her own worth with high-minded but wilfully blind faith in Kurtz's cause, refusing to pick up any hint from Marlowe that he was anything less than a hero and a saint. So, her domestic habitat--white and grey, the colour of ashes--is deathly because infused with the lies that veil the corruption and cruelty of the colonizing enterprise. According to Conrad, then, the ideal female, too, has her sinister side: if the earthy whore corrupts the masculine spirit of heroism by binding it to base ends, the Angel connives at stifling the truth.

But Conrad's portrait of the Intended, ironised to protest

against the politically harmful role woman like her can and have played, adds to the store of western culture's misogyny without protesting, on behalf of women, against either the necessary ignorance following upon the narrowness of the domestic sphere or the taboo on a woman being 'disloyal' to her man.

Lessing (like Woolf) does protest. In her search for a meaningful existence in Southern Rhodesia that will include a worthy social role, Martha does her most intense battle with the Angel, who is embodied in her martyred mother and internalised by both Martha and Mrs. Quest through their culture:

> . . . [Martha] was of that generation who, having found nothing in religion, had formed themselves by literature. And the books which spoke most directly were those which had come out of Western Europe during the past hundred years, and of those, the personal and self-confessing.. . . [But] women in literature were still what men, or the men-women, wished they were. (PM 73)

Lessing understands from the inside, as Conrad does not, the formation of a middle-class women in order to conform with her approved role in the colonial enterprise.

Just as Conrad's 'good' woman provides a useful foil for highlighting Lessing's achievement, so does his 'bad' woman. The 'bad' woman at the heart of Conrad's dystopia is a jungle amazon, as at home in her habitat, the earth, untamed nature, as is the Intended in hers. Dripping bangles and beads, cruelly haughty, half-naked, dark-skinned, her description shot through with the red of passion and the black of death, she is a classic example of her type. Product of a masculine imagination, her

adventurousness, powerfulness, and sexual assertiveness are alluring but, above all, are deadly. And, like the Intended, she reflects and reinforces western culture's ambivalence about sexuality and women.

The Judaeo-Christian 'bad' woman, Eve, like the Virgin Mary, has assimilated attributes and titles of pagan goddesses. Peter Redgrove has traced the presence of an Eve-like figure, whom he calls the Black Goddess, in ancient religious cults and mythology through to contemporary art and literature. Neither her force nor her manifold manifestations have always been shunned, says Redgrove,[8] nor, one may add, has acknowledgement of the power of women, or of powerful women, always led to a split, into wicked witch and fairy godmother. The powerful woman has been worshipped as a giver of both pleasure and pain, as Kali in India, as the German fertility goddess Holda, or as the temperamental Greek goddesses.[9] (In terms of the Jungian model of psychic makeup, both the Angel and the Eve figures are aspects of the male psyche that are, in western culture, denied because deemed 'feminine', feared because linked to the irrational and untamed.)

Woman has been linked to the natural world by European male artists in a more benign way than is Conrad's amazon. She may, if the appeal is to profane instincts, be a buxom shepherdess, or, if the appeal is meant to be spiritual, appear as the Virgin Mother who is Star of the Sea--the single goddess-like being in the Christian pantheon. Thomas Hardy's Tess (1891) contains one famous example of the benign linking of woman and nature by a male writer. But Tess, who is as dewy and luscious as the blossoms on the hedgerows of South-West England, and as innocent, is a gentle nature goddess, both more and less than human. She falls, like

wheat, before the mechanical and the greedy. And, as with the mother of Christ, her female sexuality must be redeemed by her moral purity; still the cultural unease over women's sexuality and women's bodies influences the nature of the figure produced.

Such unease, since it is pervasive, is not unnaturally found in the writing of women, including Lessing, who, like her character Martha, formed herself by models found in West European literature. Consequently, 'mud' is linked by the narrative with the body and its sexuality, and all become potential betrayers of Martha's determination not to follow the feminine narrative into marriage and motherhood.

And yet, when alone in the veld, Martha was (granted the caution against too much solitary daydreaming) fortified. When lying under her customary tree, she had sensed its roots as "like a second spine" (MQ 16). She had also

> felt the rivers under the ground forcing themselves painfully along her veins, swelling them out in an unbearable pressure; her flesh was the earth, and suffered growth like a ferment; and her eyes stared, fixed like the eye of the sun. (MQ 62)

Free here of social expectations and constrictions Martha tastes to the full the ecstasy and pain of cosmic connectedness--as De Beauvoir suggests, women's exploration of nature may challenge the domination of the masculine order.

> The flesh is no longer a defilement: it means joy and beauty. At one with earth and sky, the young girl is . . . an organism rooted

> in the soil and in infinite consciousness, she is at once spirit and life; her being is imperious and triumphant like that of the earth itself.10

With underground "rivers" in her "veins" and "earth" for "flesh," Martha herself has become mud, which is a combination of water and earth. Further, Martha is neither a nature-goddess like Tess, nor is she, like the Angel, a woman who finds her virtue in restraint. Rather, the terms Lessing uses--which emphasise power, passion, sexuality: "swelling," "flesh," "growth," "fertility"--all portend, in their connection with female reproductive sexuality, a later 'mud' encounter when Martha and her swollen, pregnant body are held in a cycle that includes spume, slime, warmth, movement, primitive creatures, blood.

The episode occurs in A Proper Marriage when Martha and her friend Alice, who is also in late pregnancy (a peer, a sister, and not a mother or a mother-figure), run naked into the rain and grass. Shouting triumphantly, Martha leaps into a pothole in the veld, there to merge with "dots of life." The hole is filled with "heavy mud . . . and red thick water," which "[gapes] like a mouth, its red crumbling sides swimming with red water"; above it "the long heavy grass almost [meets]" (PM 153). The women have set off on the expedition as an act of defiance against their husbands. Both have been resenting their clumsy bodies as well as the boredom and confinement of pregnancy. After her insertion into the 'womb' of 'Mother Earth/Africa', Martha "[carries] her belly proudly . . . " (PM 154).

The earth of Southern Rhodesian is red; this is realistic enough. But the emphasis on the primitiveness of the forms of life in the 'ancient' continent suggests a Eurocentric perception

of the incident. (Martha's celebration of her pregnancy strongly recalls Anna's in The Rainbow (1915), when she dances alone--in denial of her husband Will--in front of a fire. The passing of a "crowd of labourers" along the road immediately after Martha and Alice get back to their car, in turn echoes Ursula's encounter with colliers after her brush with elemental and libidinal forces, the shape of a storm and charging horses, at the end of The Rainbow. Both groups of men are black and of an inferior class; popular belief has had it that working-class men, like black men, are exceptionally virile, and therefore pose a threat to the women of the superior class(es).[11] Both D. H. Lawrence and Lessing urge, in their fiction, the freer expression of sexual desire and energy. Yet they both also assign libidinal forces to social groups who, within their fictional, and real, worlds, occupy inferior social and economic positions. Simultaneously romanticising and dehumanising the black, or blackened, men, they leave sexual energy still ambiguous, and potentially threatening.)

When Martha inserts herself into the womb of Mother Earth in celebration of independent female fertility, the geographical locale may be southern African, but the symbolic context is European, and the passage itself is a suggestive moment in Lessing's encounter with the meaning of motherhood within western culture's patriarchal symbolic order.

Martha is set on evading the repetition of the lives of her parents and their generation, repetition symbolised in the rotations of a ferris wheel she looks at through her flat window at the start of A Proper Marriage (PM 31-33). When she leaves her parents' farm, she is fleeing the "[t]radition" of her mother's moralizing, the "ritual" of her father's illness, the "twin litanies" of her parents' suffering during the First World War (MQ

12, 32, 32). Especially is Martha afraid of becoming like her mother in her guise of "eternal mother," sad and long-suffering, nor does she wish to reproduce both herself and her mother through her daughter Caroline (MQ 32).

The fact that the narrator constantly conceptualizes Martha's dilemma in terms of time and repetition is intriguing when set alongside Kristeva's theorizing on the institution of motherhood in western culture.[12] In her influential essay entitled "Women's Time" (1979), Kristeva said that female subjectivity appears to be linked both to "cyclical" time (repetition) and to "monumental" time (eternity), at least in so far as both are ways of conceptualizing time from the perspective of motherhood, which entails reproduction through maternity. Many men, perhaps most men, wish to achieve perpetuity through their offspring, the point is that women are encouraged to see themselves as attaining their main and fullest identity, as women and as human beings, in motherhood. When they do become mothers, they enter a cycle in which they reproduce the self, and their mothers. "Historical" time, on the other hand, belongs to the world of public event, wars, peace treaties, changes in government, modulations in the economic and social order; in <u>this</u> world, which is controlled by men, time, conceptualised as following a chronology, is "linear."[13] The "linear" perspective on time, one observes, is modern, and dovetails with the modern notion of progress, that is, the belief that change brings improvement. In the older Judaeo-Christian worldview, all human activity took place within time schemes cyclic and eternal. It appears, then, that it is with the decline of traditional religion in the west and the consequent loss of a sense of the numinousness of the natural world, that the view of time as cyclic and monumental has become

"woman's" time.

For a woman to insert herself into "linear" time is to insert herself into the symbolic order, the Law of the Father, (and, says Kristeva, into language--and language is her particular concern--"considered as the enunciation of a sequence of words");[14] but the symbolic order of daily life in culture and society directs women to motherhood (and acceptance of their mother's life-pattern). The mudhole scene of A Proper Marriage appears to mark a point where Lessing celebrates "woman's time" as Kristeva describes it, and yet her protagonist will go on to reject the life as a woman that follows such conceptualisation of oneself and the scheme of things, in order to place herself in the world of public events, of "history." Fearing her own continued entrapment in a marginalised position, and that she will raise her daughter to similar marginalisation, Martha will leave her child, her husband, and her mother--all the social ties that might tie her to attaining perpetuity through repetition. Steedman urges recognition of the political implications of the refusal to mother,[15] and Martha refuses to mother in order not only to emancipate herself from wifely subservience but also to play a role in a new social order in Southern Rhodesia.

Martha goes even further, however, for, although she has drawn strength into her body from physical contact with the veld, she will set up rational resistance to her body and the veld, for the body's desires tempt her away from a nobler sense of self. While, therefore, a grounding in nature is characteristic of Martha's mystical experience in Martha Quest (is characteristic, in fact, of women's mystical experience of nature in western literature);[16] and, while in A Proper Marriage she energetically inserts herself into nature, after this novel

'mud' encounters, which, symbolically, imply attempted accommodation with black peoples as well as the Rhodesian landscape--belong (as was stated in the previous chapter) to male characters. But, yet another rejection is involved here.

A Proper Marriage is a highly detailed deconstruction of the mid-twentieth century ideology surrounding western bourgeois marriage and motherhood, its dogmas made even more constricting by a smalltown setting that offers no anchorage for any deviant longings. Against her culture's glorification of maternity, Lessing sets its reality, which, for her protagonist, includes a host of miseries, discomforts, and humiliations suffered when pregnant, in labour, and when raising a toddler (PM 18-22, 158-67). Setting the real in opposition to the symbolic, Lessing places in culture new understanding of women. She resists old definitions to negotiate new ones for femaleness.

Born in 1919 and raised between the two world wars, Lessing was in the vanguard of the revival of the women's movement that took place in the post-1945 period, after the movement's decline between the wars. By advancing a critique in the complex areas surrounding the constitution of woman--in her noblest and most prized incarnation--as mother, Lessing was tampering with some of western culture's most jealously guarded values. She did so at a time and in a place when (as Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage and her other African writing shows) any deviation from accepted behaviour was regarded as breaking ranks in the face of the threat of black revenge, and at a time when official versions of a woman's life, in literature and social science, ignored much about women's real experience.

Having set herself, as a writer, the conscious task of being a trailblazer--addressing colonialism in the Fifties, the sex war

in the Sixties, and, more recently, neglect of the aged in Thatcher's Britain--it is not surprising that Lessing is unsure of her ideal readership.[17] In the preface to the 1972 edition of The Golden Notebook, she speculated that her book might be among those that "are not read in the right way because they have skipped a stage of opinion, assume a crystallisation of information in society which has not yet taken place" (GN 9). And her contempt for critics is wellknown. For instance, in her interview with Bertelsen in 1984 she said:

> . . . my attitude as a writer is, well critics are bound to say something. Forgive me, but there are vast numbers of critics in the world and my attitude towards criticism is it is of no use to writers and of not much use to readers. It may be of use to other critics.18

Lessing's sense of her difficult mission as a pioneer together with her lack of confidence in her readers and critics, may have something to do with the narrator's attitude toward Martha. That attitude is ambivalent.

Another factor besides Lessing's lack of confidence in her readership accounts for the narrator's stance in relation to Martha. Martha, the reader's touchstone, is a fallible one; she knows and understands far less than the narrator, whose irony exposes the flaws in Martha's judgement consequent on her youthful desires and prejudices. Lessing neither chooses an older "I"-narrator (as in Villette or Great Expectations) to recount the career of and to judge a youthful self; nor does she use the more subjective stance of an "I"-narrator who appears at times to be

experiencing events as they happen, as in Jane Eyre. The reader cannot identify with an older, 'improved' version of the flawed protagonist, but is dependent upon the attitudes to Martha of a narrator, apparently more objective than even an older "I"-narrator could be, and with a perspective broader than any single character (including the protagonist) could possess. Yet, due to the autobiographical impression of the fiction, the reader may identify Lessing with both her narrator and Martha, so that the final impression may be of having read the revelations of an older version of the protagonist (who is much like the author).

Many biographical links between Lessing and Martha encourage readers to equate author and character. These links, forged through information in newspapers, magazines, and publishers' biographical sketches at the front of volumes, have made it common for readers to identify Lessing's own views, values, and psychology with those of both the narrator of the series and Martha. In the Bertelsen interview Lessing herself talked of Martha's career as her own. To Bertelsen's remark: "It . . . interests me that I keep talking about 'Martha' and you talk about yourself. Perhaps it's easier that way?" Lessing responded, "Well, it's easier."[19] And, shortly afterward:

> In Landlocked there is a strong sense of outer activity and inner deadness.
> Lessing: Well it was the worst time of my life.20

Overall, the five novels of the Children of Violence series conveys the sense of a writer writing about her own recent past.

Much of the narrator's discourse is evaluative rather than

representational, and she is highly active in transmitting to the reader appropriate attitudes to adopt toward Martha and her Zambesian milieu. When the reader is invited to view Martha in an ironic light, this invitation is frequently transmitted through the narrator's words (rather than through manipulation of plot events or comment by other characters). These, for instance, are the narrator's words after Martha, having resolved to do so, surrenders her virginity to Adolph King, the ironically-named Jew despised by the golden girls and boys of the town's Sports Club:

> . . . she arranged the facts of what was occurring to fit an imaginative demand already framed in her mind. Nor was she disappointed. For if the act fell short of her demand, that ideal, the-thing-in-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. And since this was what she demanded, the man himself seemed positively irrelevant--this was at the bottom of her attitude, though she did not know it. (MQ 202)

No outright dislike of the protagonist emerges, as it does in The Grass is Singing, yet there is, as is so often the case in Lessing's work, a punitive attitude. Mary Turner, an unworthy quester after a sense of belonging in her body and in the world, must die. Chennells is correct when he says that Dick's genuine love of the land is contrasted with Mary's "facile pastoral impulses" and their citified roots;[21] but Mary is, nevertheless, a scapegoat at the centre of a wasteland

constructed by her author. And Mary's story overwhelms Dick's. The dystopian strains in Lessing's writing do have their counterpart in the utopian imaginings of Martha Quest, but the hopeful visions have a feebler, ironised life: critique is intent on crushing desire. Further, when the seething, vengeful life of 'Africa' takes shape as the demonic/black man who invades Mary Turner's house/body to stab/rape her with a weapon supplied by the "bush," and when, in an anti-Eden, Mary (an anti-madonna) dies in a scene that parodies a primeval coupling (in the heart of ancient Africa), Lessing is channelling her critique by means of punishment of a protagonist who has no public and almost no private authority, a protagonist who, as the narrative preceding the final chapter of the novel shows, is herself a victim.[22] Martha, although she fights a better fight, does so with far less public success than her creator. Written into these portraits is hatred of the self not only as white coloniser, but also as a woman, and hatred, too, of one's female body. The source of this self-hatred is an interiorization of western culture's misogyny.

Despite the narrator's sympathy for and affinity with Martha's youthful strivings, despite the wry, ironic humour, there is also angry condemnation and a dissociation of sympathy. The narrator half rejects this young girl who will allow herself to drift into marriage and motherhood, a rejection mirrored in Martha's physical flight from the environment of youth, from the land, and from her body. In its turn Martha's flight mirrors Lessing's own. The narrator's condemnation and desire to punish, are directed also at the writer's younger, morally feebler self. Fairly fresh from the struggle against Rhodesia's racist society and the patriarchal values that underpin it, Lessing is anxious to dissociate herself from past errors.

In the volumes that follow A Proper Marriage, Ripple and Landlocked, Martha's dilemma over motherhood is bracketed, set aside, until The Four-Gated City. In London, Martha takes on extensive responsibilities that include, in an ironic development, assisting in the raising of children; then, in the futuristic coda to the novel, she helps to nurture the child survivors of a nuclear holocaust that has devastated the globe. Martha therefore undertakes mothering rather than maternity or the raising of her own children; she is also more successful at it than are the biological mothers of the adolescents in the Coldridge circle. Here Lessing challenges such ideas as: raising the children one has borne is the 'natural' task for a woman, and, biological mothers are the best nurturers of their children. Mothering, she suggests, is a social activity; its nurturant functions need not be confined to adults and children related by biological or legal ties. Indeed, on the level of personal relations, the tie between adult and child becomes less 'harmful' to both because free of the "deep, driving egotism of maternity" (PM 27

Motherhood as maternity and nurturing are central in The Summer Before the Dark (1973), The Good Terrorist (1985), and The Fifth Child (1988) (in which a woman sacrifices everything, including her marriage and her ties with her other children, for a single, biological child). In The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974), D., like the Martha of The Four-Gated City, shelters an adolescent girl who is not her own child in a collapsing urban environment. In a switch of obligations, Jane Somers, in If Only the Old Could (1984), cares for an older woman, as a redemptive act for neglecting her mother when she was dying. Jane is the first daughter, among Lessing's protagonists, to wish to atone for her treatment of her mother, and to be redeemed. Redemption is,

however, by proxy, as it was for Martha, and for D. Lessing's persistent interest in nurturing, mothering, is perhaps her way of acknowledging that the world cannot do without the specific attributes women (have been socialised to) contribute. The self-sacrificing virtues demanded of women have, with good reason, been viewed with wariness by western feminist scholars, social scientists, and others who, like Lessing and Woolf, are concerned with the wellbeing of women; but empathy and self-sacrifice are not in themselves undesirable characteristics. On the contrary, they are among the highest human qualities. As are other 'feminine', 'motherly' qualities like compassion, receptivity to the needs of others, and tolerance of their weakness.

If, therefore, Lessing deconstructs the terms 'mother' and 'mothering', she does not, finally, go so far as to suggest the desirability of discarding entirely the social practice of women nurturing children, a practice which, eventually, is accommodated with (indeed, becomes part of Martha's) social quest. With the advantage of hindsight, a critic pinpoints absences. Lessing proposes, through Martha's career, neither the raising of children in community structures nor parenting as a responsibility shared equally by father and mother. Further, although she begins to do both, she does not sustain in Children of Violence either a positive link between the female body and nature or a challenge to her culture's unease over female sexuality by way of rehabilitating the female body. Margaret Atwood is just one writer working within the western cultural tradition who has done both. In Surfacing (1972) her protagonist immerses herself in the Canadian wilderness, regressing even to an animal-like state, to emerge stronger in mind and body. She welcomes her pregnancy as a sign of her own regeneration and as a tie with the community

she will become part of once she returns to the city. In other words, she combines her personal and social quests with motherhood. Further, not only does nature fortify Atwood's protagonist for her return into society, the novel stresses the dependence of humans in society upon a natural world which they are fast destroying.

If Martha's and D.'s version of mothering transforms the combination of cyclic repetition and eternity into continuity within the life of the community ('history'), so dissolving any irreconcilability between 'woman's' time and the linear variety, the same is true of Atwood's protagonist. Except that Atwood includes the experience of maternity. Lessing makes of Martha's desertion of her daughter Caroline a political gesture, and protests against the overlaying of biological femaleness with socialised femininity, in particular as it leads to maternity (and, for Lessing, necessarily to exclusion from the world of public events). Atwood, despite a rationalist inheritance and despite the depradations of the consumer culture on the wilderness of which she writes, includes (possibly because she was born twenty years after Lessing into a social climate more supportive of democratic institutions than was colonial Rhodesia) maternity and motherhood as reasons for affirming the value of women's bodies.[23]

In Martha Quest, Lessing rewrites the woman-nature link in relation to female sexuality so as to protest against the narrow lines of feminine destiny. In A Proper Marriage Lessing places within her culture those activities traditionally regarded as feminine (and therefore less important than masculine activities), such as pregnancy and childbirth, and simultaneously registers protest at the 'betrayal' by a woman's body that leads her into

such activities. Engaging with the veld, Martha is striving to fulfill desires for Edenic recovery, but she also desires insertion into culture and society. While the land is a space where female fertility is celebrated through symbol, the rational discourse of the narrative takes over to reject maternity; in order to insert herself into culture, Lessing's protagonist must assert her difference from nature.

Lessing's unease over the cultural equation of land/woman/mother plays a part in Martha's flight from sinking her hands into the 'mud' of engaging with life in Southern Rhodesia, and the 'mud' of her own body. Lessing rebels against the constrictions attached to femininity, to write a female version of the patriarchal rejection of the woman's body, and of mothers, as a source of temptation distracting from higher aims. In the fiction, as in Lessing's life, it is a daughter who is deserted. What is not written into the fiction, as a feature problematic or otherwise of a modern woman's progress toward self-realisation, is the fact that in real life Lessing continued to rear her son Peter. This is not to imply, impertinently, that Lessing ought to have included all important details in her autobiographical fiction, but to draw attention to the potential significance of what she chose to include and to omit. We recall, too, that in Martha's imaginary four-gated, golden city, it is fathers who benignly preside (MQ 17). Only in the allegorical world of The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five (1980) will Lessing envision a happy world (Zone Three) presided over by mothers. In Marriages, too, she finally celebrates woman as wife and mother within an extended partnership--although even then she does so with some qualification--the partners exchanging with each other some of the polarised qualities of gender.[24] Allowing

Al.Ith and Ben Ata some freedom to move between the static symbolic positions of masculine and feminine, Lessing takes further the deconstruction of the cultural meaning of gender she began in Martha Quest and A Proper Marriage.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Driver, "'Woman'as Sign in the South African Colonial Enterprise," Journal of Literary Studies 4.1 (1988): 17; and Cf. David Bunn, on "the interrelationship of landscape, ideology, and subjectivity," in "Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance in Colonial Fiction," English in Africa 15.1 (1988): 1. The "Freudian argument for [seeing the maternal garden as part of a nexus of universal mythic wishes] is best put forth," says Kolodny, in pages 246 to 247 of Herbert Marcuse's, Eros and Civilization (1955; reprint ed., New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961), Kolodny 161, n. 7.

[2] De Beauvoir 385, 386.

[3] See Ruth First and Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner (London: Andre Deutsch, 1980), on Schreiner's illness and unhappiness "as an expression of the split between her sense of her own needs and the reality of what was possible for women in the cultures in which she lived" (23). See also 19, 67-68, 115-16, 132, 137-38, 335-36.

[4] Coventry Patmore dedicated these odes to his first wife, Emily Augusta Andrews, who died in 1862: Cf. Patmore, Poems Introd. Basil Champneys (1886; London: George Bell and Sons, 1906) xxvi.

[5] Cf. Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," in The Death of the Moth and Other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1945) 148-50. Cf. also Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York, 1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Machine (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Elaine Showalter,

"Killing the Angel in the House: The Autonomy of Women Writers," Antioch Review 32.3 (1978): 339-53; and Elisabeth Badinter, The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct Trans. R. de Garis. (Paris, 1980; London: Souvenir Press, 1981).

[6] This verse is also quoted in Eva Figes, Patriarchal Attitudes (London: Virago, 1981) 107.

[7] Cf. Woolf 150.

[8] Peter Redgrove, The Black Goddess and the Sixth Sense (London: Paladin/Grafton, 1989) 117.

[9] Cf. Redgrove 117. Redgrove's catalogue of manifestations of the black goddess when she is rejected is intriguing for what it reveals about attitudes to eroticism and female sexuality: the "baby-killer" Lilith was known through the world as "Dame Donkey Legs," "Vixen Bogy," "Blood Sucker," "Woman of Harlotry," "Alien Woman," "Impure Female," "End of All Flesh," "End of Day," witch, hag, "snatcher," and enchantress (117). These are just some of the names.

[10] De Beauvoir 387.

[11] For Lawrentian echoes in The Grass is Singing see E. S. Hunter, "The Mother-Daughter Conflict in Selected Works by Doris Lessing," diss. U of Cape Town, 1985, 54, 66 n. 18.

[12] Cf. Kristeva, "Women's Time," in Moi (ed.), Kristeva 187-213.

[13] Kristeva 188.

[14] Kristeva 188.

[15] Cf. Steedman 84, 85-86, 88, 90.

[16] Cf. Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Brighton, England: Harvester, 1982) 17, 20, 21, 23, 74, 102, 160; and Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion (San Francisco: Harper and Row,

1979) 11-12.

[17] In the introduction to the 1972 paperback edition of The Golden Notebook Lessing says that "nobody so much as noticed" a "central theme" of mental breakdown as a path to healing. Instead, says Lessing, "the book was instantly belittled, by friendly reviewers as well as by hostile ones, as being about the sex war, or was claimed by women as a useful weapon in the sex war" (8).

[18] Bertelsen 96.

[19] Bertelsen 109.

[20] Bertelsen 110.

[21] Chennells 35.

[22] Cf. Hunter, "The Mother-Daughter" 53-60.

[23] Attitudes to liberation for women insofar as motherhood is concerned vary widely according to the circumstances within countries and cultures. For an Afro-American celebration of women's bodies see Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982), and her formulation of 'womanism' in In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1983) xi-xii. In South Africa, black women struggle not to shed responsibility for their children but to defend their families against the depradations of the apartheid state. In mainland China, strict implementation of the rule that each family has only one child in order to restrict population growth has made it a cherished privilege to have, and raise, a child.

[24] Cf. Hunter, "The Mother-Daughter" 110-111, 118-119, 121-122, 123-25, 128-131. And Cf. Marriages 175, 189, 191, 226-27.

CHAPTER 5

DORIS LESSING: GOING HOME

In previous chapters it was noted that Lessing reworks settler mythopoesis, and in some ways reinforces it. Noted, too, were significant gaps in the fiction representing Martha Quest's career: for instance, Lessing neither depicts the peoples of Rhodesia as engaged in a continuing political and economic struggle nor envisages for well-intentioned whites the possibility of citizenship in a country freed of white domination.

Writing as 'Doris Lessing', however, in Going Home, the account of her return visit to Rhodesia in 1956, she fills in some of the gaps in Children of Violence.[1] In Going Home, published in 1957, Southern Rhodesia is more recognisably itself than in her novels: like the setting for her African short stories, it is a country of farms, towns, and mines, within a geographical area both more expansive and more detailed in the variety of its features than the "Zambesia" mediated by either Martha Quest's (or Mary Turner's) perception and experience. Lessing records her impressions and assessments as she travels about, meets political personages, interviews white officials and black activists, observes trade union meetings, talks to acquaintances old and new. As the narrative moves to and fro in time, events in the present set off recall of the writer's past, and remembered places, incidents, moods provide a ground for

comparison with and analysis of the present. The reader is left with the impression of having had a brief glimpse of activities and lives that will continue beyond the author's account, and, importantly, will continue to some purpose. Furthermore, although Lessing clearly believed the Central African Federation was bound to fail, as it in fact did, the reader is allowed to see that it was possible for whites to play a useful part in the country's development.

In Children of Violence, then, Lessing explores, through narrator and character, the process of a fierce struggle to break free of the ties of place, people, and family. The fiction presents the 'argument' for leaving, with its contrary tensions: criticism and deconstruction work against the feebler attractions of an African utopia; the effort to insert oneself into Africa, the soil and the people, is set against the pull towards a more cosmopolitan world, exemplified by the Polish Jew Thomas Stern and membership of the Communist Party. Going Home, part personal reminiscence, part political journalism, presents, on the other hand, and with a fonder eye, what has already been escaped from. And here Going Home differs also from the short stories. If the journalistic sections of Going Home reveal the pressure of politics, exerting pressure on the entire narrative, is the fact that Lessing is, in Jenny Taylor's words, a "successful novelist writing in England," with Africa "the structuring absence"; and, 'Africa' as structuring absence exerts its most noticeable pressure in the nostalgic passages in which Lessing allows herself, as herself, to luxuriate in her attachment to bush and farm, now that she has left them behind (GH 97-98).[2] Southern Rhodesia is acknowledged as 'home'--yet Lessing 'goes', does not 'come' home, indicating that she will leave once again; and,

once again, her implied audience, and the site of meaning itself, lie not in Rhodesia but in England.

Taylor notes the variable subject position from which Lessing writes in Going Home: Lessing

> employs different discursive conventions and transgresses a range of generic boundaries: autobiography, political analysis and commentary, journalistic reportage, travelogue. Narrative time is broken up and narrative perspective fractured; the authorial persona is now dreamer, now historical authority, now political analyst, now poet, now object of surveillance, now witness.3

The fragmentation of the narrative in Going Home reflects, adds Taylor, a political and cultural crisis not solely Lessing's own.[4] The larger crisis pertains to the leftwing attack upon Britain's imperial tradition. However, even the 'personal' aspect of the crisis recorded in Going Home is linked to literary (and therefore cultural) dilemmas of "authorial identity, committed writing and political stance."[5] It is with these dilemmas, in particular as they relate to the concept 'home', that this chapter is concerned.

Having arrived in Salisbury, Lessing feels "for the first time . . . really at home" only when she gets out of the town, into the "bush" (GH 37). Here, familiar stimuli to her sense of sight, smell, and, above all, sound, arouse in her a sensation of belonging:

> . . . the Southern Cross on a slant overhead; the moon a clear, small pewter; the stars all

> recognizable and close. The long grass . . . giving off its dry, sweetish smell.. . . It was the small intimate talking of the crickets which received me and made me part of that night-scape. (GH 37)

Africa 'speaks' to her; she is "received," made "part of" the bush: this is what Martha attains, at the start of Martha Quest, under her tree: both a sense of possibilities and the comfort of being contained--intimations of a maternal "embrace" alternative to that offered by the rejected mother Mrs. Quest. However, at this point, the narrative connects the embrace of nature with her parent's farmhouse, for it was "made direct of the stuff of soil and grass and tree" (GH 38).

For this moment, Lessing feels "effortlessly and at once in immediate intimacy with the soil and its creatures," and, if she "had had to fly back to England the next day," she would "have been given what [she] had gone home for," because

> to stand there with the soft dust of the track under my shoes, the crickets talking in my ear, the moon cold over the bush, meant I was able to return to that other house. (GH 38)

Yet, she never does visit the farm or the site of the house itself.

For Martha, the bush, the farm, and the (farm)house, as both reality and symbol, are linked to her sense of belonging, and, paradoxically, also her sense of alienation. So the city--symbolic crystallisation of the utopian hopes Martha absorbed

from literature--is overlaid on an 'empty' Rhodesian landscape. While, therefore, in the bush she gains the solitude to figure, free of social expectations, her idyllic visions, the landscape is also a reminder to her of the lack of congruity between her childhood environment and her enculturation in the European tradition. The house, too, an important and related element that is used to indicate Martha's state of being-in-the-world, carries--unsurprisingly in view of the fact that Martha's is a story in which a state of inner exile becomes overlaid with physical exile--a burden of ambivalent associations.

In the course of Children of Violence the house gains a charge of metaphoric meaning in relation to the central metaphor of quest, (images of city and house interacting with each other: while Martha's utopian city indicated, in abstract form, the girl's ambitions to shape an ideal society, the house of her psyche enlarges as she grows in understanding and experience, to the point where she imaginatively apprehends--but in deconstructed form, the original utopian vision breaking open and breaking down--the real, imperfect city of London). In two passages in Landlocked, for instance, the house image is used to indicate stages in Martha's psychic development:

> [Martha's] dream at this time, the one which recurred, like a thermometer, or gauge, from which she could check herself, was of a large house, a bungalow, with half-a-dozen different rooms in it, and she, Martha (the person who held herself together, who watched, who must preserve wholeness through a time of dryness and disintegration) moved from one room to the next, on guard. These rooms, each furnished differently, had to be kept separate . . . if she did not--well, her dreams told her what she might expect. The house crumbled drily under her eyes into a pile of dust, broken brick, a jut of ant-eaten rafter, a slant of rusting

> iron. And then, while she watched, the ruin changed: it was the house of the kopje, collapsed into a mess of ant-tunnelled mud, ant-consumed grass, where red ant-made tunnels wove a net, like red veins, over the burial mound of Martha's soul, over the rotting wood, rotting grass, subsiding mud; and bushes and trees, held at bay so long (but only just, only very precariously) by the Quests' tenancy, came striding in, marching over the fragments of substance originally snatched from the bush, to destroy the small shelter for the English family that they had built between teeming earth and brazen African sky. (L 21)

> . . . the dream . . . moved back in time, or perhaps forward--she did not know; and was no longer the shallow town house of thin brick, and cement and tin, no longer the farm house of grass and mud but was tall rather than wide, reached up, stretched down, was built layer on layer, but shadowy above and below the mid-area . . . 'comprising six or so rooms' for which this present Martha was responsible.. . . (L 21)

In Going Home Lessing keeps memory and reality, like Martha's psychic rooms, apart from each other, "separate." Taylor comments:

> It has become a commonplace, even a truism, of Lessing criticism to point to the forcefulness of [the] process of disintegration as the first stage of reconstruction [of Lessing's position as an 'African' writer], and to trace this back to the archetypal collapse of the house on the veld--that tenuous citadel of white settlerdom. But ironically, in Going Home that scene . . . is once more not so much absent as invented and reinvented through the willed transformation of the dream; through the replacement of memory by desire.. . .6

The barrier to returning has nothing to do with rationally-

held scruples:-

> Africa belongs to the Africans; the sooner they take it back the better. But--a country also belongs to those who feel at home in it, Perhaps it may be that the love of Africa the country will be strong enough to link people who hate each other now. Perhaps. (GH 10-11)

The continent (rather than "country") of Africa is vast and composed of many political entities; "the Africans" consist of a wide variety of peoples.[7] Yet the point Lessing is making is clear. Her response to questions of the sort posed rhetorically by Trinh, ". . . where should the dividing line between insider and outsider stop? How should it be defined? By skin color, by language, by geography, by nation, or by political affinity?"[8]--would at this time have been that, even though she could not live in it, and even though she was white, she felt "at home" in, "love[d]" Southern Rhodesia.

Yet, despite her emotional tie with the country, and despite the connection she feels she has with the bush--both of which appear to be forms of permission to return--she cannot visit the house.

> One of the reasons I wanted to go home was to drive through the bush to the kopje and see where the house had been. But I could not bring myself to do it. (GH 55)

In the Banket District, and by now even closer to the farm, she

records:-

> 'Yes,' I said, turning the car sharply over the glittering hot railway lines, 'now I must certainly go and see how the hill where the house used to be rises empty and bush-covered from the mealie-fields.' But I did not go.
>
> (GH 208-209)

Lessing's avoidance of return to the site of the "first house," leads Taylor to say that as a result the past becomes "a collection of pasts," perceived "from the standpoint of an unstable present"--that "first house" having "crumbled," all houses except the house on the kopje "will always be wrong" (GH36)--and so does not "lead in an invitable teleological progression into the present, but is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted."[9]

Steedman suggests that this is not, in fact, an unusual way for a significant dream of childhood to function. Describing a childhood dream crucial to her, her "understanding" of which "built up in layers over a long period of time,"[10] Steedman says

> The only evidence that [this] dream offers is the feeling of childhood--all childhoods, probably--the puzzlement of the child watching . . . wondering what's going on, what they, the adults, are up to, what they want from you, and what they expect you to do. It is evidence in this way, because as an area of feeling it is brought forward again and again to shape responses to quite different events. Memory alone cannot resurrect past time, because it is memory itself that shapes it, long after historical time has passed.11

Lessing chooses to hold onto her dream, her vision, and the "area of feeling" involved, reconstructing the object of her desire, the farm and its house, through willed imagination; and she volunteers a reason for not returning: "Supposing," she says, "that the house was still there after all?" (GH 55). Even after seven years in England, ways of perceiving and understanding that she learned in childhood threaten to subvert her writing of her story in terms of her hard-won, maturer, achieved vision.

The memory of the house, if not its reality, is invaluable, as is indicated by Lessing's discussion of two recurring dreams she used to have. One dream is of the "collapse and decay" of the "first house" itself, the second is a "terrible" dream she used to have "about Cape Town" (GH 56). In this second dream--an "exact repetition of what [she] once saw, awake"--cloud spilled over Table Mountain, to cover the city.[12] Both city and house, places of human habitation and culture, had to be "restored" in her mind in opposition to overwhelming natural forces:

> For a long time I used to dream of the collapse and decay of that house, and of the fire [that finally destroyed it] sweeping over it; and then I set myself to dream the other way. It was urgently necessary to recover every detail of that house. (GH 55)

> . . . when this dream [of Cape Town] began to recur . . . I first restored the house, and then forced the mist back, rolled it back off the city and the sea and the lighted ships and back through the gap in the mountains. It took

> a long time, but at last the city was free and illuminated again. (GH 57)

Kolodny says that the concept "home" is typically understood as we move through life in terms of "larger and larger perceptual configurations":

> The progress from infancy to adulthood, in fact, may be seen in part as a progress through larger and larger perceptual configurations of "home"--from the maternal embrace to the neighborhood, to a country, a continent, indeed, to whatever we finally believe comprised by that sometimes ambiguous phrase, "the world." When the childhood experience has not been pathogenic, the world visualized as one's home takes on the positive elements of what were previously the parameters of the original home, the maternal embrace (or even, perhaps, the womb). Hence, our need to see the world as rich with pleasure, comfort, gratifications, and easily available means to self-fulfilment.13

Lessing's autobiographical fiction evokes a childhood dominated by the sense of the emotional and physical fragility of her parents. They and others of their generation become the "children" of the "violence" of the twentieth-century. The health of the fathers was undermined during the First World War; the mothers were frustrated and unhappy. As families they were short of vitality, joy, hope, and money.[14]

The early sense of the world as a threatening place was "brought forward," as the child grew in consciousness, to "shape responses"--to the ramshackle construction of the house (which in turn is used as a metaphor for the psyche and the body), and to

the tenuousness of the hold of European 'civilisation'. (The Quest's piano is no longer in tune; in reality as well as dream white ants burrow their way into the structures of the house. In actual fact, invasion by plants and insects does follow very fast upon neglect of human habitations in the warm, fertile zones of the earth, and the Quest house, intended to last only a few seasons but the family's dwellingplace for twenty years, was constantly in a state of disintegration and repair (GH 41-42, 54-55).)

Drawing on memory and controlled imagination Lessing was able to reconstruct the house (and the city of Cape Town) on her own terms, the mind maintaining a rational defence against terrors emanating from the natural world. These terrors are a compound of a generalised fear that humankind feels in the face of the elements and of a more specific (and Eurocentric) fear of the revenge that the 'old' continent and its black peoples might take upon white colonials. Willed "transformation" became, then, a necessary, rational defence against the intrusions of those aspects of the childhood worldview that were half-consciously recognised as cruder and unenlightened and which now, upon the writer's return, make their potency felt.

At the same time, and paradoxically, willed "transformation" of the past has enabled her to sustain the vital part, the heart, of her childhood worldview. Lessing surveyed the farm and its year from her "own room," the one place which, even when the rest of the house faded, remained "clear" in her mind (GH 55). "This cycle [of the seasons] I watched from my bedroom door, when I was not absorbed by what went on in the room itself" (GH 47). Her room, distinct, familiar, alive with creatures and plants the penetrated walls and floor--part of a house now remembered

affectionately "as a rather old, shaggy animal" (GH 42)--constituted the author's first subjective perspective on the world (GH 43, 47-48, 51-54). By not returning, she can protect the eye of childhood, its innocence (in its lack of judgement and limited scope), its fearless wonder, its joyous sense of harmony. Sustaining the creative power of the childhood eye, Lessing also protects (perhaps unconsciously) her imaginative powers from her rational powers.

Despite and in opposition to the analytic, dissecting, deconstructing drive of the committed realist,[15] journalist, and socialist, Lessing writes, in Going Home, a tribute to the mythic imagination and to the myths it creates. And she inscribes in this work yet another strategy for protection of her creative identity, again by means of the concept "home" in relation to the "first house" (as structuring absence). Not only does she withhold herself from contact with the site of the real farmhouse of childhood, she also claims, not to belong anywhere. In none of the "over sixty different houses, flats and rented rooms" in which she has lived since leaving the farmhouse has she felt at home (GH 37). Further, she claims to prefer things this way, to be able to tolerate only the anonymity of blocks of flats: "in order to find a place I live in tolerable, I have not to see it"; only then can she keep at bay "a terrible feeling of insecurity and improbability" (GH 37). "The fact is," she says, "I don't live anywhere; I never have since I left that first house on the kopje," and the pathos of her condition--and any suspicion of self-pity--she deflects with the words "I suspect more people are in this predicament than they know" (GH 37).

As Steedman says, however, a house for those without one is more than "the place of undifferentiated and anonymous desire . . .ma

desirable [as in a fairytale] because someone wants [it],"[16] a house is "valuable in itself because of what it [represents] of the social world: a place of safety, wealth and position, a closed door, a final resting place."[17] Lessing chose, in 1956 at least, to do without this security.

In Going Home, home/(farm)house/city as metaphor and reality reveal more about being white and English in Southern Rhodesia than about being female. Lessing is both insider and outsider, in relation to both England and Rhodesia. She writes from within the English leftwing tradition, which was during the Fifties firmly anti-colonial; at the same time, she writes as an ex-colonial, with firsthand knowledge of Rhodesia, and of Britain's colonial past. The position she holds as "an African writer" is, as Taylor says, paradoxical, in that she holds it "by explicitly subverting but implicitly confirming an essentially Eurocentric perception of Africa."[18] It is possible, however, particularly since Lessing's fiction consistently views the constructs of gender as highly problematic, that her adopting of a subject position of permanent exile was due somewhat less to her English-ness and whiteness than to her femaleness. Here, Nancy Walker's study of the autobiographical work of three women writers, Emily Dickinson, Alice James, and Virginia Woolf is helpful.

Common to the autobiographical writing of all three is, says Walker, the assumption of a position of social exile.[19] They assumed such a position either through "illness or physical removal from ordinary society," and, Walker adds, both "the fact of illness" and of "physical removal" are "linked ... to the concept of place, which is in turn related to the mind and the process of thought."[20] Social exile offered these writers the benefits of relief from the usual domestic responsibilities, so

gaining them the time and opportunity in which to write, and, at the same time, their outsider status was a way of deflecting any criticism that their presumptuousness, as women, in speaking their minds might draw upon them. Women in western culture, due to their socialisation, are far more susceptible than men to anxiety regarding social approval or censure.

Removal of oneself through illness was a strategy more common in the nineteenth-century (and is one Martha explicitly rejects). Lessing chose "physical removal" from Southern Rhodesian, and then, in Going Home, psychological removal from her dwelling-places in London. The position of permanent homelessness held certain advantages for Lessing: as a woman who, like her protagonist Martha, had deserted a daughter, she might have welcomed the shield of social rootlessness; as an exile from her past home, she could reconstruct Southern Rhodesia in accordance with her "mind"; in her new home, London, as an outsider-in-residence she could assume the status of a critic more objective than those who belonged. As someone who does not "live anywhere" she could even claim to have a privileged view (akin somewhat to overarching omniscience) on the world.[21]

Lessing records in Going Home strategies for protecting her imagination self, yet she does not give it full utterance in work like Children of Violence, where her vision is trimmed to fit her commitment to a realist programme.[22] Later in her career, however, she will venture beyond the conventional bounds of realism into, for instance, the psychic journeying of Briefing for a Descent into Hell (1971), The Summer Before the Dark (1973), and The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974), and into the worlds

of her space fiction in the Canopus in Argos: Archives series (1979-82).

Her formal changes have corresponded to changes in the social and cultural climate in the west. The social upheavals of the Sixties and Seventies led to emphasis on the desireability of realism in imaginative writing so as to voice the lives and concerns of disempowered groups, including women; meanwhile leftwing literary criticism and theory in Britain and North America were dominated by ideas derived from the teachings of Karl Marx and his followers. By the Eighties, however, the realisation had grown of the importance and uses of non-realist modes, including science fiction and fantasy.[23]

Lessing cherished, in 1956, a subject position, unrestricted by country, race, or gender, which gave both spur and edge to her creativity. It is likely that by now, after forty years in London--where she has achieved "wealth and position"--she no longer feels she does not live anywhere; yet she has continued, in, for instance, The Good Terrorist (1985) and The Fifth Child (1988), to write of the impossibility of structuring, or sustaining, home and a family. The condition of homelessness still dogs her protagonists.

NOTES

[1] Jenny Taylor, "Memory and Desire on Going Home: The Deconstruction of a Colonial Radical," in Bertelsen 59. Writing with the voice of 'Doris Lessing', the author is, in terms of the conventions of autobiography (and journalism), identifiable with her narrator. Since this is so, I refer to the "I"-narrator as "Lessing." The distance between narrator and narrattee is closer, more intimate than in any fiction, and the implicit contract between Lessing and her audience is that the latter will finish Going Home having acquired a more concrete sense of the selected particularities that move the real-life person Doris Lessing.

[2] Despite their nostalgia, the descriptions of the farmland and farm life are written with more particularity than in Children of Violence. Free of her oppositional programme, Lessing writes, for instance, as follows:

> The stones on the kopje [on which the house was built "high"] were not of the quartz which cropped up all over the farm, but tended to be flattened and layered, and were brown, a light, bright brown, and when they were wet with rain, yellowish. To the touch they were smooth and velvety, because of the dust surface. Such a stone I used to prop my door open, so that I could look down on the hawks that hung over the fields, and watch them turn and slide down the currents of air with their stretched wings motionless. The great mountain ten miles off was the chrome mountain, scarred all over with workings; and it was part of the chain of hills and peaks over which the sun rose. The big field below the house was a mealie field. Newly ploughed it was rich reddish-brown, a sea of great, tumbling clods. From the path which ran along its edge, the field showed a pattern of clods that had fallen over from the ploughshares one after another, so that walking slowly beside it avenues opened and shut, lanes of sunlight and shadow. And each clod was like a rock, for the interest of its shape and

> colour: the plough-share cutting smooth through the hard soil left a clean, shining surface, iridescent, as it if had been oiled with dark oil.
>
> And sometimes, from the height of the house, looking down, these clean, shared surfaces caught the sun all over the field at the same moment so that a hundred acres of clods glittered darkly together, flashing off a sullen light; and at such times the hawks swerved off, high and away, frightened. (GH 43-44)

In "The Old Chief Mshlanga," too, the "great red clods" of a "mealie field that had been newly ploughed" show "fresh and tumbling to the vlei beyond, like a choppy red sea" (CM 15), but here texture, as well as the colour and shape, of clods and stones, are noted with more precision than in the short stories or the novels.

[3] Taylor 55-56.

[4] Taylor 57-58, 63.

[5] Taylor 56.

[6] Taylor 63.

[7] Lessing would have been well-served by an editor alert to her sometimes clumsy constructions, as in the following sentence: "What Partnership is actually doing is to give a few privileges, raising the standards of a minority of Africans above their fellows, without altering the basic structure of segregation, which is identical with that of the Union, in the slightest (GH 89, emphasis in original).

[8] Trinh 75.

[9] Taylor 57.

[10] Steedman 28.

[11] Steedman 29.

[12] This dense cloud, brought by the prevailing south-easterly wind, is Cape Town's famed "tablecloth."

[13] Kolodny 152.

[14] Cf. Lessing, "Impertinent Daughters," Granta 14 (1984): 54-68, and "My Mother's Life," Granta 17 (1985): 227-38.

[15] Cf. Gardiner 85-96.

[16] Steedman 43

[17] Steedman 43-44.

[18] Taylor 58. An instance of Lessing situating herself as infallible outsider in relation to both England and Southern Rhodesia, occurs in her satirical description of a lecture given by a white anthropologist to a group of black social workers on the position of African women (GH 190-94), all present (besides herself), being male. She compares this event to one she attended in England, when a "violent feminist" lectured working-class trade union members on how badly they treated their women. The connection, for her, is seeing "exactly the same look of stubborn resistance" on the faces of the listeners (GH 192).

[19] Nancy Walker, "'Wider Than the Sky': Public Presence and Private Self in Dickinson, James, and Woolf," in Benstock 277, 278, 289.

[20] Walker 290.

[21] Cf. Jouve 96.

[22] I am indebted to Marike Flockemann for pointing this out to me.

[23] Cf. Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920 (1979) 234, 235. Stubbs notes that "a difficulty peculiar to realist fiction" is "how to incorporate into a form whose essential characteristic is the exploration of existing realities" those "experiences and aspirations which go well beyond the possibilities afforded by that reality" (234).

CHAPTER 6

CAROLYN SLAUGHTER: DREAMS OF THE KALAHARI

Events in the South African works all take place after the Second World War. The same is true of Slaughter's Dreams of the Kalahari, which was first published in 1981 but is set in colonial Bechuanaland, then in a Botswana free of British rule. Slaughter was born in India, spent much of her childhood in Africa, and now lives in London. She has published eight novels, most of them set in England. Dreams of the Kalahari, is not her first published novel; it does, however, give the impression--particularly in Parts One, Two, and Three, which recount Emily Jones's childhood and school life--of being Slaughter's autobiographical novel of education.

The story traces Emily's development between the ages of eleven and twenty-one. Her childhood in Bechuanaland is followed by boarding school in Rhodesia, and, then, an unhappy year of exile in London, a year which forms the substance of Part Four of the novel. No dates are supplied, but the pervasive presence of British officials (Emily's father being one) makes the climate of power before Emily leaves for England a colonial one. She returns, in Part Five, to a country clearly independent of Britain--an milestone reached in 1966--with events in adjacent South African resembling those of the seventies: there is widespread unrest and young men are leaving for guerilla training.

Upon her return, Emily becomes a helper in a refugee camp near the South African border. (Slaughter's interest in South Africa has led her to write The Innocents (1986), a novel that envisages the country in the middle of full-scale civil war.) Emily's active role in aiding victims of apartheid is a crucial factor in her successful formation of a social identity based within the subcontinent; however, her move from loneliness and helplessness, narcissism, and fear, toward autonomy combined with social commitment, is explicitly linked to development in her interaction with the land, the Kalahari desert in particular. This chapter will examine Slaughter's treatment of her protagonist's accommodation with land and people.

Emily's interaction with the land is distinct from a range of attitudes--all of them resulting in either disaster or failure--among other white characters. Those whites who never feel at home suffer, as does even a sympathetic character like Dick Thompson, the veterinary officer:-

> He reminded himself that [white farmers] were cruel because they were bored, and afraid. They were all exiles and had found refuge here: refuge from what they were, what they might have been in their own place. He was the same: he had come out here because he could not have achieved a great deal in Scotland; he was better away from stiff competition. But, God! this harsh place offered no shelter. It was merely a place to hide. Perhaps they had all, once, sought enrichment by what was strange and wild, but had found that the land rejected them--utterly and eternally it was indifferent. (DK 52)

Slaughter raises here that aspect of the empty land myth previously encountered in Lessing's fiction, the tendency to view 'Africa' "strange and wild," as a source of the kind of

"enrichment" and adventure that is no longer available in the highly industrialised countries of Europe. The fate of those who approach the "land" with such a preconceived vision, is to find it "utterly and eternally . . . indifferent": the unhappiness of Emily's parents, who lack the strength of mind and character to adapt to the country, provides the author's endorsement of Thompson's opinion.

Those who have sought "enrichment" of the material variety are embodied in the character of Stanton, a failed diamond prospector who calls to mind one of Lessing's admired solitaries. His dress is ragged and soiled, but is a white man's dress. "'A filthy old man, but proud as a lion!'" (DK 276) His nails are clean; his moustache trimmed. He sets himself apart from the blacks, whose courteous hospitality he has regularly relied on. Slaughter mocks the pioneering spirit of adventure--and underlines Stanton's enduring alienness--when she has Emily set the old man to earn his keep in the refugee camp by planting an English garden.

The "colonel," is an adventurer of another type, one who sees 'Africa' merely as a backdrop to the fulfilment of his own unrestrained appetites. Like Conrad's Kurtz, he is corrupted by the power he is able to exert once free of the restraints and sanctions of communal life among his social peers. His murder by his young nephews--which recalls, in its viciousness, the deeds of William Golding's schoolboys in Lord of the Flies (1954)--might seem to confirm his notion that the continent provides a setting in which whites may rediscover their own primitiveness (DK 53). Yet it is he himself who, having exploited his privileged freedom to seduce his nephews, invites their revenge. But rejection, or destruction, within an "indifferent" landscape

is not the necessary fate of all whites, as it is in Lessing's work.

In Dreams of the Kalahari, the natural world, if not respected, is dangerous. Careless travellers are tortured by thirst; the snakes are dangerous. But, by the time she is eleven years old, Emily has already learnt--and the colonel's fate confirms this--that far more dangerous than any 'wildness' in nature is the destructiveness of humans.

> [Emily] was sitting close to the reeds, looking out across the water; a golden bream burst through with an open, pouting mouth, then sank again. Her thoughts were gentle and unhurried, because all the sights, smells, and colors around her had nothing to do with man and his frightening ways. She became one with the silence and was made free by it.. . . The desert around this loop of water was a reflection of her own soul. (DK 44)

Emily's interaction with this particular part of the Kalahari at this stage of her life recalls De Beauvoir on the uses of nature for the adolescent girl.

> The adolescent girl has not as yet acquired for her use any portion of the universal: hence it is her kingdom as a whole; when she takes possession of it, she also proudly takes possession of herself.1

Such heightened moments as Emily experiences in the veld

have an aura of mysteriousness, but are not precisely epiphanic. The solitude, beauty, and space of the bush comfort her, and set her free to experience herself, serenely, in-the-world, released from the demands and attacks of others, her mother in particular.

At this point in the girl's story the desert is analogous to the northern forests, or moors, a zone in which only the virtuous survive its trials. As Emily approaches adulthood, the bush remains for her a space in which to meditate, after she has undergone testing experience; but the concept of self she evolves in such contemplative moments become, in time, like Martha Quest's concept of self imaged against the backdrop of the bush, more social:

> Emily had left Mary and Lukas working the clinic.. . . More and more people kept coming from the bush with war injuries. Often when they got to the clinic, their wounds were deeply infected and difficult to treat quickly. Emily had been glad to get away from the stinging disinfectants, the needles, the rough bandages seeping pus and blood; the anguished faces of the parents, the endless crying of the children. Now she sat in perfect silence, crouching close to the ground, with her knees bent and the faded green dress pushed up above her knees. She kept on working, her head bent away from the glare, the basket filling with the squat bean pods.
>
> This was a special place for her, a place that filled in her heart the space once filled by the river [of her childhood home]. She came here to be by herself; she smiled to think of the last time she had come here with [her adopted black baby], and cried. Now she knew what she had been raging against, and then grieving for, was her aloneness, the thing she had once most prized. With Reuben's silence, which seemed to mean his desertion, she had felt abandoned. Alone, with all the old defenses thrown away.
>
> But then, extraordinarily, she had faced it: she was able to stand back and face the iron truth that dreams are crushed under the boot of reality; people desert or die; do not hear when one is screaming--she stood alone, no

> human touch could alter that. She was like a lone plant under a blistering sun whom no one would gather or save; she had no choice but to survive. But at that moment, she knew how great was her strength. She had gone through a loop of fire and been forged fine and free: not to escape the world, but to live in it, not through alienation but through kinship with others. And the devastating sense of loss left her completely and forever. (DK 268)

This is the climax of her development, and Emily, of English parentage, is granted by her author a liberated Afrikaner journalist, Reuben Potgieter, to complete, with Happy, an orphaned black baby, a nuclear family in which are merged the diverse strands of the history of the subcontinent.

Emily imposes on the veld her individual perception--European-based, perhaps deserving of the term "Romantic"--when, as a child of eleven, she views a "loop" of the river as "a reflection of her own soul." However, it would be too easy, and revelatory of the Eurocentricity of critic rather than of writer, to label all the interaction Emily is recounted as having with the veld as "Romantic". The melange of cultures feeding into the production of culture in Southern Africa demands an ability on the part of literary critics to respond to the uniqueness of what is emerging locally. Emily's sense of the numinousness of the natural world, may be consciously achieved, yet it is also depicted as based on her familiarity with both its particularities and its elemental power. She becomes a young adult who, living within society, at times, as do persons in cultures across the world, takes temporary refuge from the demands of culture and society in nature. Slaughter does not, however, define her protagonist in identification with nature and in opposition to culture;[2] nor must Emily flee the

natural and irrational in order to embrace society and culture; nor, even though typically the bush is described in passages of lyrical beauty that are focalised through Emily, is the protagonist's main accommodation with the landscape rather than black Africans.

Emily is not characterised as entirely free of enculturated 'white' fear of the bush in association with black violence. In one passage, Slaughter uses the conventional images of floods and waves (which were found in Lessing's dream of the submergence of Cape Town under cloud), only, however, to defuse them, and point a way for Emily through such fear.

> But just beyond that safe circle were the broken and gutted roads, the deserted villages with their burned huts, the fields raided and trampled. She was filled then with a dread of the bush; at night it was always menacing, always on its own side. Soon, like a wave, it would lap closer and closer and perhaps sweep them all away. No one traveled [sic] far anymore.
>
> She looked away to all the little fires winking at the entrances of huts. The African life was in full swing now, with laughter and shouting and complaints about the beer, which had run out. A woman was singing a soft rippling song, accompanied by a drum and a hosho rattle. Farther away, a five-stringed lute trickled out an independent melody and a bow blended in with the other melodies, so that they became a haunting intricate whole. Someone was clapping to the rhythm of the drum. A voice joined in the first song and someone hummed softly in another key. At odd moments, one of the women gave a high-pitched howl, an expression of praise and exuberance; it seemed to gather all the harmonies together, acting as a funnel, a conductor in some mysterious sense.
>
> Emily stood quite still and listened; the menace of the night had vanished, or been absorbed, by the delicate beauty of the music. A woman wearing a skin skirt . . . walked past.. . . Emily walked into her rondavel. . . She recognized a rain song and, listening to it, fell asleep. (DK 246)

Slaughter, unlike Lessing, wrote after the 'deluge' had swept over most of Africa and was already at work in South Africa. Slaughter could draw on a wealth of literature and information to figure mimetically the violence into which she inserts her protagonist, whereas Lessing, before the event, resorted to warning that resistance was immanent, by means of metaphor. Still, it is true to say that Slaughter deconstructs a feature of conventional colonial perception, and depiction, of the 'African' landscape.

Slaughter does not deny the threat of black revenge, upon both whites and their black servants (DK 252-53, 254-59, 264-65), on the contrary, her inclusion of the atrocities committed by the dispossessed, and her detailing of the pettier attitudes that prevent people from rubbing along together--such as the refusal of two refugees, Afrikaner women whose farm has been destroyed and husband and son probably murdered, to eat 'kaffir food' (mieliepap)--are two factors making for some authenticity in her depiction of life in the refugee camp (DK 258). But dread of the bush and the human violence it shelters, can, Slaughter suggests, be dispelled by acquaintance with indigenous peoples and their culture, and the readiness to respond with enjoyment and liking to both.

Emily's "kinship" with black Africans is given a plausible base in her childhood contact with certain individuals. There is anxious, servile Violet (the Jones's household servant), and Johanna, a tougher sort, whom Emily loves and admires, and who is Emily's mentor about local tribal ways until the girl leaves for boarding school in Rhodesia. When Emily is adult, there is Lala,

her ally and mentor in the refugee camp and another 'strong' type, like Johanna. "Kinship" in the camp comes of Emily's sharing, like the other whites present, the food shortages and physical dangers that the black inhabitants are exposed to. She is no white madam: she nurses, teaches, prepares food, according to her skills and the communal need.

In Emily, Slaughter fabricates an intriguing figure, a new type of frontierswoman. How new an exemplar is she, however? The resolution of the narrative in a hybrid South African family does seem pat. It also provides the heterosexual partnership that was the inevitable reward for women heroes in the nineteenth century.

> In nineteenth-century fiction dealing with women, authors went to a good deal of trouble and even some awkwardness to see to it that Bildung and romance could not coexist and be integrated for the heroine at the resolution, although works combining these two discourses in their main part (the narrative middle) are among the most important fictions of our tradition. This contradiction between love and quest in plots dealing with women as a narrated group, acutely visible in nineteenth-century fiction, has, in my view, one mode of resolution: an ending in which one part of that contradiction, usually quest or Bildung, is set aside or repressed, whether by marriage or by death.3

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, the commentator here, goes on to say that

> It is the project of twentieth-century women writers to solve the contradiction between love and quest and to replace the alternate endings in marriage and death that are their cultural legacy from nineteenth-century life and letters by offering a different set of choices.4

Slaughter might appear to fail to resolve the contradiction between "love and quest" noted by Blau DuPlessis as "the project" of twentieth-century women writers. And Dorothy Driver warns against the frontierswoman who performs traditional feminine roles:

> What becomes clear . . . is that however much the polar opposites of masculinity and femininity appear to break down under the concept of frontierswoman, which is so obviously a site of contradiction (as indeed is the concept of woman as author), the patriarchal balance rights itself again in terms of these carefully constructed opposites. "Woman" is maintained as a sign in a signifying system that is intent upon creating and reproducing a set of ideal divisions, divisions between culture and nature, the civilized and the uncivilized, masculinity and femininity, rationality and irrationality, divisions upon which patriarchal discourse depends and which are thrown into sharp relief in the colonial context.
>
> While the colonial enterprise has created women of initiative and capability, then, it has been in its interest to have women play traditional feminine roles. Despite their fulfilling a set of practical frontier needs, women must be seen to withdraw to home and hearth, which no doubt becomes the more urgent project the more opportunities open up to women not to withdraw.5

Emily Jones does not, however, give up the adventure of the quest for marriage: Reuben comes to partner her in the adventure she has chosen; Emily absorbs 'marriage', heterosexual partnership, into her quest.

Furthermore, Slaughter has earlier in the novel (and here she resembles Lessing) undermined the myths of the glamour of

pioneering life and of the special role of 'femininity' and the 'lady' with her 'civilising' influence within the colonial enterprise; Lilian Jones, is, like May Quest, a bored, frustrated, and lonely 'lady', pathetic and emotionally destructive. Lilian's daughter Emily, on the other hand, while she may not opt for a 'career', does become an effective force among a democratic grouping who are pioneering a new social configuration in the face of physical dangers and with minimal resources.

Emily also becomes a more effective, and loving, nurse and parent than her mother was. When she accepts the task of mothering Happy, she is already in fact performing traditional feminine tasks usually incorporated into the role of mothering, such as nursing, and teaching--that is, she acts as bearer of culture. Since it is Lala who orders Emily to look after Happy, it could be claimed that the cultural imperative to mother is merely transferred from its usual enforcers to an enforcer from another culture, which is yet another culture to pressure women into constituting their female subjectivity in terms, primarily, of motherhood.

Yet, Lala <u>is</u> a black woman and Happy is adopted by Emily in the context of the consequences of apartheid South Africa. Apartheid is the reason for the very existence of the refugee camp in which Emily <u>chooses</u> to live. Furthermore, the narrative attempts to establish new grounds for judging responsibility for work. This occurs when Emily challenges <u>black</u> male control in relation to the division of labour:

"It is women's work, gathering [food]," one

man said in a deep voice.
"No," she said quietly, "it is anyone's work, and the women are working already." (DK 251)

Here Slaughter splits open the polarised, fixed definitions of masculine and feminine within a black culture to establish flexibility and difference, although the implications of what Emily says reflect also upon the division of work within the English culture she has inherited. Within the context of these more flexible terms, Emily could be understood to be fitting in where she is most needed, doing "anyone's work." Symbolically, she is a helper in the formation of a social group whose composition is transracial and whose principles are those of equality and reciprocity. (As can also be seen in the fact that the black women's control is no longer <u>silent</u> control; when they, like Emily, insist that black men gather food, they are challenging the gender rule of their own traditional culture that would have women defer to men by not speaking up and not imposing their decisions (DK 252-53).)

It remains to consider Emily as a white woman who is a mediator. Driver has distinguished the traditional functions of the white woman as mediator in colonial writing:

> . . . white women are not the mediators between the races simply in the sense that they are intermediaries, intervening in order to reconcile differences, nor simply in the sense that they form a connecting link or transitional stage between the two (as between culture and nature), but they are mediators also in the sense that they divide into two parts the two racial categories, as the Latin <u>mediare</u> further suggests.6

Emily neither aligns herself with white men against black folk--on the contrary, she begins to assume a deserved position of authority in the camp in relation to the single white man, Lukas--nor does she act (like Macphail's Nio on Joe's farm) as reconciler of stern white male authority and black weakness. Emily has no privileges, no servants who might enable her to occupy the position of a madam who might intercede for weaker blacks. Instead, she is compelled at times to rely for protection against hostility from blacks, not upon white men, but upon black women, becoming particularly reliant on Lala's protection and backing (DK 239, 251-52, 267). Black women at times act as her mentors, and, when black and white women unite against the insolence of some high-heeled black teenage girls, Slaughter inscribes a moment of solidarity that links females who are peers by virtue of their age (sisters), while it simultaneously cuts across barriers of race and class (DK 244).

As foster mother of Happy and a worker in the refugee camp Emily <u>does</u> form both a connecting link and a transitional link between white and black, but, importantly, she herself has begun, in her perception of herself and of her way of life, to dissociate her skin shading from her cultural and social position. Slaughter further blurs 'black' and 'white' as fixed and opposed concepts (so diminishing Emily's function as a connecting link) by inverting the racist pecking order to have Reuben arrive--a greenhorn fresh from England--at a camp controlled by seasoned black women, and by inscribing blacks in culture, instead of identifying them with the 'natural' and primitive. Black persons in this narrative do not only sing and dance, they also build huts, and follow their own methods of

agriculture and worship. Their agrarian way of life means that they live in nature, not that they are of it.

Absent from the camp and its surroundings are the truly powerful, and stern, white men, who are just across the border. The camp is a small community in a ruined landscape, marginal to mainstream culture and society. Also absent from this world is 'racial' prejudice among black Africans.

> Before the white man became universally disliked for his mental outlook, it was there. The white man found only too many people who looked different. That was all that outraged the receivers of his discrimination, that he applied the techniques of the wild jiggling dance and the rattling tin cans to anyone who was not a white man. And if the white man thought that Asians were a low, filthy nation, Asians could still smile with relief--at least, they were not Africans. And if the white man thought Africans were a low, filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile--at least, they were not Bushmen. They all have their monsters. You just have to look different from them, the way the facial features of a Sudra or Tamil do not resemble the facial features of a high caste Hindu, then seemingly anything can be said and done to you as your outer appearance reduces you to the status of a non-human being.7

The perception here, mediated by the narrator of Maru (1971), belongs to Bessie Head. Head was an African who, as a "coloured" person, fled from South African race prejudice to find, like her Masarwa (or San) girl in Maru, that it existed also in Botswana, where she lived in exile until her death in 1986.

Life in the camp represents an intention (the idealisation of which--given Slaughter's use of the word "dreams" in her title--could be deliberate). While this part of the novel lacks

the verisimilitude of the parts recounting Emily's childhood and adolescence, it is nevertheless authentic and compelling enough to constitute a potentially empowering vision within the circumstances of the present and in relation to the future. While Lessing will transfer her bold women to the frontiers of the mind and outer space, Emily manifests the daily courage, in the daily round, of the genuine pioneer, within an environment given concrete materiality. She is always physically brave (sometimes reckless). Forced, when still a child, to be the timid girl, she acts out her adventurousness through an imaginary friend, Julian; back in Africa, she loses all timidity, in community with others. In Slaughter's narrative, exploration is no longer an exclusively masculine act, a moment of penetration into a feminine region. The space, vision, freedom, and energetic physical exertion that the imperialists took as their right are taken over, not by woman, but by a woman working, predominantly, with other women. Emily fights a war, without guns, in a postcolonial space in Botswana--that is influencted by its closeness to the neocolonial space of South Africa.

Slaughter's visionary ending is a modest one that gains compulsion from the overall authenticity of the narrative, the moving exploration of the sufferings of exile, and the sense of Emily's development into a person of some stature, and modesty. The power of the closing pages is one of immanence, of possibilities for the future.[8]

NOTES

[1] De Beauvoir 385.

[2] Cf. Driver, "'Woman' as sign," 17.

[3] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1985) 3-4.

[4] Blau DuPlessis 4.

[5] Driver, "'Woman' as Sign", 10-11.

[6] Driver, "'Woman' as Sign," 17.

[7] Bessie Head, Maru (1971) 11. In Maru a white woman, like Emily, extends her protection and power to the orphaned girl-child of an oppressed people. Margaret Cadmore gives her name to the Masarwa orphan, whom she leaves behind when she returns to England. She rears young Margaret, then leaves her in Botswana, for the sake of the San people. In this case, the white woman mediates, as teacher and bearer of a dominant culture, between two groups lower on the social ladder to herself.

[8] Less successful is Slaughter's evocation of South Africa in a state of civil war in The Innocents; this novel is less well-crafted: its style is less taut, and character and dialogue (despite the many authentic details) do not quite attain South Africanness.

CHAPTER 7

NADINE GORDIMER: THE LYING DAYS AND E.M. MACPHAIL: PHOEBE AND NIO

Introduction

Even as the process of decolonising the European imperial holdings gathered momentum after the Second World War, starting with the independence of India in 1947, white power was entrenched more firmly in South Africa. By the end of the 1950s the process of decolonizing Africa was nearly half completed, and during the 1960s the British, French, Belgian, and Spanish empires almost totally disappeared from Africa.[1] But, in South Africa, the National Party, after coming to power in 1948, banned the Communist Party in 1950, then promulgated a series of laws that have ensured the predominance of its policies to the present. Afrikaner nationalism proved resistant to the ethical arguments for self-government and human rights that bore upon the European nations to evacuate their colonies.[2] In any event, Afrikaners have claimed a local, South African identity by right of centuries of habitation. Their localised group identity means that they have not, as English-speakers have done, clung to the idea of a metropolitan 'home', superior in culture even if somewhat faded in vitality, and always there as a bolthole should things grow too unpleasant. Afrikaner commitment is to the 'homeland' of the 'volk', here; the volk's sense that its 'destiny' lies in this country alone has been a source of its will to power, and of its fear.[3]

English-speakers have been more provisional in their allegiance. Many have left South Africa, choosing to join what has been dubbed the "chicken run", for a variety of reasons: fear, guilt, the desire for a more secure future for themselves and their children, or because they have been lured by the greater riches--cultural, social, financial--of life elsewhere, usually in other parts of the anglophone world, North America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand. The imposition of one after another destructive law enforcing separation and discrimination while at the same time restricting civil liberties, the misery and social insecurity that resulted from these, as well as the decline of belief in the efficacy of liberalism to resolve the country's problems, all have contributed to feelings of helplessness and despair in many English-speakers. Official propaganda, in the meantime, labelled anyone who did not support government policies as neither a 'true' nor patriotic South African. Sharpeville in 1960, the declaration of a Republic in 1961, the disturbances of the Seventies and Eighties, together with a declining economy, have induced many English-speakers to leave. Sharpeville heightens Freed's protagonist's fear of the "knife at the throat," although she longs above all for a career in the London theatre and a taste of the Oxford that bred her father (HG 231). Freed herself, like Becker, and Slaughter left the country permanently.

The uncertainty of English-speakers over their claim to South African identity or citizenship has been reinforced by the National Party's centralisation of power in all areas of public authority--education, the civil service, police, the armed forces, the television and radio services--in the hands of white Afrikaners, and the consequent imposition of the values of

Afrikaner culture on all facets of public life. In corporate business, too, Afrikaners have gained wealth and influence aided by the privileges and patronage that accompanied membership of the elite, secret Broederbond.

Local forces urging emigration meshed with the pull of strong ties with Britain. Until the Republic of South Africa came into being in 1961, the country was a member of the British Commonwealth. At the conclusion of film screenings, urban audiences--then still largely English-speaking--stood in solemn and attentive silence as an image of the monarch appeared on the screen and "God Save the King" was played. After 1953, the proud year of Everest, they stood for their queen. The arrival of the weekly mailship in the coastal ports brought English newspapers and magazines, as well as post, to eager children and adults. While youngsters absorbed the adventures of characters in "Tiger," "Beano," "Dandy," "School Friend," and "Girl's Crystal," their elders read, according to whether their taste was for the sensational or the sober, newspapers such as the "Daily Mirror" or the "Guardian." Magazines named "Women's Weekly," "Woman," and "Woman's Home" fostered, simultaneously, knitting skills and girlish dreams centred in the Rochester-like heroes of their romantic fiction. Radio dramas transmitted from the 'English station' were usually of the drawing-room variety, written by British playwrights, and played by actors with standard BBC accents--overlaid with Cockney or other British regional dialects when necessary. The Second World War revived feelings of patriotism toward Britain, and many former British servicemen stayed on in South Africa as husbands and fathers after demobilisation.

Tribute was paid to the old countries, British and European,

in the trip 'overseas', then, and now, an obligatory rite de passage for any young white South African with a sense of adventure and sufficient funds. Lessing describes meeting on board the ship that took her to England in 1949 two "attractive young women," South Africans, undertaking such a trip (GH 26-30). Gordimer's The Lying Days closes with Helen Shaw setting off on a visit to England, Freed's Home Ground has Ruth Frank set off for Oxford in the final chapter, and Macphail's Phoebe spends two years in Italy and Spain before returning to Johannesburg. Such a trip, then usually undertaken by sea, might be compared to the grand European tour undertaken by earlier generations of the well-heeled youth of England, and, later, of America. These trips combined a finishing course--during which callow young colonials polished up their cultural acquirements--with a last youthful fling before assuming the responsibilities of adulthood.

The desire to escape permanently from the tense social conditions of South Africa, has continued to draw away thousands of predominantly English-speaking South Africans in the increasingly violent climate of protest and repression during the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties. English-speakers of conscience have been under pressure from both left and right to feel unwelcome in the country. Many of those who played an active part in resistance suffered prison, torture, death, or forced exile; those less brave or unable to accept the politics of the left have lived with shame, grief, and anger. The following chapters will examine a variety of responses to their problematic South African identity by five women novelists who write in English.

Nadine Gordimer: THE LYING DAYS

The Lying Days, published in 1953, is Gordimer's first novel. In it, Helen Shaw discovers that, in the period immediately following 1948, she cannot simply assume by 'natural' right of birth that she belongs, and, by the close of the novel, having experienced her initiation into love, politics, and friendship in Johannesburg, she has resolved to act, upon her return from a trip to London, in some way as yet unspecified but in accordance with her raised (liberal) consciousness.

Very early in her career, then, Gordimer asserts for a white woman the possibility of belonging, if she earns her place. Helen will, like her creator, remain in the subcontinent--unlike Martha Quest and her creator. There were some significant differences in the real settings upon which Helen's fictional milieu and Martha's were based. The greater density of the white population in South Africa, and its collective wealth, meant a richer cultural climate than was found in Rhodesia for the writer/intellectual. Furthermore, the Fifties in South Africa were a time of optimism for intellectuals like Gordimer: their hopes for a supraracial society preceded the decades when the full determination and ruthlessness of Afrikaner National social engineering would be felt.

Differences in the social, political, and cultural context within which she wrote, by comparison with that of Lessing, might account for Gordimer's hopefulness. But certain features of the fictional presentation of their protagonists suggest further differences between the two writers that bear on the matter of local cultural identity and citizenship. Despite the attack on the injustices of racism, Helen's rebellion, against parents and narrow sexual mores, is fairly conventional. Helen experiences

no violent revulsion against the land or its peoples, or against her body. But, then, her expectations are more moderate.

At the start of her tale, Helen is--as Martha was--found beneath a tree in Atherton, the small highveld mining town in which she lives with her parents. However, neither farm nor veld features in Gordimer's novel of education. That fact that this is so, and that Gordimer writes neither pastoral nor antipastoral, is attributable, probably, both to the fact that Gordimer grew up in Springs, a small town on Johannesburg's East Rand, and to her acute historical sense.

> The fundamental historical concern of The Lying Days lies in its general encounter with its local environment.. . . The most arresting part of [Gordimer's wealth of social observation of the world with which the novel engages] concerns the Mine estate in . . . Atherton in which the young Helen grows up. To some degree it appears to be autobiographical; that is to say, this observation seems to have been drawn from the details of Gordimer's own early youth. The novel is after all autobiographical in form, and certain descriptions of Atherton are on occasion almost image for image the same as those of Gordimer's descriptions of Springs, where she grew up. Yet Gordimer did not live on the mine estate in Springs.. . . [A]nd it was only through a close friendship with the daughter of a mining official that she came to know of the mining world at all. What appears to be autobiographical in the most autobiographical of Gordimer's novels is therefore as much the product of close observation as it is of personal experience. It seems almost emblematic of Gordimer's method of writing in general that this should be the case.4

Helen does not expect 'Africa' to speak to her; instead, she satirically announces that "the oracle voice of the Ancient Africa

did not come to us" (LD 97). Helen does not interact with the natural world, in any form, with any intensity or frequency, even though she sits beneath a tree after escaping from the grownup world. Sitting beneath the tree, she peels off, then swallows, a scab on her knee: the moment is one, not of mystical absorption into the universe, nor of utopian vision, but of wholly childlike self-absorption (of a concrete sort). The intensity of the moment (only lightly symbolic) remains sensory: the trunk of a tree, the coolness of the stone on which Helen is sitting, features of scab and knee, these are the narrator's focus. The scene is without that charge of frustrated, romantic desire common to Martha's communing with nature, and therefore also without heightened aesthetic or quasi-religious overtones.

Helen is, like Martha, a solitary child, her isolation intensified by the sharp, critical view she takes of her parents and the town's inhabitants and by the narrow social and intellectual range of such a community. Yet, Helen stands apart from a group of young white girls in South African imaginative writing that does include Martha. These girls are distinctly odd in the eyes of the adults who observe them. Martha escapes into the veld, books, fantasy, and transcendence; Lyndall of African Farm, Rebekah of Man to Man, and Emily of Dreams of the Kalahari all have highly active, compensatory fantasy lives, Rebekah and Emily both going so far as to create and talk to an imaginary playmate. These girls' excessive dependence on fantasy could be explained by the isolation of life on a farm. Yet, it is also true that their sense of being at odds with their culture and society is intensified by their awareness of expectations related to gender.[5]

Helen is less bookbound, less idealistic. She may become

caught up in a process during which she becomes like her mother, moving into her lover's flat, typing his thesis, giving up the job (that he found her) to hover over him as he eats the breakfast she has prepared--just like a Mine wife (LD 251), and she may also be susceptible to making romantic, heterosexual love her religion and her man a household god (LD 335). However, she successfully resists pressure (from her mother and her supposedly leftwing friend, Jenny) to marry (LD 210, 214), and she does not, like Martha, have a child she does not want.

Lessing's writing bears the pressure of a mix compounded of idealism, frustration, and an intense struggle over matters of identity, personal, social, artistic, and sexual. The element of this pressure that relates to conscious conflict over gender is absent from Gordimer's work, and she has declared herself unsympathetic to the feminist enterprise in the South African context. In 1983, reviewing Ruth First and Ann Scott's Olive Schreiner, she stated:

> I suppose one must allow that [Schreiner] had a right to concern herself with a generic, universal predicament: that of the female sex. During her restless, self-searching years in England and Europe, and her association with Havelock Ellis, Eleanor Marx, Karl Pearson, women's suffrage and English socialism in the 1880s, she studied intensively theories on race and evolution and participated in progressive political and social movements; but feminism was her strongest motivation. Yet the fact is that in South Africa, now as then, feminism is regarded by people whose thinking on race, class and colour Schreiner anticipated, as a question of no relevance to the actual problem of the country--which is to free the black majority from white minority rule.6

This statement suggests that Gordimer is not alert to the significance of gender in the existing network of power relations in South Africa.[7] One may speculate that the oddness of the girl-characters created by Lessing, Schreiner, and Slaughter--particularly in view of the (socialised) fear of criticism in women writers that was noted in the previous chapter--is evidence, at least in part, of the pressure of gender conflict in their work.

Helen will act on her sense of place in South Africa sometime in a future beyond the close of the novel; she does not move much beyond her own personal consolidation, and, as yet, black persons do not impinge on her consciousness except as they affect her.[8] She has "accepted disillusion as a beginning rather than an end" (LD 42). Stephen Clingman is critical of Gordimer's ending, saying that the novel does not consider that such (humanist) "acceptance," if "a thoroughgoing principle" must ultimately "fall subject to the governing terms of an apartheid environment."[9] This reading seems perverse. One may accept, as they are. one's parents--whom one can neither change nor exchange--without at all feeling obliged to subscribe to the current social order. Liberation from a struggle (inner and outer) with one's parents may, in fact, be necessary before one is capable of useful engagement with the social environment at large. Helen, the reader understands, having come to terms with her past, is now ready to be an actor, rather than a spectator; her part is not yet chosen, her principles not yet clearly formulated, but she is unlikely <u>not</u> to oppose the National Party government.

In any event, the kind of loving, in personal relations largely unchosen, that the novel endorses--between Helen and her parents, Helen and Joel--is not identical with the more

impersonal, generalised, and consciously chosen devotion of oneself to fighting offensive social forces. For all that the Fellini-like motif of the singing, dancing "native children" may, in the context of the politicisation of the black youth of South Africa during the late 1970s and the 1980s, seem ludicrously idealistic, romanticised, and bland, and for all that the end of the novel glosses over the social horrors that have been partially exposed, there is openness rather than closure, courage and resoluteness, rather the passive "luxury" that Clingman says "acceptance" would seem to imply.[10]

In 1984, thirty years after publication of The Lying Days, Gordimer, when asked how she saw her citizenship, responded:

> To begin with I see myself, as an individual, as a white African. I'm not a European in the true sense of the word. I was born here; it's my home; I've lived here all my life, but that of course doesn't make me a white African. I feel myself committed to an indigenous culture here. I think it hasn't happened yet but it's something that one hopes will be allowed to happen--that there will be whites who will prove themselves acceptable in terms of our past to build a common cultural future with blacks. So from that point of view I see myself--yes--as an African, a white African.11

The most significant feature of this statement, in which Gordimer sees herself as waging the battle against apartheid in the arena of culture, is the imagined audience to whom she holds herself accountable. Helen, intent on helping the underdog, holds herself accountable to a group of like-minded whites; but Gordimer's most recent protagonist, Hillela Capran of A Sport of

Nature (1989), marries a black activist, lives at various times in Central Africa, the United States of America, and Eastern Europe, and takes part, finally, as wife of the Chairman of the Organisation of African Unity, in the "proclamation of the new African state that used to be South Africa" (SN 391). Hillela's pan-African commitment is echoed by Gordimer's view of her own position. She claims identity not as a South African at all, but as a white African, with her eye on an imagined audience of blacks (many of their most prominent members not inside South Africa at the time of her statement, because in exile) who will, in the future, have the power to rule, judge, and condemn. One hopes to earn one's place in the present for the future in the context of the past.

By the mid-Eighties it had become clear, even to the National Party, that apartheid, if defined as a system of partition, had failed, and writers such as Gordimer and Du Plessis began to reflect an awareness of a 'post-apartheid' audience.

E.M. Macphail: PHOEBE & NIO

In future writing by Gordimer the land will issue symbolic warning to whites, in the form of a black corpse that washes up on the farm in The Conservationist (1974). Given, however, that black resistance was building up in the early 1970s to erupt in the schools boycotts and township burnings of 1976, Gordimer's symbol represents a reasonable probability rather than a projection of the author's fear and guilt onto the natural world. This is not merely a matter of Gordimer's being privileged with

hindsight: her farm world in The Conservationist is no nightmarish dystopia as is the Turners' farm in The Grass is Singing. Different from Lessing's dystopia, too, are veld and farm--and life in the city--for Macphail's eponymous adolescent protagonists in Phoebe & Nio. The novel was published in 1988 but its events, like those in The Lying Days, occur in the Fifties.

Some of Macphail's characters voice their assumptions about t 'race' superiority with a bland confidence that, by 1990, has become unusual. The novel depicts a world of relative ignorance, and optimism. Partly, this is a matter of period. It was easier, in the Fifties, for white South Africans to be unaware of the cruelties and deep destructiveness of racism; easier, too, for some to find sufficient justification for their privilege in the individual kindnesses they could extend. At that time, too, 'grand' apartheid had not yet been imposed in all its ruthless thoroughness.[12] But the ignorance in the social milieu depicted by Phoebe and Nio is also the attribute of a particular section of society, the petit bourgeoisie. Like the petit bourgeoisie in other countries, Macphail's characters are inclined to be complaisant, bigoted, and uninformed except in matters concerning their own well-being. Their complacency is of a different order from the optimism Gordimer captured in The Lying Days and A World of Strangers (1958) when depicting the same city of Johannesburg in the same period. The world Gordimer detailed, that of the white liberal bourgeoisie and black intellectuals, journalists, and artists was one she moved in. It was a world, centred in Sophiatown, that was dynamic, ebullient, and hopeful--its optimism based on the multi-racialism that was then the dominant political belief of the opposition.[13] The turning-point

for this era in South African history, was the Sharpeville shootings in March 1960; and it is at this point that Macphail ends her novel. Sharpeville marked the end of any easy hopefulness and the rise of black separatism. To be a white person in opposition became a far more dangerous matter. The shock of the shootings would be followed by a new era, of increasingly violent and politicised opposition, and increasingly violent and oppressive efforts by the state to destroy such opposition and conceal its very existence. The end to this era is only now, in 1990, beginning to seem possible.

Gordimer, like most of her central characters, belongs to the intelligentsia. Macphail, on the other hand, brings to her novel neither the intellectual and ethical weight, nor the aesthetic skill, of a Lessing or a Gordimer. Her characters do not probe and analyse exhaustively the correctness or otherwise of their claims to a place in South Africa. Nevertheless, Phoebe does, after tracking a path through Italy, unmarried motherhood, Spain, and married French lover, return to Johannesburg to teach literacy to black South Africans. And, although Nio is timid, and is forced to rely on Phoebe as her mentor for most of life's matters, her innocent perspective is used to subvert several cultural and literary assumptions about race and gender. Macphail's satirical eye observes, and comments on (even if it does not investigate with any depth), the type of question Lessing raises (and Gordimer will raise after <u>The Lying Days</u>): who does the work on the land? who reaps the benefit of that work? and, does farming in South Africa amount to rape or husbandry? Although black persons in Macphail's world, as in Lessing's and Gordimer's, inhabit the periphery of the white characters' lives, nevertheless Macphail does, like Gordimer, Lessing (and Schreiner)

oppose the dominant discourse of tribute to white labour by inscribing both the black person's labour and white exploitation of that labour in order to create white wealth (PN 293, 324, 329, 331).

Macphail depicts, too, the patriarchal brutality of the South African farm: the possession and exploitation not just of fenced terrain, but also of wives, servants, and animals (PN 317-18, 327-30, 336); the privileged position of sons, "basies," reared to dominate all they own, as of 'natural' right, by inheritance from the father (PN 348). (On Lessing's farms, run by settlers of English origin, domination of the women by the men is more gentle, and the men do not always prevail.)[14]

If Phoebe and Nio reveals no consciousness of the aesthetic and ethical pitfalls of enculturation in Eurocentric perception, nor does it insist on its protagonists' radical alienation from land and people. (Macphail has spent much of her life in small-town and rural Transvaal, although she has also lived in Johannesburg.) In Phoebe & Nio the homodiegetic narrator Nio tells her story as a chronological thread broken by flashbacks. The narrative's revelations emerge at a slight, comic remove from its subject, whether that subject is the self or others. The narrating self, often helpless in inarticulateness, reconstructs the setting and the history of the experiencing self only gradually and fragmentarily. The paucity of terms indicating judgement and emotion renders Nio's perspective 'naive', her tone blank, features that may be seen as stylistic analogues for her 'feminine' timidity and sense of powerlessness; she is yet another of the adolescent girls who, like Martha Quest, sleepwalk their way into early adulthood.

Yet, Nio's narrative succeeds in conveying an enjoyment of

the natural world, its birds and plants, that is without ahistorical romantic projections onto the veld. She records lovingly, minutely, what she observes: khakibos and blackjacks, cormorants flying over reeds (PN 249, 253); she enjoys working with soil and tending it into sustaining plants (PN 251, 275-77). Nio, literally, 'digs in' to the soil on the company station, then, having grown up on a farm, she chooses eventually to return to one.

The farm in both Lessing's and Macphail's writing is not, as is commonly found in colonial writing, an Edenic pastoral site mediating between the corrupt city and the wild savagery of the 'dark' Continent.[15] But in Phoebe & Nio the farm also does not, as it does in Lessing, have overtones of nightmare and dystopia, the accoutrements of colonial critique and frustrated desire. The city, too, Phoebe's choice, is never merely a place of corruption that has fallen from a state of grace; in Jo'burg the two girls enjoy many (usually simple) pleasures, like window-shopping. We may compare the London of The Four-Gated City or the urban landscape of Memoirs of a Survivor.

The absence of revulsion against either the veld, the farm, or the city is mirrored is the novel's characterisation. White characters may have their share of racism, and yet remain likeable and loving. Lessing, on the other hand, loads her characters with her own dislike, and in her African writing the search for a local identity fails; in Macphail's novel it does not. At the close of Phoebe and Nio, even though neither friend has become an activist, both have begun to develop their sense of South African identity (and their adulthood) in terms of service to blacks, in opposition to persistent colonial attitudes and to the newer ideology and discourse of apartheid.

Not only in her characters' life choices but also in features of her style does Macphail signal positive engagement with South Africa's cultural and social life. Ways of speaking are Nio's, and Macphail's, sport. Macphail captures the idiosyncratic and the precious, the idiom of time, place, class, race, and age. The novel mocks, often hilariously, the petty snobbery and grosser brutality of the colonial pecking order. Even as she mocks, however, Macphail is also finding a language to reflect a slice of South African life.

> ". . . Did you see any newspaper?" Phoebe asked Granny.
> "Yes I found some in the kitchen drawer. And you know what? The English have been playing cricket with coolies."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> She poured the oatmeal into the boiling water from the box with a picture of a tiger. With a wooden spoon she stirred very fast until the mixture thickened. She sat back on her heels. I watched the big bubbles come slowly to the top of the porridge and burst. Phoebe stirred the pot now and then.
> "I always knew the English were a bunch of hypocrites."
> "Why?" I asked.
> "Because they used to have wars against them," Granny said. (PN 212-13)

Macphail's eye for detail encourages the reader to share the narrator's enjoyment in recalling her past; it also imparts historicity to the tale. Such passages convey, too, a confident sense of readership, a community of experience between writer and public that, as Coetzee says, is unusual in writing in English in South Africa.[16] (Lessing, on the other hand, could not have hoped

for such community of experience within the borders of Southern Rhodesia, given the reigning politics of the period and the smallness of the potential local readership.)

Some white South Africans are, though, uncomfortable about accepting a sense of community with Macphail: the novel was rejected by one South African publisher as insufficiently political; others have found her characters not feminist enough.[17] Macphail targets sexual harrassment in the workplace, the incestuous rape of a girl by her uncle, and rape by a husband; the barriers to liberated communication imposed by apartheid interweave with Nio's stifled, alienated experience as a woman. Yet, Nio's function remains, finally, an inspiriting one: she plays motherly, self-sacrificing Mary to Phoebe's sexual, assertive Eve. Macphail herself opposes the two characters to each other: "I see the two main characters as two sides of a coin and the story needed both."[18]

Macphail's own lighthearted comment on her ending begs the question how Joe, with his conservative racist and sexist attitudes, can possibly be seen as a "good" father:

> . . .I can see that the ending may well seem pat but the original one dribbled away into nothing. Perhaps I decided on an exchange of husbands out of a wish to be contrary since wives are quite often swapped. Up to now I've allowed my creative imagination free rein and hope I won't ever feel it should be restricted because of any body of readers' criticism. But I don't see the switch as too outlandish.
>
> Bear in mind that Phoebe was ahead of her time; she knew she could entrust her children to her friend; that Joe would make a good father and staying in a lousy marriage with him wasn't in their best interest anyway. Remember too that Henry, like one of Girlie's frocks from John Orrs', was 'on appro'. I like to think that readers speculate about how it might all have turned out, as I often do myself.19

Further, Nio's taking over of Phoebe's husband, children (and farm duties), in a spirit of good-humoured affection, serves to elide the radical nature of Phoebe's rebellion.

NOTES

[1] Robin Hallett, Africa: Since 1875, Volume II (Michigan, 1974; Repr. London: Heinemann, 1975) 69, 71.

[2] Cf. Rian Malan, an Afrikaner journalist: the "central act in [the Afrikaner's] history," the most "powerful and reverberant" of the "many truths about Afrikaners" is their "willful [sic] self-blinding" in resistance to the tenets of "Western enlightenment," because they "presented a threat to their survival" (17). Malan, My Traitor's Heart: Blood and Bad Dreams: A South African Explores the Madness in his Country, his Tribe, and Himself (London: Bodley Head, 1990).

[3] In 1948, the year in which the National Party came to power (not since to be dislodged), the concept underlying the governing of South Africa changed from that of guardianship to baasskap. Acknowledgement of white (in particular, Afrikaner) supremacy in SA, was demanded; when this was denied, SA left the Commonwealth, to become a Republic in 1961.

[4] Clingman, 27-28.

[5] All three of the novels narrated heterodiegetically (by a 'third-person' omniscient narrator) start with the girl protagonist under a tree. In the first line of Dreams of the Kalahari, Emily Jones "[sits] on the sand under a thorn tree" (DK 3). Each of the girls exerts aggression, Helen on herself, when she eats the scab off her knee, Martha and Emily on natural objects outside themselves. Martha "rip[s] the fleshy leaves" of the "big tree" "between her fingers" (MQ 16), while Emily "very deliberately . . . shovel[s]" a small stick "down deep into the . . .

home" of a beetle below the sand when it will not rise to her song, then, "pushing the sole of her foot down hard on a thick black thorn" she "whisper[s], and smile[s]," saying "'I will walk on diamonds'. . . " (DK 3). The place under a tree is, then, for Martha and Emily, a place for indulging their dreams, and, conversely, where they experience acute frustration. A tree is traditionally a phallic symbol, as well as a symbol of life. The girl who does not exert her aggression outside herself, Helen, is the most conventional of the three.

[6] Gordimer, "The Prison-house of Colonialism," Rev. Olive Schreiner by Ruth First and Ann Scott, in Cherry Clayton (ed.) Olive Schreiner (1983), quoted in Margaret Lenta, "The Need for a Feminism: Black Township Writing," Journal of Literary Studies 4.1 (March 1988): 63-64.

[7] Arguments that women's rights should be fought for during any process of reform or revolution, and that one of the burdens black women have to bear is systematic victimisation by their own menfolk, can be found in: Kuzwayo 101; Hunter, "Saga of 'a transitional woman,'" Rev. of Call me Woman by Ellen Kuzwayo, Contrast 60 15.4 (1985): 83-90; Lenta 49-64; and Driver, "Reconstructing the Self."

[8] Cf. Clingman 31.

[9] Clingman 33.

[10] Clingman 44.

[11] Gordimer, in Daymond, Jacobs, Lenta, Momentum, 33.

[12] Macphail makes a similar point when responding to a question about the names (somewhat unusual in white South African society) she gives her protagonists. "I've always liked the name Phoebe and research revealed that the phoebe is a small bird peculiar to the United States. Also it seemed to 'fit'. Names

are very important to me and I couldn't possibly see 'Phoebe' as an Amanda, Priscilla or anything else. The letters N I O stand for Narrator Interested Observer and keeping this in front of me helped me to evoke the naivete and ingenuousness of the character. In 1987 I had to agree with those publishers' editors who commented that Nio's innocence was not credible, but it really was believable in the early 60's, given her background and upbringing." Macphail, letter to the author, 18 Sept. 1989.

[13] Sophiatown was razed, and turned, by the Group Areas Act, into the white suburb of Triomf ('Triumph'). Cf. Clingman 71-75.

[14] Cf. The distinction between Afrikaner and English culture in Martha Quest: "[Mr. Van Rensberg] was a patriarch in a culture where the feared and dominating father is still key to the family group" (MQ 87).

[15] Cf. Coetzee 4.

[16] Coetzee 176.

[17] Information supplied by Shirley Pendlebury, co-owner of Hippogriff Press, in a telephone conversation, 8 Aug. 1988. Pendlebury also disclosed the fact that a "women's" publishing house had rejected the manuscript because Nio does not embody feminist principles.

[18] Macphail, letter to the author, 18 Sept. 1989.

[19] Macphail, letter to the author, 18 Sept. 1989.

CHAPTER 8

JILLIAN BECKER: THE VIRGINS AND LYNN FREED: HOME GROUND

Jillian Becker: THE VIRGINS

Black persons are the more important to Emily Jones during her childhood by virtue of her mother's withdrawal from her daughter's life. The same phenomenon occurs in the two novels set in the South African suburbs of Johannesburg and Durban, Becker's The Virgins (1976) and Freed's Home Ground (1986). In Becker's and Slaughter's novels, the mothers are bored to the point of headache and mild sickness, in Freed's, a more energetic mother is engrossed in her theatre work;[1] in all three a lonely, neglected child-protagonist receives surrogate mothering from a female servant.

In the early chapters of the novels, interactions between the girls and certain black servants occupy much narrative space. But these black characters, although characterised to some extent, fit into the trusty retainer stereotype. Their lives as lived apart from their servanthood within this particular white home are unknown, and, later, they occupy less narrative space as peers and lovers begin to take precedence in the protagonists' lives. Slaughter's Emily, however, has a mentor in a black woman called Johanna, who is not a servant in her parents' household, and black characters reappear as her peers when she returns to Botswana as a young adult.

In the homes of Annie Firman (The Virgins) and Ruth Frank

(Home Ground) there are several domestic servants. This has never been typical of South African urban homes; Becker and Freed both depict life in wealthy bourgeois suburbs. One of the privileges of wealth is the ability to screen oneself off from poverty and ugliness. In South Africa the legislation of apartheid, such as the Group Areas and Separate Amenities Acts, has overlaid separation upon grounds of class with that upon grounds of race. As more whites have become affluent (with the help of government policy directed to promoting their interests), so have they been able to imitate such seclusion as the Firmans and Franks enjoy behind hedges and walls, with swimming pool and tennis court.

Yet, one of the ironies in Home Ground lies in Ruth's realisation that ignorance about the conditions under which blacks live, and the luxury of indifference toward those conditions, are not attributes reserved to whites.

> 'What will you do after Oxford?' I asked Maya. We sat on her verandah listening to the plock-plock of tennis balls.
> 'I'll come back here,' she said.
> 'You're mad.'
> 'No, I'm not. You tell me where I'd be better off?' She smiled her checkmate smile.
> 'England?'
> 'Without my family? A curry-muncher? Ha! Ha!'
> 'Better than being a second-class citizen here,' I said.
> 'Look at it my way. I don't need to take buses. We never go to restaurants. And we have our own theatre. It would be much worse in England.' She loved these arguments of ours, the ironies in them.
> But I didn't. I could never admit to the real differences between us--money, beauty, happiness. Or accept as she did our common indifference to the black man's plight. (HG 232)

Outside both Maya Chowdree's wealthy Indian home and outside Ruth's, is the suffering and poverty of the mass of black South Africans--and it is a phenomenon of the violent Seventies and Eighties that the suburbs of privilege have remained peaceful.

Inside the Firman and Frank homes is a smattering of Western liberal ideas sufficient to fortify their sense of being superior to black Africans and Afrikaners. Blaming Afrikaners for an unnecessarily callous racist despotism, English-speakers have been able to enjoy white privilege while simultaneously clinging closely to their conviction that they are more 'civilised'--and their language and culture of a higher order--than Afrikaners. In short, English-speakers have been able, in they chose to do so, to dissociate themselves from the ruthlessness of the 'Nats', even while benefitting from their policies.

Becker uses Annie's focalising point of view to satirise the snobbery and brutality in the Firman's bourgeois home, Annie's pretentious, spiteful mother being the narrative's main target.

> Mrs Firman stood on the threshold of the small grey concrete room and asked;
> 'What is your name?'
> 'Yes misses.' She looked very abashed.
> 'Your name. What are you called?'
> Susan interpreted, and Hannah said her name was Hannah.
> 'Can't you speak English?'
> 'Yes misses.'
> 'Well speak it then. Are you a good washgirl?'
> 'Yes misses.'
> 'Can you iron?'
> 'Yes misses.'
> 'I pay ten shillings for one day. All right?'
> 'Yes misses.'
> 'You come every Monday, yes?'
> 'Yes misses.'
> 'Have you been a washgirl before?'

'Yes misses.'
'Have you got a reference.'
'Yes misses.'
'Have you got it here with you?'
'Yes misses.'
'Well, come on, let me see it then.' (TV 11)

But Hannah has no papers, no pass, no English--and very little control over her economic fate. Becker's satire, like that in the novels by Freed, Slaughter, and Macphail, reveals the way in which racism infects language: vocabulary, forms of address, and silences show the formal and informal structures of apartheid at work.

The novel closes with Annie making a bid for sexual freedom, a common enough way for an adolescent to rebel. However, Annie's partner in the act of transgressing sexual mores is Edward, the 'coloured' son of her beloved Emmy, who was the family's former servant. Annie and Edward's tryst takes place in the Firman's garden.

Although neither veld nor farm has played a role in Annie's suburban life, the garden has. Here Annie has found a refuge from the house and its presiding, predatory spirit, her mother.

> Out, to pick at the boles of the cork-oaks, climb the rockery above the swimming-pool, find the hornets' nest under the thatch of the changing-sheds. The stink-bugs that live on the dahlias bleed a pungent green blood if they're squashed. The yellow flowers of this bush are like birds. You break them off at the beak and push the two side-petals forward to become wings. The gum has run out of these trees and hangs in long globules down the buckled black bark, and it tastes neither nice nor nasty, you soon want to spit it out: but the gelled drops of oil which hang from the slats of the shutters and look the same, taste horrid. (TV 15)

The garden has allowed Annie physical movement, adventure, exploration of the world and her sensations. It has also served her as a space in which her life might intersect less formally than inside the house with the lives of the servants. She has paid them friendly visits in their rooms, which are set in the garden outside the house.

Beside the swimming pool--also set in the garden--is where much of the narrative action and dialogue has occurred. There the adolescents Annie and Barb have discussed Life through the long summer holidays, talking freely of sex, marriage, mothers, and of their future role in South Africa. Barb speaks first in the following passage.

> 'I must say.. . . Being a wife isn't my idea of living.'
> 'That's only because you haven't fallen in love.'
> 'Well perhaps falling in love is just a biological trick to make us reproduce our species. I don't like babies; I don't see dressing up in a bridal veil and carrying a bunch of lilies as the happiest possible climax of my life. I'd rather become a lawyer or something, or even a teacher. I want to travel, and meet different kinds of people.'
> 'Do you mean you'd never get married?'
> 'Well, sometimes I've thought how dreadful it would be to have to live the lives our mothers do.. . . Imagine being as bored and ratty as your mother or as bored and silly as mine.. . .'
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'But Barb, what else can we become? I mean even if we get to University and you become a lawyer and I become a doctor, won't we still be just spoilt rich white women?'
> 'Whom nobody loves,' Barb said. 'Yes, as long as we stay in this country I suppose we will.'

Barb decides that

> 'I don't think there is anything we can ever do for the natives. Not us. I've thought and thought about it, but I can't think of anything. And at least if we went and lived in another country we wouldn't have to feel ashamed just being what we are. Only of what we once were.'
> But Annie did not agree. She thought there would be no escape for them, anywhere, ever.
>
> (TV 134-36)

The girls' earnest talk is handled with some irony, but the narrative neither undercuts their doubts as to the wisdom of remaining in South Africa, nor includes any option for them alternative to that of exile.

But the garden is not, after all, nature untamed: in its manicured lawn, flower-beds, and paths may be read the exercise of class and race privilege, and the pretensions, of families like the Firmans, the Franks--and the Chowdrees. So, the garden as space for unfettered childish play and adolescent talk may become, through Mrs Firman's prescription, an assigned area for "fresh air and exercise" (TV 14). In order to assert her independence, Annie will have to escape the interim, ambiguous zone of garden-attached-to-the-house.

The girl reaches after sexual initiation, and simultaneously makes a gesture of rebellion against the taboos of family and society, by playing Eve to Edward's Adam, under a mulberry bush, and then, in darkness, on the lawn leading from swimming pool to house.

> Annie picked a long black berry. 'Here,' she said, 'try this one.'
> He bit off its stalk. It left its red stain on his fingers.
> She went in through the hanging branches and he followed her into the brown shade smelling of crushed mulberries, the place of that old intimacy of jealousy and spite and forgiveness and remorse where she had pushed him down and he had kissed her. (TV 142)

The couple retrace their steps back into the semi-innocence of childhood, to taste forbidden fruit, in a zone heavy with symbols of female sexuality.

Becker says, in her Preface to the 1986 paperback edition, that although The Virgins is "partly autobiographical," "[f]ew of the episodes of the novel ever happened." And: "There was no Edward" (TV 5-6). By including Edward and the circumstances of his neglect, she has strengthened the element of opposition to apartheid in The Virgins, while the event that closes the novel--in a chapter entitled "A Barrier of Skin"--is Becker's tilt at the taboo of miscegenation. That she hit home in some quarters is testified to by the fact that although the novel was published in the United Kingdom in 1976 it was declared 'not undesirable' for distribution in South Africa on appeal only in 1984. However, the encounter between Annie and Edward is reactionary in its racial and sexual politics.

Annie has some fondness for Edward, and she wishes to assuage her guilt: she gives food, drink, and her body to the boy whose mother was forced, by economic need, to abandon him in order to

help raise her. Annie also wants to pay tribute to Edward's devotion to her: he has travelled fifteen hundred kilometres to see her. Yet, since at no point is Edward not servile toward Annie, the reader is justified in thinking that, despite her wish to make amends, she is taking advantage of her superior social status--and of the appeal she knows she has for him. She appears to tempt Edward into an action only she <u>really</u> wants. The combination of precisely detailed description of Edward's body and of their lovemaking, together with the absence of emotive terms, denies the encounter any feeling such as passion or pleasure, so contributing to the impression that Annie is, wilfully, using the boy. Further, removal from the discourse at this point of the satirical perspective that has so far controlled the reader's response to the narrative, means the reader is not encouraged to view Annie's deed critically.

Lynn Freed: <u>HOME GROUND</u>

Like Becker's novel, Freed's is a witty satire of an authentic slice of wealthy bourgeois white life. Ruth Frank reveals her family's daily domestic intercourse to be an emotional battlefield, yet, as "I"-narrator, she tell her story with some affection--a quality absent from Annie Firman's relations with her parents. Freed's portrayal of Ruth's mother also contrasts with that of Annie's: Ruth's is flawed, exasperating, domineering, but not, as is Annie's mother, the villain of the piece. Freed does not write a female version of the rejection of the mother. However, whatever consciousness of gender oppression emerges from the novel does so only by means of its

exposure of the sexual predatoriness of men.

Like Becker, Freed represents the isolation and insulation of the privileged. The Frank family's connections with local "history," and with its peoples and cultures, are tenuous; the few local phenomena allowed to filter through garden wall, garden, and front door into their home include newspaper accounts and a handful of black persons in their role as servants. Ruth's parents, who have become big fish in a small cultural pool, hanker nostalgically after England as their cultural pivot. Their local achievements in theatre drama they rate according to a supreme standard, set by the London stage.

Ruth's story becomes increasingly dominated by her urgent desire to escape, a desire that grows as the family's fortunes decline: her parents become hard up, her grandparents die, and Nora, the cook, Ruth's ally and surrogate mother, develops a fatal cancer. What she wishes to escape <u>from</u> is, above all, her quarrelling, sometimes vicious, family, but there is also her dissatisfaction with herself, and what she perceives as the thinness of culture within South Africa. Her goal is England, which, Ruth declares, has "a history," while South Africa, by implication, has none (HG 265).

Another factor reinforcing Ruth's wish to leave is her Jewishness. Talking to her Indian friends, she says that "Jews and Indians [seem] to have no stake in the future of [South Africa]" (HG 233). Ruth has already shown her aversion to the exclusiveness attached to the "Jewish heritage" dear to her grandfather (HG 227), and she dislikes the Habonim movement and her Hebrew classes. But her belief that Jews like herself have no role to play is stimulated particularly by Sharpeville, a recent event, which has led to her conviction that revolution,

with the consequent threat for whites of the "knife at the throat" (a phrase used by her four times), is inevitable (HG 231, 232, 238, 239).

Freed has Ruth admit to her ignorance about current events; admit, too, that the self she wishes to become once free of her family will have "Money. A man of my own," and will be freer to love (HG 233). She does not claim for Ruth a larger commitment than to herself (for the present). It is the sort of commitment common in adolescents, made perhaps more necessary in Ruth's case by the damage to her self-esteem that her family's fighting has inflicted on her.

Ruth <u>is</u>, however, both uneasy about her position of privilege and concerned about the ill treatment of blacks, especially of those she knows and loves. Freed also presents her as weighing the option of whether or not to leave within the context of political commitment. Maya Chowdree's father, on the one hand, encourages her to return South Africa after Oxford in order to "work for peaceful solutions" (HG 239); on the other hand, Jocelyn Hopswith, the visiting London actress who becomes Ruth's sympathetic confidante, encourages the girl to flee family and country:

> 'If you were a revolutionary--not just politically, in every way--I'd say stay and battle it out. But you're not. You like to please too much.' (HG 186)

Freed is original in more that her use of friendship across

the colour line to show how class similarities can draw together those whom apartheid would put asunder. Original, too, is her treatment of the white nightmare of the sexually rapacious, virile black man. If Becker ends her novel with a white female taking dubious advantage of a black male's sexuality, Freed begins hers with a white female child invading the sexual privacy of a black male (HG 21-24). The fact that Ruth is only eight years old serves merely to underline the agony of an adult rendered powerless by virtue of his race and class position to discipline a mischievous, exhibitionistic, young child.

(Freed inverts the nightmare to insist on a feature of power relations within apartheid. Slaughter, on the other hand, defuses it. Peter, the driver, responds to eleven-year old Emily's 'crush' on him by being "mildly amused by the passionate gaze of the small girl who looked up at him so openly . . ." (DK 26). His "amusement" is carefully defined as appropriate, "not wilful or unkind," but "reminiscent, tender" (DK 26).)

Becker's and Freed's novels of education depict the lives of those who are rendered marginal, and alien, in the country in which they live, by their beliefs that, firstly, culture and meaning, as well as hope for the future, lie in a metropolitan centre elsewhere, and, secondly, their particular section of the white ruling caste has no part to play in the resolution of South Africa's tribulations.

Any accommodation the protagonists of these novels make in order to establish for themselves their claim to South African citizenship, must, given their suburban lives, be with black South Africans, and not with nature. Freed's novel, in disclaiming the possibility for Ruth of making such a claim, is markedly frank about its protagonist's lust for fulfilment of her

selfish desires; no claims of any false worthiness are made for the girl's motives in leaving South Africa, nor is her choice of exile given any general validity for other whites (or English-speaking whites). The option of political commitment is raised, and given serious consideration in terms of the protagonist's temperament; but the narrative remains open-ended on the possibility for other whites to choose, successfully, a life of activism. The narrative also notes its awareness, by means of Ruth's admission of her failure to be more informed about conditions in South Africa, of the circumscribed nature of the world it represents. Becker, however, strains at protest against apartheid in a scene set in nature (in the form of a garden). This scene recalls De Beauvoir's statement that women writers have had recourse to depictions of the nature world, beyond the reach of society's strictures, to reveal their secret desires and hopes. However, the sexual and race politics in this closing scene are unexamined and, as stated above, reactionary.

NOTES

[1] The character of Sarah Frank is based on that of Freed's own mother, Ann Freed, a wellknown theatre and radio drama personality.

CHAPTER 9

MENÁN DU PLESSIS: A STATE OF FEAR

Du Plessis's, first published novel, A State of Fear (1983), and her second, Longlive! (1989), both convey a sense of a particular South African place, the city of Cape Town.[1] Du Plessis has said, "yes, I suppose that it is part of my secret private project," to "write Cape Town"--where she has lived for all but one year of her life.[2]

The opening paragraphs of A State of Fear, for instance, include details of topography and vegetation that denote Cape Town as the setting for the narrative:

> It's raining over the city, raining down steadily over all of us who live in the mountain's rain-shadow. Raining over the Cape flatlands, over the dense growth of acacia in the sand dunes; over the factories and houses and shanties and office blocks; over all the million of us who live here. The sky must capitulate easily to those vast surges of icy air in the upper atmosphere: to come tumbling so weakly afterwards, helpless against gravity, melting down uselessly in straight pencilled strokes of cold air and glinting light. Raining down over the two wintry seas with their separate island and bays and harbours.
>
> Up in the mountain the granite faces must be glistening now behind the dense mist; there will be ephemeral waterfalls, hundreds of tons of water crashing down each second over the boulders and rock faces; and those quartz pebbles smoothed to opacity in ancient streams will be stirring in the beds of the steep ravines. Ja. It's against these rainy, graphite-smudges skies that the colours of protea and aloes achieve their full power of sustained incandescence. (SF 1)

The novels convey knowledge of and affection for Cape Town,[3] and, too, a sure sense of South African identity. Apartheid and gender oppression may marginalise and isolate Anna Rossouw of A State of Fear, but she never considers exile as a possible option for herself. When the subject is raised--a fellow-teacher has "gone into exile" after receiving his call-up papers for the army--Anna is adamant that "For me it would be a desertion, to leave my homeland now" (SF 170-71). For her, the betrayal would not (as it is for Annie and Barb in The Virgins) be not to go, but to do so. And, "now," especially, would it be a "desertion," for the country is in turmoil due to the industrial strikes and school boycotts of 1980. Following on the assumption that this is her "homeland," Anna takes it for granted that she has a responsibility to work for change, and much of the inner struggle that she, as narrator, recounts concerns her attempt to define, and adopt, the correct political stance.

This chapter focusses on A State of Fear. Despite the fact that Longlive! also covers subject matter characteristic of novels of education--notably liberation from parental domination into emotional freedom and intellectual autonomy, because the narrative weaves into and out of the minds of three characters, two white and one 'coloured', two female and one male, it does not have the single female focalising conciousness common to the novels of education so far discussed. However, brief comment will be made on the developments in Longlive! which make this writer a pathbreaker in the context of South African writing.

Both of the novels are marked by a tension between the author's acceptance or self-imposition of boundaries,

restrictions, limitations, and her splitting open of boundaries, those established by the dichotomies of culture, race, and class in South African discourse. The most obvious (self-imposed) limitation is that of perspective: the novels are focussed inward. This is especially true of A State of Fear, in which there is little action and virtually no dialogue. Du Plessis chooses to iscribe consciousness, a consciousness that reflects, furthermore, a particular kind of sensibility. This sensibility is intense, and sensitive equally to the sensory pleasures of features of nature in and around Cape Town (plants, the sky, Table Mountain) as to the complexities of conscience one faces as an activist and, in A State of Fear, as a writer.

The paragraphs quoted above introduce the inwardness Du Plessis will convey by means of her technique in A State of Fear. No Eurocentric mythopoesis interposes itself between narrator and nature; neither city nor nature carries the burden of pastoral or antipastoral; yet, despite some topographical detail ("Up in the mountain," "over the Cape flatlands"), and some social and economic detail ("the million of us who live here," "factories and houses and shanties and office blocks"), the topographical detail cannot be read (in what relation to city and mountain are the "two wintry seas"?). The narrator's perspective is saturated in the weight of sky, mountain, and, above all, rain; despite the local meteorological knowledge (in "vast surges of icy air in the upper atmosphere" and "helpless against gravity"), the state of the weather is being used, primarily, to establish a mood for the narrative to come. That mood is sombre, sad. This is weather suitable for hibernating, and thinking and writing, for remembering--and for mourning: the destruction of veld and human life, the loss of the narrator-protagonist's father and

brother, the death of childhood dreams.

Du Plessis's use of natural features is, therefore, a characteristic of her means of evoking place, and emotional climate. On the whole, the responses of the consciousnesses rendered in both novels aestheticise what they perceive of nature, the intensity of their responses reflecting Du Plessis's own keen enjoyment:

> I do make a deliberate effort just to look at the world around me. I use it very much as a way of sustaining myself and I do that for my characters.4

Anna views the mountain and the weather from behind a window; the school where she teaches has been closed due to boycotts by the pupils. Her solitude as she writes is broken only periodically by the two child activists who take refuge with her from the state's policing forces. Du Plessis's characters are outsiders; and she herself eschews the omniscient perspective. She said in April 1989 that she had chosen deliberately to narrow the perspective she uses, in order to reflect her "delimitation as a writer from [her] particular social set-up in this country at this point in time."[5] However, the very same impulse--engaged, critical, striving toward integrity of representation--that leads Du Plessis to decide to impose upon her fiction this narrowing of perspective, leads also to her using formal aspects that challenge certain boundaries in South African discourse and life. Anna's language, for instance, reflects a subjectivity that is hybrid white South African: she writes in English (her mother is of mixed Germanic

and Irish extraction), but with a vocabulary laced with Afrikaans words, like bywoner, and, sometimes, entire Afrikaans phrases (SF 170, 188). A more important feature of Anna's discourse, however, than the mix of the two languages spoken by whites (although not only by them), is its revelation of her success in having breached to some extent the psychological and physical boundaries that the laws of apartheid enforce between 'races'. Effected by means of her job as a teacher in a 'coloured' school, the breach has resulted in a perspective sufficiently fluid to enable Anna, for instance, to refer to "our kids" and mean the scholars at her school--where "those kids" refers to African scholars, and to insert into her account political arguments that have taken place in the school in the recent time leading up to the boycotts (SF 55, 54, 182, 183).[6] Furthermore, the words and ideas of two 'coloured' child activists who take refuge in her house occupy a place in the continuum of Anna's narrative. The language, ideas, and experience of those not, like Anna, classified 'white', have become part of her total subjectivity as inscribed in her narrative. Despite its inwardness, therefore, Anna's narrative reflects a subjectivity less insulated by white privilege and comfort than do the narratives in Becker's, Freed's, and Macphail's novels (where, in a manner suited to satire, the authors' focus on presenting the externals of word and gesture).

Turning from form to content, and to comparison with Gordimer, Du Plessis's outsider characters do not (like Rosa Burger and Hillela Kapran) move in the world of decision-makers. Her characters, says Du Plessis, are not among those "who believe they are at the centre of the dominant experience of South Africa";[7] they are minor actors in the South African drama.

Their crises of conscience and discomforts may seem trivial. Anna, for instance, although she acts *in loco parentis* for Felicia and Wilson, feeding and sheltering them, has none of the rights of a parent: they tell her neither what they are doing, nor where they are going, while Wilson ignores her very existence (SF 50). But Anna's treatment by the children is similar to that of many of the real parents in 'coloured' townships, for they, like the teachers, are no longer in control of events, and are not consulted.

This sort of cogent, minutely recorded experience therefore can, and does at times, take the reader into the heart of matters which may lie outside the heady realms of the powerful (men, black and white) and their rhetoric, but which have been not only the daily reality for some of those who have fought the struggle on the streets, in classrooms, and in their homes, but will also constitute part of any future process of restructuring the social fabric of the country. For instance, when Anna ponders the children's repudiation of their elders' control, she touches on the brutalisation of these children and the loss of a climate of learning:

> . . .there'll be differences [after the revolution]. And maybe that's why the children now have no choice but to choose. They're the ones who have a future at stake, and they're the only ones courageous enough, innocent enough to reject their parents' anxious conservatism. Suppose that's why they've hardened their faces and abandoned games of football played in the streets, and the dances at the discotheque. Why teenagers in Zimbabwe left their studies and put on battle-dress, living in camps in the bush for years--sleeping on the hard earth, digging out the pupae of ants under stones for a sweet and rich, if meagre food: to bring down a government. Wilson said one night with such a ravaged

> bitterness: 'We never fucken wanted violence. It's the last thing a person ever wants in the world: but we driven to it, man, by the fucken state. And that's the one thing, I tell you, in the end--that's the one thing I'm never going to forgive the bastards for.' (SF 174-75

Contained in Anna's muted, claustrophobic account are voices whose rawness of emotion, and vividness of anecdote and dialogue, testify to their emergence from a territory nearer, physically and psychologically, to the cutting edge of the processes that have led to "change" than any of the other novels studied. Du Plessis, born in 1952, is of a generation in which white, as well as black, youth became more politicised as the Seventies and Eighties grew more violent. (She has, like Anna, spent all her life under Afrikaner Nationalism (SF 41).) The back cover of A State of Fear records that the author was "co-founder and later national chairperson of National Youth Action, an organization which sought to fight racial discrimination in education". Anna is a member of this organization.

If Du Plessis's own involvement goes some way toward accounting for A State of Fear's specificities about political activism, the confidence the narrative reflects that South Africa is the "homeland" could be attributed to her Afrikaner origins on her father's side.[8] But, in any event, a younger generation of English-speakers than is depicted by Gordimer, Freed, Becker, and Macphail have experienced no other homeland, and the ties with Britain have faded--both due to the passing of time and because South Africans, particularly those in the large cities, are, like the rest of the world within daily reach of mass communications, acquiring a veneer of American food, clothes, colloquial language, behaviour, and, even, attitudes.

The "historical condition" Anna chooses to confront rather than flee or evade she relates to her parents' forebears--especially to her father's, who, on his father's side "arrived here almost three hundred years ago--Protestant fugitives from France, relocated by kindness of the Dutch," while those on his mother's side "settled even earlier--maybe fortune seekers," seeking to "enter a new world upon the earth," the cape known as "De Goede Hoop; De Kaap de Goede Hoop" (SF 171). Now, however,

> . . .since human beings have migrated right across the planet . . . .I can't help feeling that a phase has ended, and that now we have to stay put--to face our historical condition. (SF 171)

She distinguishes her position from those who have not stayed to "face" the historical condition she shares with (presumably other South Africans. Her father, for instance, joined the diaspora for cultural reasons:

> In Anton's case. . .it really was a return, I think: he with his intellectual and cultural rootedness in Europe. But then he was a part of his own generation, his own class, and that Sestiger ethos arose along with the emergence of the new Afrikaner haute bourgeoisie. With its super-sophisticated delight in contemporary art movements overseas, the full-blown decadence of ars gratia artis, and individualism glorified: die vreeslike lyding van die kunstenaar, en sy groot, oneindige soektog. (SF 170)

Anna (like her creator, who includes, within a text that is post-modern in its self-consciousness, the vernacular voices of grassroots activism) repudiates the individualistic positioning of the post-modernists of the immediately preceding generation of writers in Afrikaans, the Sestigers. She also repudiates, without difficulty, the prevalent attitudes of those who have written in English:

> I've tried so hard. . .believing, still believing that history cannot be deadlocked, that it's a contradiction in terms, absurd to speak of impasse. I've always felt a fierce, perhaps suspiciously vehement impatience with those English-speakers who lay claim so self-flatteringly to powerlessness. Years ago I rejected their bravely weak, sepia-tinged literature of regret. No one exists outside of history, I used to think, unless they've surrendered their humanness. Because we're not aerophagous after all--we feed, think, dream, trade, speak: we're not like those drab-leaved, spiky epiphytes that you sometimes see in people's gardens, suspended by a piece of grey string from the branches of a tree. Dull, slow-growing plants that only rarely put out a small, rustling showiness of bright flowers. We're human beings: survivors of floods, catastrophes and even our myths; ja, we're living and responsive; and answerable.
>
> No survivor ever finally escapes the wordless, ghostly memories of others. (SF 173)

The fierce, courageous credo voiced at this point deserves to be honoured; yet it has become easy, and modish in intellectual circles, to sneer at those who have found it problematic to pledge allegiance to South Africa and its future, and at those who have adhered to the liberal beliefs that formed part of Britain's legacy to South African English-speakers. One may question whether Du Plessis comprehends that a real process of

change in consciousness has been necessary for those English-speakers who were raised to regard Britain as home.

Repudiated, too, is the Afrikaner myth of the pastoral farm. This takes place when Anna, attempting to "piece . . . broken things back together" as her narrative draws to a close, increasingly dwells on memories of veld and decayed feudal farm, and childhood experiences shared with her brother (SF 178). It is not easy to follow Du Plessis through this brave, bleak tale. The mind longs for more economy of expression, for relief from the over-frequent associative shifts, for fewer sentences that begin with a verb and omit the subject pronoun (as in "Thought I'd.. . ."--and for a plot line. Yet, the narrative does draw to a climax as it nears its end, and that climax focusses on childhood, and the pastoral farm as a feature of inherited culture, not, for this urban writer, as part of her character's actual experience, past or present.

Anna's articulation of her desire to take refuge in nostalgia--"I want to be walking across that dry country.. . . I want to walk close behind Frans's shoulder, so that he can show me the things in the veld" (SF 181, 186)--is intruded upon by the internalised, rational, disillusioned (Sestiger) voice of her father. "Anna, it is winter.. . . Well, Anna, my dear: you must know that pastoral--that the country is dead?" She retorts "Ja, Anton. Ja: do you imagine that I am not mourning" (SF 188), but, nevertheless, returns to her imaginary journey. "I want to head up towards the kloof.. . . I want to turn and look back down the valley" (SF 189).

There, she imagines, she would see the "bywoner's cottage" of childhood; but it is at this node of remembered, shared joy, that she can allow into consciousness what has been deferred, the

always-immanent but inadmissible thought (set apart typographically from the rest of the narrative) that her brother, who appears to have disappeared (SF 110),

> . . . must be dead.
> Fallen, perhaps, on a concrete floor;
> in shadow. (SF 190)

Like Slaughter, Du Plessis deconstructs the myth of return to harmonious rural life, on a farm, as refuge from the corrupt city. In Dreams of the Kalahari, Emily returns from London to a landscape devastated by war, with, just offstage, an Afrikaner farm, which has been destroyed (only its women and children surviving). In A State of Fear, the protagonist wishes to look again at the once-idyllic farm. However, her father has left, her brother (keenly interested in agrarian methods) is dead, and she imagines she would find sand "building up" around an "ancient, rusted ploughshare," the bywoner dead of cancer (SF 189-90). Anna, her eye fixed on "history" and the accommodations it demands with the present, mourns the loss of childhood, of its faith, and of the vision of the fruitful farm so dear to Afrikaner mythopoesis.

The fact that Anna's struggle into autonomous thought and action is not with her mother, but with her (internalised) father--for whom she longs even as she resents him, distinguishes her novel from those by Lessing and the other southern African writers included in this study. This same feature distinguishes her novel, too, from the women's writing dominant in the west. If the narrator's temporary stasis--she does almost nothing else

besides write--comes of grieving and extreme fear; and, if her fear is of both a certain incident in the past and the violence happening in the present in streets, roads, and houses under the lowering sky--both past and present violence haunting her in the recurring image of a policeman's raised fist--what she discovers is that even further back in her past lies another source of frozen incapacity: at school and at university she couldn't join in, for she was not given the Word, by her father, the Father. As a result, she cannot enter society, as a person, as a beloved, as a loving and hating "woman" (SF 170). Du Plessis 'writes out' a domineering, overwhelming father figure in A State of Fear by removing him from the scene; and in Longlive! he is, as a bullying patriarch, killed off at the end of the narrative.[9]

Insofar as Anna's mother is concerned, Anna has since learnt "some language of femininity" from the "culture" (SF 170), but here, too, lies betrayal, for the "culture . . . demands you should tease and be coy. Be yourself; be a woman; be like your mother. Be an actress" (SF 170). Du Plessis's interest in language (she is a linguistics scholar) emerges in her inscribing, through Anna, the politics of gender in terms like "Word" and "language"; but neither of her two novels does more than engage superficially with the oppression of women as women in either Afrikaner culture or South African political and cultural life.

Earlier chapters noted that Lessing's use of the mode of critical realism prevented full expression of her vision in her work set in southern Africa, a vision later allowed to burgeon into narratives of voyages into inner and outer space (sometimes recounted by surrogate story-tellers, like Lusik, an inhabitant of Zone Three, who narrates Marriages). Du Plessis, however, with some success in A State of Fear, and with more certainty in

Longlive!, develops a form suited to her particular vision. Pechey says of Longlive! that:

> The dichotomies of class and race and gender, material enough as effects of power, take second place here to a complex positioning. Intermediacy reigns not only in the choice of characters . . . and in the effective androgyny of a writing of inner speech which weaves easily in and out of male and female consciousnesses, but also in the refusal throughout of a colour-coding of attitudes, affiliations and identities.10

In addition,

> . . . we [are] exposed to the moment-by-moment and far from composed rushing-inwards of signs from outside as the whole person of each character is propelled forward on legs or wheels in the course of the day.
>
> It is this continuum . . . that offers an agonistic counter-truth to the besetting binaries of apartheid cognition and of liberalism, rather than some formal deconstruction or theoretical refutation of those discourses.11

Pechey's analysis of Du Plessis as constructing this kind of subjectivity (and as succeeding, too, in her ability to combine utterances from the different languages and registers forming part of the totality of South African culture so as to "break beyond the ethnic-literary deadlock" that has resulted from the "split of South African fiction after its liberal heyday into a white post-modernism. . . and a post-Soweto black prose of 'populist

realism'")[12] is an analysis of precisely what Du Plessis says she wishes, in fact, to achieve:

> . . . if I were to look at my own mind and the way I see the world and other people, there's no point at which I have a consciousness that some filter comes into being which says I'm a white, and everything I do is coloured by the sense of being white. That does not exist; it is thrust upon one by other people.. . .13

She also says:

> . . . I think if you're wanting to expand your reader's consciousness, you take them into a world where race actually isn't an issue, where you can deal with this person as a person, and you can understand their dilemmas and their emotions as the emotions of any other human being. So I feel that is a useful thing to be doing and I don't think it's side-stepping [the socio-economic dimensions] of race, I think it's actually stepping <u>beyond</u> something.14

Du Plessis's move--following on the definition, in <u>A State of Fear</u>, of what must be repudiated--toward fabricating subjectivity as a state of being in the world in which the dichotomies of South African discourse and thought do not feature does, certainly, have the potential to expand the consciousness of her readers. However, it is neither true that this is what subjectivity itself is like in all humans, nor that where consciousness of (say) race exists it comes only from outside oneself. Human beings are, it

is true, inducted into the ideological constructs they hold. But, as was stated at the close of Chapter Two, such induction entails their internalising attitudes, responses, ways--even--of perceiving, not all of which are always under their conscious control. Du Plessis, decentring the personal subject, avoids the essentialism of supposing the existence of a core human identity; but she either rejects or is unaware of that insight of psychoanalytic theory which, viewing consciousness as historically constructed to reflect ideology, <u>therefore</u> demands recognition that it is impossible to have full knowledge of the potentially limitless unconscious that shapes conscious thought. To underrate the stubbornness of the patterns of thought and emotion involved, is not to improve the chances of combating offensive prejudices.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Du Plessis, interview with Susan Gardiner, 26 April, 1984, and Du Plessis, interview with Hunter, 4 November, 1989 in Hunter (ed.), Between the Lines 2 (Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1991), in press.

[2] Du Plessis, interview with Hunter.

[3] Cf. Graham Pechey, "Voices of Struggle," rev. of Longlive! by Du Plessis and A Rainbow on the Paper Sky by Mandla Langa, Southern African Review of Books (December 1989/January 90):

> Longlive! insistently places before us the whole gamut of speech-acts which go to make up the great dialogue of pain and elation that was South Africa in November 1985. . . . Typography equates . . . public and private words, makes the generally heard speak to the unheard that we are privileged to overhear. It is the peculiar blending of these accents that constitutes a unique experience of urban struggle and crisis, making the site of their interaction and intersection after all not just any city but inescapably Cape Town (p. 3).

[4] Du Plessis, interview with Hunter.

[5] Du Plessis, "I've deliberately chosen boundaries . . ," interview with Hein Willemse, Die Suid-Afrikaan (April 1989), 45. Cf., however, interview with Hunter:

> At the Falls Conference [in July 1989] when a whole lot of Afrikaans writers went and spoke to comrades from the ANC . . . I remember Albie Sachs came up to me and Antjie Krog.. . . [A]nd she dared to say to me, Look, is it not possible for someone imaginatively to enter the mind of another person, even if their experience is to some extent foreign to your own? . . . we ended up saying, Why not? Provided you do it well.. . . And that's been an opening for me, an opening of doors.. . .

[6] Anna crosses other boundaries, with varying degrees of success. In the classroom, she inverts power relations between

herself as teacher and her pupils by being willing to take instruction from them when she is challenged on political grounds (SF 9-10). Class boundaries, which usually overlap with those of race in South Africa, are undermined by her way of life: meals are frugal in her home, and she lives in Observatory, an old section of the city, which was, until recently, rundown. Observatory is also closer to some 'coloured' suburbs than are most white suburbs, closer, too, to the public transport that is used predominantly by the poor. Simply in being geographically accessible to Felicia and Wilson, Anna was more likely to be turned to by them for help in their activities. On the other hand, and ironically, Anna's ability to work and live where she chooses confirms that she occupies a position of relative privilege.

[7] Du Plessis, interview with Hunter.

[8] Du Plessis, interview with Hunter.

[9] Du Plessis, interview with Gardiner.

[10] Pechey 3.

[11] Pechey 3.

[12] Pechey 3.

[13] Du Plessis, interview with Hunter.

[14] Du Plessis, interview with Hunter.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The work by Lessing examined in this study records her attempt to deconstruct the settler mythopoesis of Southern Rhodesia in order, instead, to insert within the country's literary culture mimetically rendered representations of settler life. Lessing's successes have been noted--for instance, her incorporation of the historical fact of usurpation of the land from its previous black inhabitants--as have instances where she retains in her fiction some aspects of colonial ideology. These include her retention of the (contrary) Eurocentric notions of Africa as both 'new' territory and the 'old' continent, and her placing of her characters within the bleak wastes of the 'dream' topography Coetzee identifies as characteristic of South African antipastoral. With Schreiner as her acknowledged influence, Lessing writes a critique of colonialism by means of inverting the topos of the farm as a pastoral paradise, to create in its stead the settler farm--indeed the country of Southern Rhodesia--as a dystopia.

A feature of Lessing's dystopian landscapes is the mysterious, pulsing, threatening life she instills into them. Representing white fear of retribution by blacks in this way, Lessing conforms to the traditional colonial notion that identifies black persons with the primitive. Furthermore, she denies in Children of Violence--her vision limited as it is by

her dystopian critique--the possibility that well-intentioned whites might work with blacks for liberation from white domination. Lessing's suggestion that the generic white man must inevitably fail, within the colonial dispensation then current, to make accommodation with the land and--since they are connected with nature--Rhodesia's black people, conceals her need, as a writer, to leave the narrow intellectual life of Rhodesia for London. Anna Wulf's tormented realisation, in The Golden Notebook, that she is unable to depict her African experience in any way other than through the distorting lens of "nostalgia" is Lessing's apposite comment on her own earlier depictions of Southern Rhodesia, which record the frustration of her ideals.

The attempt at accommodation with the land in Lessing's work set in southern Africa, the importance of the topic of the land in colonial writing--including that of South Africa, and De Beauvoir's thesis that women writers reveal themselves most clearly when they write about the natural world, have led me to use the writer's representation of the land, as veld, farm, and garden, as a device for focussing discussion of Lessing's work read in conjunction with novels of education by southern African white women writers. To test the appositeness of De Beauvoir's thesis to these texts has seemed appropriate because all of these writers are inheritors of the broad European culture upon which De Beauvoir bases her thesis, and because these novels trace the negotiation of personal and social identity of an adolescent girl, to whom, says De Beauvoir, nature would be of especial importance.

Lessing's Martha Quest and Slaughter's Dreams of the Kalahari support De Beauvoir's proposition. The bush is for Martha and Emily a refuge in times of crisis or exhaustion, and, even more pertinently, in both novels the bush is the locus for the protagonists' achievement of crucial recognitions in the course of their development. When Martha moves from her parents' farm to the nearby local town, episodes in the bush, and, then, in a garden, mark important stages in her understanding of herself and her social role, while the noble ideals Martha associates with her adolescent epiphanies in the bush remain a touchstone for her as she proceeds on her quest for commitment and personal fulfilment.

There are, however, significant differences in the two writers' depictions of their protagonists' interactions with the natural world. Emily may experience unfocussed, atavistic fear of bush and black persons; yet she is able, despite the bush warfare taking place around her, to dispel her fear when she realises that she has formed ties with particular black persons as well as a more abstract sense of kinship with human beings generally. Secondly, the inscription in the novel of Emily's achieved kinship with blacks, together with the delineation of black Africans in culture, accords with the narrative's move toward emphasising the necessity of attaining accord with black persons rather than with the landscape. Lessing's characters, on the other hand--apart from Martha's abortive forays into communal ethics--are intent, like the narrator in "The Old Chief Mshlanga", upon seeking dialogue and reciprocity with the landscape. They fail, as does the author fail, for she does not represent a peopled landscape in which her characters might

find local identity.

But the importance of the land in Lessing and Slaughter's works is not only metaphorical. The land is also what has been, and is still being, fought over; it is a real, phenomenal environment. The land, its spaces and sky, is an overwhelming existential fact in rural parts of Southern Africa. When a writer has spent many years in a rural area of the subcontinent, and particularly if she has grown up in such surroundings, it is to be expected that the space, light, and other features of the impressive southern African topography will have affected her consciousness: it is therefore likely that, in her fiction, love for the bush (or veld) will be a vital part of any feelings of connection to the region, and that, conversely, the bush will be part of what is yearned for if exile is chosen. This is true for Lessing and Slaughter's fiction. It is also true for Phoebe and Nio. Phoebe, having contemplated not returning to South Africa, writes to Nio that

> When I saw the red earth [of Spain] I knew when Luc when home [to Paris] I would [go home] too. (PN200)

The absence of similar strong feelings of connection to physical aspects of the South African topography in Becker's and Freed's novels may with some confidence be linked to the fact that the authors spent their childhoods in comfortable suburbs like those in which their stories are set.

With writers like Becker and Freed, where neither bush, veld nor farm feature, and where there is virtually no awareness

inscribed of the centrality of land in the historical struggles for power in the subcontinent, only representations of the garden topos could provide proof, if any, in support of De Beauvoir's thesis on the importance of nature for women writers. Becker's novel does in fact close with a symbol-laden scene set in the Firmans' garden (so providing another example of the ideological significance of closure). Here, Annie acts out desire and rebellion, coupling with her black Adam to negotiate a specifically female self. Since Annie exploits Edward's body for her own satisfaction, Becker's closure is reactionary in its sexual and race politics; yet, the author's use of the symbolic trappings of a seduction in an Eden, together with the removal of the satirical perspective that the narrator has until this point in the narrative sustained, do mark this garden scene as a representation by a woman writer of a site of desire.

Freed, on the other hand, provides weaker affirmation of De Beauvoir's thesis. It is possible to view the garden, as, in Becker's novel, an interim zone--both part of Ruth's parents' home and a site where desire is expressed and taboos broken: in Maya's garden Ruth walks with her Indian friend, and, in her own garden, she invades the servants' quarters to abuse the genitals and dignity of a black man. (An encounter in which Freed criticises successfully, as Becker does not, the perversions of power in a hierarchy based on race and class.) However, no symbolism attaches to either these gardens or the events in them, a characteristic that accords with Freed's openness about the self-interest involved in Ruth's wish to leave South Africa. But, the fact that Freed is bold enough to invest desire, dreams, and fears in a 'transparent' narrative instead of, covertly, in the symbolism of a conventional literary topos,

does not in itself disprove De Beauvoir's argument; it merely suggests that what De Beauvoir describes is not a necessary feature of writing by women influenced by European culture.

Gordimer, too, is an urban writer. She was raised in a Transvaal town, and Helen, although found sitting underneath a tree in a highveld town at the start of The Lying Days, soon moves to Johannesburg. However, the freedom of Gordimer's novel of education, and of her later fiction, from the expectations, and the fears, that Lessing imposes on 'Africa' and its natural spaces is due primarily to Gordimer's developed historical imagination. The close of The Lying Days, with Helen deciding, as she watches black children dance, to return to South Africa, signals both optimism as to possible success for a young white woman in negotiating identity and meaning in South Africa, and (with hindsight) Gordimer's own ongoing authorial project of engaging with and understanding at least some of the circumstances of life for blacks; of finding the connections between such circumstances and her own as a white inhabitant of South Africa; of developing her ethics and actions according to what she discovers; and of forging the correct vocabulary for use in her writing. Already in The Lying Days she shows herself possessed of an imagination and intellect capable of engaging energetically with these formidable tasks.

Du Plessis, like Macphail, conveys reverence for, and attachment to, South Africa's natural world--the sky, the fynbos--such reverence and attachment forming an important part of each protagonist's sense that a familiar part of South Africa, and nowhere else, is 'home'. Du Plessis's two novels also reflect, through certain consistent features of the various subjectivities represented, a sensibility keenly aware of the

beauty of, and solace provided by nature. Elements of Cape Town's topography, such as sky and mountain, recur continually in the interior monologue of State of Fear. Yet the setting is urban, and Du Plessis is, in essence, an urban writer, a writer, in fact, of Cape Town. While, for instance, Macphail's Nio enjoys working with soil, in Du Plessis nature is either aestheticised, or abstracted (as when the narrator gropes her way toward a sense of responsibility for the ecology of the entire globe). The (decayed) pastoral farm of A State of Fear is not ever Anna's home; it appears, in her consciousness, merely as a cultural phenomenon. It is part of that cultural and political heritage, handed on to her through her Afrikaner father, whose meaning she must confront as she finds a new "path", into the future, where she may negotiate a place for herself with conscience (SF 189).

In Du Plessis's novel, as in those by Gordimer, Macphail, and Slaughter, it is seen to be possible for the white protagonist to earn a place within the subcontinent, through dedication to work that opposes, or ameliorates the effects of, apartheid. In effect, the protagonist atones for the privileges she enjoys due to her 'whiteness'. This position is in contradistinction to the colonial doctrine of work as a defence against the lure of savage Africa and as justification for the domination of idle black by industrious (and therefore superior) white.[1]

In Becker's and Freed's novels no atonement is possible. Like their autobiographical protagonists, and like Lessing, these two writers opted for the richer cultural pastures of England. Of the three, only Lessing engages more than superficially with the key questions for the white writer of conscience, By what right

do I stay and claim to belong? How do I write about this world? Slaughter, the fourth of the writers studied to leave the subcontinent, also responds directly to the first question, and implicitly to the second, when she fabricates a contemporary frontierswoman, one who returns from miserable exile in England to Botswana, to fulfilling work and love, in a camp for refugees from South Africa.

Freed and Becker record white guilt, but, even more strongly do they record the aspiring intellectual's desire for a more bracing and nurturing cultural milieu than that available in Southern Africa. Ruth Frank's decision that there is "no stake" for "Jews and Indians" as black African and Afrikaner fight to dominate the future spurs on, but does not motivate, her urgent drive to study in Oxford (HG 233). Both these novelists also satirically contrast the lip service paid to liberal orthodoxies in wealthy bourgeois English-speaking families with the actual treatment of servants. Their novels reflect disillusionment, and some doubt that cultural refinement as the protagonists know it, and virtues such as tolerance, will have a place in any South African future following on Sharpeville.

In Lessing's Going Home, as in her fiction, those who work the land are almost entirely absent. As at the start of Martha Quest, "black, small figures" plough the fields, "the little black boy" leads oxen, and only one among the farm labourers, Tobias, is described as working (he paints), and is personalised to the extent of being named and having his thoughts and actions imagined (in whimsical fashion) (GH 47). In Going Home, however, there is the story of Dickson, Lessing's houseboy. Chapter XII, Lessing recedes as autobiographer from the events, and the

chapter approaches the form of a self-contained short episode, even though it is linked to the concerns of the longer narrative. This chapter resembles a short story like "Little Tembi" in which there is some characterization of blacks, but, on the whole, Lessing's black characters are distant, representative, sometimes symbolic figures (like the black women Martha envies from time to time for their apparent comfortableness with their fertility).

It is typical of these novels of education that they combine a critique of racism with relative absence of black characters. When black characters do in fact take up much of the narrative space, as in the novels by Becker and Freed, they are depicted only in relation to the childhood and adolescence of the protagonist, and they appear only in their role of trusty retainer in a white household. Nevertheless their talk, wit, strengths, foibles, activities, rooms, loves, and weaknesses provide much of the anecdotal richness of the novels. The novelists depict an aspect of the lives of some black Africans, and, in doing so, dignify their characters.

Slaughter creates, besides Emily's childhood friends and mentors, adult black companions for a more mature protagonist. Blacks emerge as individuals, variable by character and temperament, not only as servants in the Jones's household, but also in the refugee camp, where they are cheeky teenagers, disaffected soldiers, hostile loafers, and mature women companions. Slaughter also counters identification of blacks with the primitive by providing specific details to show them living in a culture: although they live, as an agrarian people, in continuous interaction with nature, they are not identified with it.

Lessing and Gordimer, with their highly developed political sense, also, like Slaughter, incorporate black experience beyond the white household, as in the Dickson chapter in Going Home, and, in The Lying Days, in episodes such as the strike Helen witnesses as a young girl (LD 35-38) and the May Day riot in the black townships in 1950 (LD 328). This first novel by Gordimer does not reach beyond constituting black characters as moral dilemmas for whites, but it already announces the writer's active involvement in politics and her move toward close acquaintance with black South Africans, from the Fifties on. In A World of Strangers, published in 1958, for instance, Sam Mofokenzazi and Steven Sitole, characters in their own right, bear recognisable correspondences with Todd Matshikiza, the composer of the jazz musical King Kong, and the journalist Can Themba, respectively.[2]

In Du Plessis's State of Fear the words of children Anna has taught and of the two schoolchildren who take refuge with her are incorporated into the narrative that renders her consciousness, while, in Longlive, subjectivity is represented as transracial and transgendered. Du Plessis's events and characterisation, influenced by the fact that she began her writing career at a time when the South African political climate was at its most violent, and by her own service in popular activism, bring the reader closer to the war zone of life in the black townships than the other writers, including the Gordimer of more recent writing. However, Du Plessis denies both the existence of ideology at unconscious levels, and the force that constructs of race, class, and gender, not always under voluntary control, are capable of exerting.

Martha's key "'moments'" of "illumination" in the bush involve

sensations of oneness with nature and dissolution in the universe: these are goals of self-conscious romanticism. Romanticism influenced the works De Beauvoir examined in The Second Sex and De Beauvoir's responses to them. Current literary criticism is, on the whole, suspicious of romanticism--indeed, like this study, it probes behind and beyond imagery, symbolism, tropes, looking for gaps, contradictions, silences, ideology. A bookish child, Lessing steeped herself in English letters and interiorized its prevalent attitudes; at times she uses a purplish vocabulary that echoes Lawrence's brand of romanticism.

There is a need, however, within the context of South African letters, for critics, and among them feminist critics, to develop a vocabulary for discussing spiritual belief in writers and their works without (if whites are concerned) automatic resort to the term 'romanticism', and without (if blacks are concerned) any patronising assumption that such belief indicates lack of sophistication and an insufficient degree of politicisation. For one thing, the majority of black South Africans do believe in the existence of a spirit world, and the crucial role played by several of the Christian churches in opposing apartheid has strengthened their position in black communities. For another, the progressive nature and popularity of liberation theology and feminist theology indicate the need for literary critical practice to respond to religious belief (or, at least, religious belief in some of its forms) with more tolerance.

Insofar as religious belief and nature are concerned, despite the west's heritage of rationalism, white writers in this country and elsewhere express varieties of reverence for nature,

some of these expressions warranting use of the term 'spiritual', others not.[3] It is worth remembering, too, that an unforced sense of the numinousness of the natural world was, despite Blake's grief over its loss as early as the late eighteenth century, general in Europe and England as recently as the last century. Martha's 'moments' may have features of romanticism, but they are also an energetic, conscious attempt to sustain the unselfconscious sense of the numinousness of the universe that comes from religious certainty ("she of course knew that such experiences were common among the religious," MQ 61), and that used to come from leading a pre-industrial way of life not intent on pillaging rock and field.

Du Plessis, the youngest of the writers studied, introduces a rationally-based awareness into her consideration of the natural world. As the Eighties ended, it became more and more obvious that greater care was needed in husbanding South Africa's natural resources and controlling pollution and despoliation. And so, Anna Rossouw suggests that it is an urgent matter, in this country where all else tends to fade in importance before racism, that humans respect the plants and the creatures of the earth. Wilson, the boy street-soldier, may pronounce Anna' concern about the state of the natural environment "bullshit" and "a pipe-dream," a "romantic idea" that wishes "history" to go "backwards," but the narrator herself does not dismiss her ecological principles (SF 82).

Kolodny's Lay of the Land underlines the connections between the abuse of women and of nature, urges, too, that it be replaced by conscious and rationally-based sensitivity to the dependence of human life upon the resources of the earth, and by a greater respect for both the human and the natural resulting in

rehabilitation of the female, her body, and of the earth.[4] If, across the Atlantic, Kolodny has traced a process of ravaging the fertile and varied expanses of North America that has been accompanied by the domination, in the pastoral vocabulary, of images of abuse,[5] in South Africa, Afrikaner men, leaving the farm, have joined English-speakers as foremen, managers, directors, owners, engineers, to exert 'masculine' independence, competitiveness, drive, as they scour, dig, crush, penetrate, dump, shift whatever gets in the way: soil, forest, 'weeds', 'pests'--people. Crushing villages and towns, subjugating a nation to your will; this is the Law of the Father at the extreme of the logic of its negative face.

An aim in this study has been to define where the writing forms a "ground that belongs to no one," where otherness becomes critical difference, and, conversely, to mark those points at which the works no longer constitute critical difference, instead underpinning the given, either through omission or reinforcement.[6] The "given" has referred to constructs of race, class, and gender, which are viewed as interweaving. While comments on gender have already appeared in this concluding chapter, I now turn to matters of concern more specifically to feminist critics.

Ogunyemi has laid the charge of obsessiveness with sexuality at the door of white feminist writers, alleging their consequent narrowness, and failure--by comparison with "black womanist" writers--to "incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into [their] philosophy."[7] There is some truth in Ogunyemi's charge. However, not only

does Ogunyemi give a writer like Lessing far less than her due, but in all of the novels discussed in this study there is at the very least condemnation of social and economic inequities based on race. Further, when the questions raised by most of these writers are not merely 'Shall I stay or leave?' but also 'What does it mean to be a South African (or Rhodesian)?' or 'What does it means to be a white South African or a white African?' then clearly "cultural, national, economic, and political considerations" do feature in their texts.

The novels vary in the degree of conscious feminist protest. Lessing has, like Jean Rhys and Woolf, been instrumental in exposing the links between sexual inequalities and other forms of social relation, and in connecting such inequalities with other attitudes underlying imperialism and capitalism.[8] Like Schreiner, Lessing is acutely intelligent and articulate on practices that, specifically, oppress women; and, again like Schreiner, she registers a conflict over femaleness, sexuality, and motherhood that is complex and deeply painful. Du Plessis and Gordimer, both highly politicised about race and class, are also alike in the limitations to their understanding of the role of gender within South African society. This is true even though Lying Days, for instance, details Helen's temporary decline into wifely servitude and Du Plessis's narrator notes that one is expected, if female, to adopt feminine behaviour.

Three of the writers challenge the notion of the black man's sexual appetite for white women, an area where the constructs of gender, race, and class clearly interweave. Slaughter's Emily stimulates only gentle amusement in the driver Peter when he spots her childish passion for him, and Becker and Freed refute this aspect of 'black peril' mythology by showing the power that

a female, even if only a child, may exert when her race and class position override any inferiority attached to her gender. However, Becker's narrative records implicit endorsement of its protagonist's use of a black male's body. Ruth Frank's "diverting [of herself] and [her] friend on an otherwise dull Sunday afternoon by pulling on the penis of the gardenboy"--called Sampson--is more successful as a challenge to white myth. Sampson can react only with paralysed fear to what the reader is meant to understand as a brutal, if ignorant, assault on his "manhood" (HG 23).

On the standard heterosexual resolution that concerns feminist critics, Slaughter casts a new image from an old mould. She closes her novel with a family triad made unconventional by virtue of its cultural, and 'racial', mix. Furthermore, Emily does not give up adventure in order to commit herself to Reuben Potgieter--instead he joins her in the refugee camp. The partnership also gains social and political significance that resonates beyond itself by being set within the context of active resistance to apartheid.

Slaughter's ending is visionary (without being utopian), for Emily's frontier life constitutes a provocative extension of the possibilities raised by the narrative for social and individual reshaping. However, in the other novel closed by heterosexual pairing, Phoebe and Nio, the ending (which, like Slaughter's, appears contrived) has Nio become surrogate mother and wife in a (nuclear) family, and undertake the mediating function, between stern white male authority and helpless blacks, traditionally allowed to the white woman in colonial South Africa. The ending therefore closes over the challenges to social mores previously posed in the narrative, so placing Macphail's novel within a

category of fictions by women writers that was more typical in the nineteenth century.

Gordimer, Freed, Becker, and Du Plessis do not conclude their novels of education with a heterosexual pairing, possibly for no more reason than that the protagonist is as yet very young. Nevertheless, it remains true that the author in each case propels her hero beyond the novel's ending toward further adventure instead of toward domesticity. Lessing's Martha Quest closes in marriage; but, in light of the novel's position as first in a series, and of Martha's defection from marriage and motherhood in the following volume--ironically entitled A Proper Marriage, the marriage constitutes an anti-resolution.

On friendship between women--which opposes the androcentrism of culture and society--female friendship in Macphail, Becker, Freed, and Slaughter is lively and rewarding. The pairs of friends in Becker, Macphail, and Slaughter share intimacy and affection, and some discordant moments, as they help each other to come to terms with themselves and Life. Emily also develops a relationship of trust and support with a black woman, Lala, in the camp. Neither in the Lessing works, nor in Gordimer's The Lying Days, nor in the sealed-off world of Du Plessis's narrator is there female friendship of similar worth. Helen's attempted friendship with a black student at Witwatersrand University, Mary Seswayo, a co-student at university, fails because Helen, restrained by guilt, cannot simply see Mary as another person (and the episode seems contrived). Freed shows originality in using Ruth's friendship with an Indian girl to make the point that the girls (and their families) are not so much 'transcending' race as confirming class solidarity.

The white women in these novels, no longer frontierswomen,

are, on the whole, materially comfortable, often protected and pampered. However, something other than pampering must be taken into account when considering the weakness of the white women in this fiction. This phenomenon, first described by Elaine Showalter, Ogunyemi defines as "the strange phenomenon that strong, successful female writers hardly ever portray successful female characters."[9] A striking example of this phenomenon occurs when Lessing transfers the adventure of exploration within southern Africa from her female protagonist to her male characters, to write of failure that comes of being female as well as white, to write, too, of rejection of the mother, the female body, and motherhood, as distractions from more elevated goals.

Ogunyemi claims that black 'womanist' writers, on the other hand, portray "strong" characters.[10] And already South African literature in English has produced impressive figures by the few black women writers published; for instance, in Miriam Tlali's autobiographical fiction Murial at the Metropolitan (1975) and her short stories and pieces in Mihloti (1984) and Footprints in the Quag: Stories and Dialogues from Soweto (1989), in Kuzwayo's autobiography Call Me Woman, and in Noni Jabavu's autobiography The Ochre People (1963). It is a cliche of South African popular lore that black woman are 'strong' (and 'stronger' than their menfolk).

Among the white writers studied, however, Slaughter's Emily is a 'strong' woman; she is enterprising, adventurous, dependable, sound in mind, body, and character, and successful in both love and work. In later novels Gordimer will create a Rosa Burger, and a Hillela Capran. (Although the fact that Hillela does useful work as an activist is never as convincing as her

undoubted ability to sleep her way into the hearts of powerful men.) Macphail allows her characters to be fallible and yet likeable. For a white South African reader less heroic in resolve and with less emotional stamina than an Emily, a Rosa, or a Hillela, there may be relief in encountering such characters. This might be how one's parents speak and think; this might even be how one used to speak and think oneself.

All of the novels, with the exception of Du Plessis's, confirm that for English-speaking white women, the path to adulthood and the assumption of an authoritative voice lies by way of a struggle with the mother. Lessing's transfer from Martha to male characters of the 'mud' experience of venturing into and penetrating Rhodesia's topography and politics, is matched by her fiction's rejection of the female body and motherhood. Resisting, rather than relinquishing, the cultural link between woman and nature, she writes a female version of patriarchal rejection of the female body, female sexuality, and the mother.

For Lessing the wrench of leaving the country of her childhood, was, it would appear, so painful that still her fiction speaks of homelessness or the breakdown of home--of the suggestion that it is impossible to fabricate a home-in-the-world for oneself that is fulfilling, secure, and where one can accept that one truly belongs. The state of not occupying a defined social place is, certainly, a convenient vantage point from which to exercise one's pen as a critic of society, but the rage and anguish in works like <u>If Only the Old Could</u>, <u>The Good Terrorist</u>, and <u>The Fifth Child</u> prove the condition to be far more than a mere strategic and perceptual device. Furthermore, the fact that family life continues to be the locus for Lessing to explore the breakdown of structures of emotional security, together with

the bitterness of the gender struggle recorded in her fiction, suggests that gender is a strong component in the mixture of factors that compel this ex-colonial to continue writing of the loss of a sense of place. When Lessing flees Rhodesia and its bush, she flees also womb (her own and her mother's) and house, two states/social and cultural conditions she has linked with--and not opposed to--the natural world, through the concepts 'mother' and 'house'.

Mothers in the novels by Lessing, Becker, and Slaughter are destructive, Becker's novel being characterised by the degree of animus directed against Fanny Firman, a spoilt and terrible figure. Freed's Ruth Frank has a mother who is a more benign tyrant. Nio's mother is a pale figure, who soon enough dies. If, as Steedman suggests, the working-class mother, herself deprived, may deprive her children (of a father, or of schooling),[11] these novels can be said to reflect the scenario more typical of middle-class women writers, in which the daughter tries not to be like her mother.

While fathers, in these novels, are either absent emotionally or as in Phoebe's and Nio's cases, dead, in A State of Fear it is the father with whom the daughter struggles to break free into adulthood. Here, Du Plessis, whose father is an Afrikaner, reflects the more staunchly patriarchal ethos in Afrikaner culture. 'Western' women's writing, characterised by a struggle against the mother, internalised and actual, on the path to adulthood, contrasts also with the father-daughter struggle inscribed in black women's writing in South Africa.[12] The fact that white Afrikaners and black Africans will very likely decide South Africa's future, is a crucial reason for rejecting the argument that women's issues must take second place to the racial

battle, for it is a country where women are, on the whole, still expected to play a supportive role to their menfolk, whether they are Mrs. De Klerk, or Mrs. Mandela.

Kuzwayo is clear about this. In Call Me Women she pays tribute to black women for the burden they have taken on in rural areas when their husbands and sons were drawn into the migrant labour system;[13] and she notes that when black women moved to the city--to be hampered by lack of education, of knowledge of a foreign language and culture, of accommodation, work, and money, and to be harrassed under the influx control regulations--on top of all this they have been suffered due to conflict over traditions now outdated by new conditions.

> The changing role of the urban black woman as she makes an increasing contribution towards the family income, even brings in more money than the husband, has added to the problems of family relationships. This factor hits at the root of the traditional acceptance of the man as the head of the family, and is made more complex by the cultural dimension in the black community where the man has always been accorded a special authority as father and master, with his word the last in family decicsions. Women are now taking a very firm stand against such behaviour in their husbands, who often still expect their wives to accept in silence some of their most unacceptable practices. The men may completely refuse to listen to and reason with the women, even in matters very crucial to the existence of family life.14

The differences between the lives of white and black women are enormous, yet some do manage to meet, and to express solidarity on the common ground of women's issues, as members of the Federation of South African Women have done.[15] The challenge

for South African women is to work, together when possible, separately when necessary, to improve the conditions of life for all the women, in their multiple varieties of culture, in this country. In doing so, they will also etch, in both their literary productions and in 'history', their particular and varied 'differences' from women anywhere else in the world.

NOTES

[1] Coetzee 5, 12-35.

[2] Clingman 51.

[3] Cf. Margaret Atwood's Surfacing, and Glyn Hughes's When I Used to Play on the Green (1982), a contemporary lament for a spoiled world that is also a fictionalised historical account of the life of William Grimshaw, predecessor to Patrick Brontë at Haworth Parsonage. Hughes accuses Puritanism as well as industrialisation, both with their emphases on utility, the denial of pleasure, and rejection of the untamed, of together having accomplished the devastation in the first part of the nineteenth century of all the numinous plants and animals of the wood and the moor around Haworth.

[4] Cf. Kolodny 137, 147-48, 159.

[5] Cf. Kolodny 133-34.

[6] Trinh 75.

[7] Ogunyemi 64. Cf. Kaplan, who, calling for a more political feminist criticism, urges 'liberal' feminist critics to do more than concern themselves in their analysis both of literary texts and of their conditions of production with "the naked drama of sexual difference as the only scenario that matters" (148).

[8] Miller 31.

[9] Ogunyemi 73, n. 22. Ogunyemi notes that Elaine Showalter makes this observation in A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing (1978) 244 ff.

[10] Ogunyemi 64, 72, 74-75, 79-80.

[11] Cf. Steedman 90-95.

[12] Cf. Driver, "Reconstructing the Self"; Noni Jabavu, The Ochre People; and Tsitsi Dangarembga Nervous Conditions (1988).

[13] Cf. Kuzwayo 12

[14] Kuzwayo 261.

[15] The Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) was founded in 1956 by the ANC Women's League, lapsed into inactivity, and was then relaunched in 1987. It functions as an umbrella body to which a variety of women's organisations, all linked by their opposition to apartheid and commitment to improving the lot of women in South Africa, are affiliated.

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