

THE APOCALYPTIC VISION IN THE NOVELS OF DORIS LESSING

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Southwest Texas State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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San Marcos, Texas

December, 1982

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND AND ACCLAIM

For over thirty years, Doris Lessing has been publishing novels, short stories, and other literary works. Although many critics have viewed her works as "political," she would deny the label. In "The Small Personal Voice," she explains that she rereads "Tolstoy, Stendhal, Balzac, and the rest of the old giants continuously," not for a "firm reaffirmation of old ethical values," but to find "the warmth, the compassion, the humanity, the love of people . . . which makes all these old novels a statement of faith in man himself."<sup>1</sup> Lessing's commitment is her acceptance of the responsibility that goes with being a writer. This commitment does not mean writing for a particular group or party, but having a feeling of responsibility "as a human being, for other human beings [that] the writer influences."<sup>2</sup> Throughout her career as a novelist, she has continually expanded her vision of the world during a time which is "dangerous, violent, explosive

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<sup>1</sup>Doris Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice" in *A Small Personal Voice*, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

and precarious."<sup>3</sup> Doris Lessing is acutely aware of the writer's responsibility in the explosive and chaotic modern world, and her novels exemplify her commitment. Speaking of the Children of Violence series, Frederick R. Karl sums up Lessing's view of modern life:

. . . Mrs. Lessing gets gloomier and murkier, heading toward that vision which has rarely been sympathetic to the English temperament. It is chiefly a continental design, the sense of final things in Mann, Kafka, Conrad. Deeply humanistic, Mrs. Lessing takes up the familiar question of technology in conflict with the rest of life and foresees, in striking images of disintegration, science as inexorable, while human values, never more than tenuous, are trapped in, Atreus-like houses in which people devour each other.<sup>4</sup>

The facts of Doris Lessing's life are well documented. She was born in Kermanshah, Persia in 1919 to English parents, Alfred Cook Tayler and Emily McVeigh Tayler. Before she was six years old, her father moved the family to Southern Rhodesia. She attended school in Salisbury, did not like it, and left at fourteen.<sup>5</sup> She returned to Salisbury in her teens, got a job, and married, by her own acknowledgment, "far too young."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick R. Karl, "Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy," Contemporary Literature 13 (Winter 1972):29.

<sup>5</sup>Dorothy Brewster, Doris Lessing (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted by Roy Newquist, "Interview with Doris Lessing," in A Small Personal Voice, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), p. 46.

After the failure of two marriages, Doris Lessing left Rhodesia in 1949 and went to London, accompanied by her young son. She took with her the manuscript for her first novel, The Grass Is Singing.

Growing up on the African veld left its imprint. She says that "it was hellishly lonely, but now I realize how extraordinary it was and how very lucky I was."<sup>7</sup> She claims that the house on the veld in Rhodesia is the only place where she has ever felt at home.<sup>8</sup> Africa plays an important part in many of her stories and novels. The first four novels in the Children of Violence series are set there. The spaciousness and isolation of the African scene are evident in Lessing's stories about Africa. In an interview with Roy Newquist, she explains that she misses (in England) the space afforded by Africa. She says, "I don't think my memory deceives me, but I think there were more colorful people back in Southern Rhodesia because of the space they had to move in."<sup>9</sup>

Her father, an ex-bank clerk and World War I veteran, apparently moved to Southern Rhodesia, at least in part, to enjoy the freedom offered by the broad landscape. In a rather poignant essay, "My Father," she says that life was "too

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing (London: F. Mildner & Sons, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted by Roy Newquist, "Interview with Doris Lessing," p. 47.

narrow for him."<sup>10</sup> But Africa did not provide what her father had hoped for, and he became increasingly out of touch with reality. Perhaps it is from him that she developed the visions of the future and some of the ideas that appear in later novels. She writes of him, "It seemed all his thoughts were of violence, illness, war. . . ."<sup>11</sup> In reading Shikasta, one hears an echo of her father's words: "Makes you think-- there are so many worlds up there, wouldn't really matter if we did blow ourselves up--plenty more where we came from."<sup>12</sup>

While Africa has been the setting of many of her stories, much of her later fiction deals with a much larger world. She has written about the individual conscience, the fragmentation of the personality, insanity, politics, and present and future chaos. As her vision has grown, so has her critical acclaim. Michael Thorpe pays her tribute by placing her "in the company of those great novelists before her who used the novel not to divert . . . but to change us-- Eliot, Hardy, Conrad, Lawrence."<sup>13</sup> Margaret Moan Rowe points out that Lessing's early critics caused Doris Lessing

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<sup>10</sup>Doris Lessing, "My Father," in A Small Personal Voice, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>13</sup>Thorpe, Doris Lessing, p. 33.

to question the critic's role in her "Introduction" to The Golden Notebook. But as Rowe points out, "by now, at the end of the decade, much has changed in the critical response to Lessing who has emerged as a favorite and favored critical subject. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Although she has not been widely read in the United States, a London Sunday Times' critic has called Doris Lessing "'the best woman novelist we have . . . [and] one of the most serious, intelligent and honest writers of the whole post-war generation."<sup>15</sup>

In this study I want to look at Doris Lessing's vision of the world, both now and in the future. I will begin with The Golden Notebook which was published in 1962 and conclude with Shikasta, published in 1979. During this time Doris Lessing has focused more and more on the necessity of developing an individual conscience which will merge with, but not be consumed by, the "collective conscience."<sup>16</sup> In The Golden Notebook, The Four-Gated City, The Memoirs of a Survivor, and Shikasta, her vision of the future unfolds. These four novels, written over a seventeen-year period are linked together by Lessing's apocalyptic prophecy and her assessment of the

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<sup>14</sup>Margaret Moan Rowe, review of Doris Lessing's Africa, by Michael Thorpe and The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, by Roberta Rubenstein, in Modern Fiction Studies 26 (Spring 1980):163.

<sup>15</sup>Quoted by Paul Schlueter, The Novels of Doris Lessing (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice," p. 12.

nature of modern man in a world about to explode. The Golden Notebook is not a truly apocalyptic novel, but it contains the seeds of the other novels. The fifth volume in the Children of Violence, The Four-Gated City, with its prophetic "Appendix," is Lessing's first apocalyptic novel. The Memoirs of a Survivor is set in the future just prior to the holocaust. Shikasta is a history of the development and downfall of a civilization much like our own. It is the first book in the series Canopus in Argos: Archives, four books of which have been completed with a fifth in progress. It is time for a careful study of her vision of the future and its predicted woes.

## CHAPTER II

### APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE: THE TRADITION

Apocalyptic literature is not restricted to sacred Judaeo-Christian texts. As Mircea Eliade points out, "Myths of cosmic cataclysms are extremely widespread."<sup>17</sup> Such myths appear in Oriental, Indian, American Indian, Persian, Greek, Jewish, and Germanic literature, to catalogue only a few. The apocalypse in literature dates at least as far back as Vedic times, and Eliade suggests that "the doctrine of the eternal creation and destruction of the universe is a pan-Indian idea."<sup>18</sup> Frank Kermode, writing on the modern apocalypse, observes that in literature we try to give order and design to our lives. We do this, he says, because of our "modern sense of crisis," or what he terms "eschatological anxiety."<sup>19</sup> All civilizations have experienced crises, but we tend to imagine our own as more interesting

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<sup>17</sup>Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 54.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>19</sup>Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 93-95.

than those of the past.<sup>20</sup> What we find, however, when comparing the writings of the past with modern writings, are many similarities.

Because so many cultures possess myths about the end of the world, this paper cannot begin to cover them all. Therefore, I shall base my discussion of the elements of traditional apocalyptic literature on the Icelandic Prose Edda and the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic writings of the Old and New Testaments.

In their study of "End-of-the-World"<sup>21</sup> myths, both Mircea Eliade and Frank Kermode have found characteristics which are common to most apocalyptic texts. Eliade notes the progression found in the Indian doctrine of the Ages of the World--"eternal creation, deterioration, destruction, and re-creation."<sup>22</sup> Throughout his book, Myth and Reality, Eliade emphasizes the belief, held by most cultures, that the paradisaical past can be at least partially recovered. In most End-of-the-World myths, the end heralds a new beginning. But Eliade hastens to point out that while nearly all of these myths see an end, then a new beginning, that is, a recurring cycle, Judaeo-Christian eschatology reveals an

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>21</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

ending that will occur just one time. Eliade explains:

The End of the World will occur only once, just as the cosmogony occurred only once. The Cosmos that will reappear after the catastrophe will be the same Cosmos that God created at the beginning of Time, but purified, regenerated, restored to its original glory. This Earthly Paradise will not be destroyed again, will have no end.<sup>23</sup>

Frank Kermode also lists characteristics of apocalyptic thinking. He includes "Terrors, Decadence and Renovation, Transition, and Clerkly Scepticism."<sup>24</sup> According to Kermode, apocalyptic thinking is associated with war, and after the moment of "supreme crisis," one age will be replaced by another (renovation).<sup>25</sup> Before there can be any eschatological benefits, a demonic host must be destroyed. He points out that the old apocalypse "reconstructs" but the modern apocalypse "abolishes."<sup>26</sup>

Traditionally, apocalyptic writers often prophesy and have visions. The Old Testament writers Isaiah and Daniel and the author of Revelation include both prophecy and visions. In The Prose Edda the visions of the Sibyl contain prophecies which eventually come true. The Judaeo-Christian myth includes 1) two opposing forces; 2) destruc-

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>24</sup>Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

tion resulting from evil and man's failure to uphold God's commandments; 3) a false messiah, sometimes referred to as the Antichrist; 4) the return of the real Christ; 5) the establishment of the New Jerusalem; 6) the saving of the faithful, but the damning of the faithless.

In Biblical accounts of the end of the world, the two opposing forces are good and evil, or God and Satan. According to the Christian writers, Satan is strong, allied with both human and supernatural forces: he is God's opponent and the tempter of mankind. That Satan is, however, inferior to God and is allowed to rule on earth for a time merely at God's pleasure is very important in Judaeo-Christian belief. One day God will intervene, and the forces of evil will be abolished. In a conflict often referred to as the Battle of Armageddon, these two cosmic forces will clash. According to the twentieth chapter of Revelation, Satan will be defeated and bound for one thousand years:

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season.<sup>27</sup>

Eliade reminds us that it is during the seventh millennium,

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<sup>27</sup>Revelation 20:2-3, King James Version of the Bible (New York: The World Publishing Company, [no date]).

according to Revelation, that Satan will be chained, and "humanity will know a thousand years of rest and perfect justice."<sup>28</sup> And after those thousand years have passed,

7 . . . Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,  
8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

9 . . . and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.<sup>29</sup>

The defeat of the forces of evil is a prerequisite to the establishment of the New Jerusalem.

Likewise, in The Prose Edda there is a clash between good and evil. Additionally, there is among the gods an evil figure, Loki, who is called "the mischiefmonger, father-of-lies, and disgrace-of-gods-and-men."<sup>30</sup> Loki fathers three evil children who figure prominently in the final clash between the gods and the forces of evil. They are the wolf Fenrir, the Midgard Serpent, and Hel. But Loki and his children are not the only source of evil in

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<sup>28</sup>Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York: Harper Brothers, Publishers, 1954), p. 126.

<sup>29</sup>Revelation 20:7-10.

<sup>30</sup>Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, trans. Jean I. Young (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 55.

the Icelandic myth. The sons of Muspell, led by Surt, the wolves which chase the sun and moon, and the frost giants are among the evil forces which will clash with the gods at Ragnarok or the end of the world. As in Biblical accounts, the forces of evil are bound for a time before they are loosed for the final battle. Both Fenrir and Loki are caught and bound. Binding Fenrir is no easy matter. After two unsuccessful attempts, the gods finally bind the wolf with a specially made silk ribbon. In "The Deluding of Gylfi," the final process is described:

"When the gods saw that the wolf was well and truly bound, they took the chain that was fast to this fetter and which was called Gelgja, and drawing it through a great boulder called Gjoll drove the boulder deep down into the earth. Then they took a huge stone called Thviti and sank it still deeper in the earth, and used this stone as a fastening peg."<sup>31</sup>

After Loki is bound, the gods shove a sword down his mouth. "He howls horribly, and the slaver running from his mouth forms the river called Von. There he will lie until Ragnarok."<sup>32</sup> Loki is difficult to catch. He turns himself into a salmon, but he is finally caught by Thor. High One describes Loki's bondage to Gylfi:

"After that Loki was taken unconditionally and put into a cave. Taking three flat stones, the gods

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.

set them up on end and bored a hole through each. Then Loki's sons were captured Vali and Nari or Narfi. The Aesir changed Vali into a wolf and he tore asunder his brother Narfi. The Aesir took his entrails and with them bound Loki over the edges of the three stones--the third under his knee-joints--and these bonds became iron. "33 There he will lie in bonds until Ragnarok."

In The Prose Edda, the forces of evil are finally conquered, but unlike Old and New Testament events, the gods are also destroyed. After the burning of the world by Surt, the world will be repopled by Lif and Lifthrasir, and the world will be renewed.<sup>34</sup>

The eschatological scheme which is basic to the Judaeo-Christian myth includes wars, civil strife, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, pestilences, and cosmic disturbances. Eliade elaborates:

A series of calamities will announce the approach of the end of the world; and the first of them will be the fall of Rome and the destruction of the Roman Empire, a frequent anticipation in the Judaeo-Christian apocalypse, but also not unknown to the Iranians.<sup>35</sup>

Both the Old and New Testaments abound with such references. Ezekiel 38:19 describes pestilence, blood, rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone which shall precede the end. Joel, in Chapter ii, describes God's judgment and the day of dark-

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-86.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>35</sup>Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 126.

ness and cosmic destruction. In verse ten he says, "The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."<sup>36</sup> Additional descriptions of the woes which will precede the end of the world are found in Amos 8:7-8, Haggai 2:6, and a most vivid description in Isaiah 24. But it is John, in Revelation, who presents the most detailed description of the catastrophe preceding the establishment of the New Jerusalem. In Chapter vi, John describes the opening of the sixth seal:

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it were moved out of their places.<sup>37</sup>

John's prophecy continues as he sees seven angels with seven trumpets and seven bowls. In Chapters viii and ix, the trumpets sound and cosmic destruction follows. The earth is showered with "hail and fire mingled with blood;" one-third of the trees and grass is burnt; one-third of the sea becomes blood and one-third of its inhabitants perish; one-third of the sun, moon, and stars are eclipsed;

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<sup>36</sup>Joel 2:10.

<sup>37</sup>Revelation 6:12-14.

plagues of locusts descend; and one-third of mankind perishes. The bowls reveal foul sores on those who bear the mark of the beast, the sea becomes blood, sun scorches men, and the Euphrates River dries up. Isaiah's description is shorter, but perhaps just as graphic. "For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire."<sup>38</sup> Eliade says that the fiery end of the world, the foundation of the Judaeo-Christian apocalypse, is probably of Iranian origin, and he adds:

Strange as it may seem the myth was consoling. In fact, fire renews the world; through it will come the restoration of a "new world, free from old age, death, decomposition and corruption, living eternally, increasing eternally, when the dead shall rise, when immortality shall come to the living, when the world shall be perfectly renewed." This then, is an apokatastasis from which the good have nothing to fear. The final catastrophe will put an end to history, hence will restore man to eternity and beatitude.<sup>39</sup>

Joel's description of the Last Judgment is similar to the account found in Revelation, and he underscores its impact when he says, "the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Isaiah 6:6.

<sup>39</sup>Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 124.

<sup>40</sup>Joel 2:11.

In The Prose Edda, the end of the world is also preceded by predicted woes. The High One explains to Gangleri (Gylfi) that there will be six endless winters, and during the first three winters there will be "great wars" and unnatural sins will be committed. High One repeats the Sibyl's Vision:

"Brothers will fight  
and kill each other,  
siblings  
do incest;  
men will know misery,  
adulteries be multiplied,  
an axe-age, a sword-age,  
shields will be cloven,  
a wind-age, a wolf-age,  
before the world's ruin."<sup>41</sup>

The sun and moon will be swallowed by wolves; earthquakes will cause mountains to topple; the Midgard Serpent will poison the sky and sea; the sons of Muspell and Surt will burn the world. Thor will destroy the Midgard Serpent, but Thor himself will be killed by the poisonous fumes. The battle of Thor and the serpent are described in the Sibyl's Vision:

"The famous son  
of Earth falls back,  
fainting from the serpent  
fearing not attack.  
All mankind  
must abandon home  
when Midgard's Buckler  
strikes in wrath.

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<sup>41</sup>Sturluson, The Prose Edda, p. 86.

The sun will go black  
 earth sink in the sea,  
 heaven be stripped  
 of its bright stars;  
 smoke rage  
 and fire,  
 leaping the flame  
 lick heaven itself."<sup>42</sup>

Cosmic destruction figures prominently in traditional apocalyptic writing.

Such universal destruction has its causes. Man and his sinfulness are responsible for the impending catastrophe. In Judaeo-Christian belief, it was man's sinful nature that led to the first destruction of the world by flood. Eliade in writing about the many flood myths, says that "if we examine the myths that announce the impending Flood, we find that one of its chief causes is the sins of mankind together with the decrepitude of the World."<sup>43</sup> Satan, the evil tempter of man, is also to blame for the chaos as he leads man to commit evil. In the Old Testament, Isaiah explains the cause of universal destruction when he says, "The earth is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant."<sup>44</sup> Through-

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>43</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup>Isaiah 24:5.

out the Book of Isaiah, the prophet warns of the fate that awaits the wicked. Jeremiah, too, issues warnings to the people. In Chapter iv, he writes of the end of the world with special emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah describes the destruction which the Lord has announced, and the prophet gives God's reasons for such havoc:

22 For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children and they have none understanding; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

Sinful man, man who has forgotten God and his laws, is ultimately responsible for God's judgment upon the earth.

In The Prose Edda, causes for the final destruction are discussed. According to the "Prologue," mankind, with the exception of eight persons, was first destroyed by a great flood because they had disregarded "God's commandments, turned to the lusts of the world."<sup>46</sup> The first part of the "Prologue" is basically an abbreviated version of the Judaeo-Christian flood myth. In the section "The Deluding of Gylfi," the destruction of the earth and all its inhabitants by fire is described, but the causes are not clearly defined. The section does clearly show that the final

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<sup>45</sup>Jeremiah 4:22.

<sup>46</sup>Sturluson, The Prose Edda, p. 23.

catastrophe is fated and in no way can it be avoided. The Larousse World Mythology discusses the myths upon which The Prose Edda is based, and in its discussion of Ragnarok gives several reasons for end-of-the-world destruction. The witch Gullveig is one reason for the turmoil because she "scattered the first seeds of discord in a world where relative tranquillity prevailed since the defeat of the giants."<sup>47</sup> The gods, too, share part of the blame, for they were greedy and wanted Gullveig's gold. This cause of the havoc is elaborated upon in the following passage from the Larousse World Mythology:

But they [the gods] took too much interest in Gullveig; they too wanted to amass piles of gold, and in order to make her surrender her secrets they tortured her. In doing this they committed the crime that started the first war. This was the basic sin that gave rise to all the others, and from henceforth war was to reign throughout the world. . . . Furthermore, the gods several times broke their word to the giants. So people ceased to believe that oaths were sacred. . . . This world could not last; the gods themselves had shaken it to its very foundations, for they had tempted the hand of Fate.<sup>48</sup>

In The Prose Edda, the Fates are the Norns. High One, again explaining things to Gylfi says, "The good Norns who come from good stock shape good lives, but those who meet with

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<sup>47</sup>Pierre Grimal, ed., Larousse World Mythology (Secaucus: Chartwell Books Inc., 1973), p. 396.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

misfortune owe it to the evil Norns."<sup>49</sup> So the gods and mankind will be destroyed because of their sins and because of the influence of the Norns.

A significant character in Judaeo-Christian apocalypse is the false messiah. Jeremiah mentions a lion "come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles. . . ." <sup>50</sup> Adam C. Welch in his commentary on this passage says:

In the lion from his lair in the North, Jeremiah personifies the divine instrument in the work of judgment; he is the destroyer of nations. The figure gave rise to Ezekiel's Gog and ultimately to Antichrist in Revelation.<sup>51</sup>

Mark, in Chapter xiii, mentions false messiahs and false prophets who will appear. But the Antichrist is probably most clearly described in Revelation. John, in Chapter xiii of Revelation, describes a beast that comes out of the sea and has ten horns and seven heads. The beast is reminiscent of one of the four beasts described in Daniel's seventh chapter. The fourth beast in Daniel's vision also had ten horns.<sup>52</sup> In Revelation, this beast looks like a leopard

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<sup>49</sup>Sturluson, The Prose Edda, p. 44.

<sup>50</sup>Jeremiah 4:7.

<sup>51</sup>Adam C. Welch, The Abingdon Bible Commentary, ed. Frederick Carl Eiselen et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), p. 683.

<sup>52</sup>Daniel 7:7.

with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. The dragon, Satan, who is the source of evil and suffering, gives this beast power. The world worships the beast, and the beast and its followers make war with the saints. Most likely this beast is the Antichrist.<sup>53</sup> Eliade, summing up the reign of the Antichrist, calls it "a return to chaos."<sup>54</sup> Eliade goes on to say:

On the one hand, Antichrist is presented in the form of a dragon or a demon, and this is reminiscent of the old myth of the fight between God and the Dragon; the fight took place in the beginning, before the Creation of the World, and it will take place again at the End. On the other hand, when Antichrist comes to be regarded as the false Messiah his reign will represent the total overthrow of social, moral, and religious values--in other words, the return of chaos. In the course of the centuries Antichrist was identified with various historical figures, from Nero to the Pope (by Luther). The important fact is that certain particularly tragic historical periods were held to be dominated by Antichrist--but at the same time there was always the hope that his reign announced the imminent coming of Christ. Cosmic catastrophes, scourges, historical terror, the seeming triumph of Evil made up the apocalyptic syndrome which was to precede Christ's return and the millennium.<sup>55</sup>

In Judaeo-Christian theology, the beast and the false prophet along with the Devil will be defeated in the Battle of Armageddon.

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<sup>53</sup>Revelation 13.

<sup>54</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 66.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67.

The defeat of the forces of evil prepares the way for the coming of Christ. In Chapter xix of Revelation, Christ, riding a white horse, is called Faithful and True, The Word of God, and King of Kings and Lord of Lords.<sup>56</sup> Eliade points out:

For the Jews the coming of the Messiah will announce the End of the World and the restoration of Paradise. For the Christians the End of the World will precede the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. But for both alike the triumph of Sacred History--manifested by the End of the World--in some measure implies the restoration of Paradise.<sup>57</sup>

New Testament writers mention the second coming. Mark, in Chapter xiii, repeats Christ's words, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."<sup>58</sup> In II Thessalonians 2:1-12 and I Corinthians 15, both Christ's coming and the destruction of his enemies are described. II Peter 3 assures the followers of Christ that He will come again:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Revelation 19:11,13,16.

<sup>57</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 65.

<sup>58</sup>Mark 13:26.

<sup>59</sup>II Peter 3:10.

It is important that after Christ's reign for a millennium, Satan will be unbound for a time, but will finally be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."<sup>60</sup> In The Prose Edda, some-time before Ragnarok the wolf Fenrir and Loki are bound but somehow manage to free themselves of their bonds. After they are freed, they fight in the final clash and are defeated.

Finally, the New Jerusalem is established. Satan and his forces have been permanently vanquished, and the earth has been destroyed or cleansed. Eliade comments on this renovation:

For after this last conflict, a universal ekpyrosis will absorb the whole universe in fire, thus permitting the birth of a new world, an eternal world of justice and happiness, not subject to astral influences and freed from the dominion of time.<sup>61</sup>

As Eliade points out, fire cleanses and renews. Isaiah foretells the coming of the New Jerusalem in Chapter lxv. He foresees a place of peace and prosperity. But it is again John, in Revelation, who really captures the imagi-

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<sup>60</sup>Revelation 20:10

<sup>61</sup>Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 127.

nation. Beginning with the famous lines of Chapter xxi, the Holy City actually descends from heaven: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."<sup>62</sup> One of the seven angels with the vials full of the seven last plagues talks with John and shows him the great city.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.<sup>63</sup>

There follows a description of measurements similar to that in Ezekiel 40. Further describing the city, John writes:

23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

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<sup>62</sup>Revelation 21:1.

<sup>63</sup>Revelation 21:10-14.

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.<sup>64</sup>

In Chapter xxii of Revelation, a river runs through the city, and the tree of life grows in the middle of the street. Man and God shall live in peace, according to verse five: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, nor light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."<sup>65</sup>

The Prose Edda also ends on a note of hope. After the earth has been destroyed by Surt's fire, High One explains that not all of the gods were destroyed:

"At that time earth will rise out of the sea and be green and fair, and fields of corn will grow that were never sown. Vidar and Vali will be living, so neither the sea nor Surt's Fire will have done them injury, . . . And the sons of Thor . . . will come there and possess Mjollnir. After that Baldr and Hod will come from Hel. They will sit down together and converse, calling to mind their hidden lore and talking about things that happened in the past . . . ."<sup>66</sup>

The two humans who had been concealed will repopulate the earth.

Mircea Eliade, summing up the End-of-the-World myth, underlines both its terror and optimism:

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<sup>64</sup>Revelation 21:23-25.

<sup>65</sup>Revelation 22:5.

<sup>66</sup>Sturluson, The Prose Edda, pp. 91-92.

For centuries the same religious idea recurs again and again: this world--the World of History--is unjust, abominable, demonic; fortunately, it is already decaying, the catastrophes have begun, this old world is cracking everywhere; very soon it will be annihilated, the powers of darkness will be conquered once and for all, the "good" will triumph, Paradise will be regained. All the millennialist and eschatological movements display optimism. They react against the terror of History with an energy that only the extremity of despair can arouse.<sup>67</sup>

Traditional apocalyptic literature includes prophecy, catastrophes, and the ultimate end of the world, but it is a literature which, in Kermode's word, "reconstructs." The modern novels of Doris Lessing contain many of the elements of traditional apocalyptic literature. Beginning with The Golden Notebook, Lessing depicts a world in which the fear of annihilation causes anxiety and fragmentation. The Golden Notebook focuses on inner turmoil and breakdown caused by the outer reality.

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<sup>67</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 68.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK: MODERN ANXIETY

The Golden Notebook introduces several themes which are important to the later works and which are relevant to Doris Lessing's apocalyptic vision. Deterioration and breakdown are part of the traditional apocalyptic scheme, and through Anna Wulf and her lover, Saul Green, Lessing presents a picture of self-division and fragmentation. This fragmentation is heightened by the Communist Party, and Anna comes to reject the Party. Healing and renovation are also part of apocalyptic thinking and Lessing examines mental breakdown as a healing process. Throughout the novel Anna is plagued by feelings of terror and fear of annihilation similar to the terrors and fears found in apocalyptic writing. Finally, both Anna and her fictional creation, Ella, have visions of the future. While the apocalyptic elements in The Golden Notebook are not as fully developed as in later novels, it prepares the reader for those novels.

Traditional apocalyptic literature presents a pattern of deterioration, breakdown, and renewal. In The Prose Edda prior to Ragnarok, the world is beset by winters and wars,

family ties break down, the end comes, but after the destruction new life emerges to live in a new world. Lessing presents the same pattern on a psychological level.

To Lessing's characters, a major problem in the modern world is our inability to perceive the world as a whole. Governments, social institutions, and corporations look to their individual interests and to their own spheres of influence. They pursue policies which are advantageous to themselves in particular and are unable to place themselves in a wider, more holistic scheme. The individual, too, is unable either to picture the world, society, nations, peoples as a whole or to visualize total annihilation. Compartmentalizing is one way modern man copes with highly sophisticated technology, global suffering, and war, as well as other terrors. Global is too big--universal, incomprehensible. Thus, society is fragmented and so is the individual.

The theme of self-division and fragmentation is vital to The Golden Notebook. Mary Ann Singleton points out that in several of Lessing's novels "certain characters spontaneously or deliberately journey deep into consciousness, shed their confining egos, and gain a more inclusive vision than they had before," and she identifies The Golden Notebook as "the first of these novels to dramatize such

an exploration."<sup>68</sup> Anna's fragmentation is exemplified by the four notebooks she keeps. Lessing explains, "she keeps four, and not one, as she realizes, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness--of breakdown."<sup>69</sup> Anna's feelings that she is "cracking up" (p. 389) mirror what is happening in the world. As she cuts and pastes newspaper clippings in her blue notebook about the H-bomb, war, death, and destruction, as she records in her red notebook her disillusionment with the Communist Party and its atrocities, and later, as she covers her walls with clippings of the horrors of the modern world, she is, with each of these acts, compartmentalizing. The clippings and her notes are themselves fragments. Anna's self-division is not a new element in her life. She says, "And yet there were always two personalities in me, the 'communist' and Anna, and Anna judged the communist all the time. And vice-versa" (p. 69). Later, Anna feels this division with Michael; her roles as mother and mistress cause internal conflict. As she nears madness, this split becomes more pronounced. She becomes at times the mad

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<sup>68</sup>Mary Ann Singleton, The City and the Veld: The Fiction of Doris Lessing (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1977), p. 84.

<sup>69</sup>Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1962; Bantam Books, 1973), p. vii. (Hereafter quotations from the Bantam edition of The Golden Notebook are cited internally, with the page numbers indicated in parentheses following each quotation.)

African Charlie Themba, an Algerian soldier, and a pregnant peasant woman.

Three modern critics who have written on Lessing's view of fragmentation are Barbara Bellow Watson, Marion Vlastos, and Mary Ann Singleton. Barbara Bellow Watson writes:

The Golden Notebook, then, announces in every way that its theme is fragmentation, breakup, breakdown. The structure embodies this theme, the characters talk about it explicitly, being highly conscious, introspective, and communicative people. The events in the narrative, both fictional and historical, demonstrate how true this fragmentation is to the midcentury experience.<sup>70</sup>

In an essay on Lessing and the psychiatrist R. D. Laing, Vlastos looks at their view of "self-division":

In Laing's view madness functions . . . to reveal society to itself. . . . the mad person embodies in grotesquely exaggerated forms society's self-division. . . . The Golden Notebook is a novel focusing on neurosis rather than psychosis. But the purpose of the final section in which Anna and Saul enter into a deeply disturbed sexual relationship is to demonstrate precisely the connection, which Laing asserts, between the normal divided self and the mad split self. . . . For Lessing, as well as for Laing, fragmentation, compartmentalization, splitting is seen as the essential problem of the makeup of our individual lives and of our society.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Barbara Bellow Watson, "Leaving the Safety of Myth: Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook (1962)," in Old Lines, New Forces: Essays on the Contemporary British Novel, 1960-1970, ed. by Robert K. Morris (London: Associated UP, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>71</sup>Marion Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America 91 (January 1976):246.

In The City and the Veld, Mary Ann Singleton reiterates Vlastos' assessment. She says that both Jung and Laing believe the "split between the inner and outer worlds of human perception" is "the central evil of modern time."<sup>72</sup>

Anna rejects the Communist Party because it does not provide the "wholeness" she needs and seeks. Writing in her red notebook, the one on communism, Anna remembers a dinner conversation she has had with John. John is also a party member, and he and Anna rarely meet; but when they do, they usually disagree. John has suggested that the reason Anna and he and others like them do not leave the Party is that they "can't bear to say good-bye to [their] ideals for a better world" (p. 161). Discussing the hangings in Prague of Michael's friends, Anna claims the "'traitors'" were framed while John argues that the Party has made "mistakes," but "was incapable of being so deliberately cynical" (p. 161). Anna reflects on their conversation:

I came home thinking that somewhere at the back of my mind when I joined the Party was a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided unsatisfactory way we all live. Yet joining the Party intensified the split. . . . (p. 161)

Jack, for whom she works at the Communist Party office, talks with Anna about her decision to leave the Party. Anna is distressed that she has contradictory feelings and attitudes.

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<sup>72</sup>Singleton, The City and the Veld, p. 83.

Jack's view is that all people have such feelings, that only a handful of people have ever possessed a consciousness which "matched their times" (p. 359). He suggests that fragmentation is all right:

"There's probably not one scientist in the world who can comprehend the implications of all the scientific achievements, or even part of them. There's perhaps a scientist in Massachusetts who understands one thing and another in Cambridge understanding another, and another in the Soviet Union for a third--and so on. But I doubt even that. I doubt if there's anyone alive who can really imaginatively comprehend all the implications of let's say the use of atomic energy for industry. . . . " (p. 359)

Anna counters:

"Alienation. Being split. It's the moral side, so to speak, of the communist message. And suddenly you shrug your shoulders and say because the mechanical basis of our lives is getting complicated, we must be content to not even try to understand things as a whole?" (p. 360)

Then she explains her humanistic credo: ". . . humanism stands for the whole person, the whole individual, striving to become as conscious and responsible as possible about everything in the universe" (p. 360). Anna's credo defines precisely what Doris Lessing means when she speaks of "commitment." For Anna and Lessing commitment means more than just existing for one's self; commitment is being aware of one's responsibility toward the rest of humanity--being committed to understanding mankind as a whole, as a universal being.

Lessing's theme of mental breakdown as both healing process and evidence of a superior consciousness is introduced in The Golden Notebook. As noted before, traditional apocalyptic thought includes destruction or breakdown followed by re-creation or renovation. Lessing traces this pattern within the individual rather than in the whole universe as writers of sacred texts do. Lessing's innovation is that she suggests that what happens to the individual is what will happen or is happening to the universe.

Anna Wulf experiences a breakdown caused, in part, by her inability to write, her writer's block. In a session with her psychiatrist, Mrs. Marks, Anna says, "I'm going to make the obvious point that perhaps the word neurotic means the condition of being highly conscious and developed" (p. 469). Later Anna will explain to Saul Green, her lover with whom she "breaks down," her raving maniac theory. In a passage which is perhaps dramatically metaphorical, she suggests that the few "marvelous, mature, wise people," those who are radiating "serenity" all have

"a history of emotional crime, oh the sad bleeding corpses that litter the road to maturity of the wise, serene man or woman of fifty-odd! You simply don't get to be wise, mature, etc. unless you've been a raving cannibal for thirty years or so."  
(p. 626)

She goes on to point out that those people who are the corpses or victims are not "tough or ruthless enough for the golden road to maturity and the ever-so-wise shrug" (p. 627).

Serene man emerges from turmoil, from breakdown.

Again Lessing and Laing seem to share the same premise. Vlastos says that "in Laing's view . . . the mentally ill individual participates in those realms of existence that conventional man has either denied or never known."<sup>73</sup>

Vlastos explains his idea further:

Laing believes it is essential to understand the mad person as symptom and as victim of a sick society and finally as prophet of a possible new world, a world governed by forces of unity rather than of separation.<sup>74</sup>

Lessing indicates that Anna will become a stronger, wiser, more sensitive person because of her descent into inner consciousness. Self-knowledge and self-confrontation are essential to Anna and to society.

Terror and fear of destruction are characteristics of traditional apocalyptic writing. Eliade explains that throughout the centuries eschatological movements have expected "a period of terrible trials and cataclysms."<sup>75</sup> Eliade points out that the "millennialist and eschatological movements display optimism,"<sup>76</sup> but he says that this optimism is not present in Western societies. "On the

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<sup>73</sup>Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing," p. 246.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 68.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

contrary, today there is an ever more intense fear of a catastrophic End of the World brought about by thermo-nuclear weapons."<sup>77</sup> Catastrophic terror pervades Anna's thoughts and dreams. In one of her sessions with Mrs. Marks, Anna tries to understand her writer's block. When Mrs. Marks suggests that she is afraid of death, Anna replies:

"No, not of my death. It seems to me that ever since I can remember anything the real thing that has been happening in the world was death and destruction. It seems to me it is stronger than life."  
(p. 235)

Later, during another visit with Mrs. Marks, Anna asserts that the "artist women" of the past could not have felt as she does:

"They didn't look at themselves as I do. They didn't feel as I do. How could they? I don't want to be told when I wake up, terrified by a dream of total annihilation, because of the H-bomb exploding, that people felt that way about the crossbow. It isn't true. There is something new in the world."  
(p. 472)

For a time, during her affair with Saul Green, Anna does not bother to read the papers; when she does spread the week's papers in front of her, she does not have to read them to know what is in them. In the blue notebook, she records:

I felt bored and stale, knowing that, without having read the newspapers at all, I could have made a pretty good guess, from political experience, at what

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

had happened in that week. The feeling of banality, the disgust of banality, mingled with my fear; and then suddenly I moved forward into a new knowledge, a new understanding; and this knowledge came out of Anna's, the frightened little animal's, sitting on the floor, cowering. It was "the game," but it came out of terror. I was invaded by terror, the terror of nightmares, I was experiencing the fear of war as one does in nightmares, not the intellectual balancing of probabilities, possibilities, but knowing, with my nerves and imagination, the fear of war. (p. 588)

Anna's reaction to the terror of war becomes personal as she thinks of her daughter, Janet. At this point, the entry in the blue notebook reads:

Thinking how war would explode, chaos would follow, I was cold and sweating with fear, and then I thought of Janet, . . . and I was angry, so angry that anyone anywhere could harm her, that I stood upright, able to fight off the terror. (p. 589)

Earlier Anna had filled her diary, the blue notebook, with clippings pertaining to the destructive forces in the world. Later she literally envelops herself in the horror of the modern world. As she cuts out newspaper and journal articles and pins them to the walls, completely covering the walls of the big room, Anna seems to be suffering from what Kermode calls "eschatalogical anxiety."<sup>78</sup> In one of her dreams, she returns to Mashopi, and in rather poetic terms, she describes the explosion of the H-bomb. George Hounslow, Maryrose, Paul, Willi, and Anna have stopped during a walk and have turned to look towards the Mashopi Hotel:

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<sup>78</sup>Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p. 95.

The hotel building seemed to have exploded in a dancing whirling cloud of white petals or wings, millions of white butterflies had chosen the building to alight on. It looked like a white flower opening slowly, under the deep steamy blue sky. Then a feeling of menace came into us, and we knew we had suffered a trick of sight, had been deluded. We were looking at the explosion of a hydrogen bomb, and a white flower unfolded under the blue sky in such a perfection of puffs, folds, and eddying shapes that we could not move, although we knew we were menaced by it. It was unbelievably beautiful, the shape of death; and we stood watching in silence, until the silence was slowly invaded by a rustling, crawling, grating sound, and looking down we saw the grasshoppers, their gross tumbling fecundity inches deep, all around us. (p. 617)

Anna is surrounded by her fears, her terrors, both waking and sleeping. Roberta Rubenstein comments on Anna's reaction to chaos in the world:

Like the later segments of the Black and Red notebooks, entries in the early installments of the Blue notebook are interspersed with insertions of several years of newspaper clippings describing the various manifestations of chaos raging in the external world. Symbolically the reports of war, violence and repression that Anna selects as evidence of the condition of the external world appear first in her most personal notebook as analogues of her own incipient fragmentation. . . .

Anna's identification with the chaos of the external world to such a marked degree is an aspect of her abnormal consciousness in formation.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps Marion Vlastos best sums up Lessing's belief that the individual cannot be separated from the world and its terrors when he observes, "For Lessing there can be no

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<sup>79</sup>Roberta Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 85.

separation of sensitive self from the horror of the world because the attitudes of the self form part of the malevolent forces that issue from the whole."<sup>80</sup> Earlier Vlastos points out that "the root of Anna's self-alienation is a refusal to accept the fact of evil and the effects of evil as part of herself."<sup>81</sup> Anna's dreams, her failure with Molly's son, Tommy, her affair with deSilva, her denial of her writer's block, and her retreat to her room are all symptomatic of her refusal to confront the evil within. Again, Vlastos sums up her dilemma when he says "that denying evil in herself only increases its power to possess her."<sup>82</sup>

Finally, as in traditional apocalyptic literature, prophetic visions of the future are described. These visions may not be as elaborate and descriptive as John's vision of the New Jerusalem, but they are nonetheless visions of a better world. Ella, Anna's fictional counterpart, hates "the thousand ugly towns, and the myriad of small cramped lives of England" (p. 188). When Paul, her lover, suggests that things are better now, she reacts indignantly:

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<sup>80</sup>Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing," p. 248.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

"Better!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, but checked herself. For she understood she was setting against the word better a personal vision that dated from her stay in hospital, a vision of some dark, impersonal destructive force that worked at the roots of life and that expressed itself in war and cruelty and violence. Which had nothing to do with what they argued. "You mean," she said, "better in the sense of no unemployment and no one being hungry?" (p. 188)

Paul responds by saying that is exactly what he means.

Ella, trying to make him understand what she is feeling, says, "'On the surface everything's fine. . . . But underneath it's poisonous . . . full of hatred and envy and people being lonely'" (p. 189). Paul catches on and suggests that what she would really like is to bulldoze the land and leave "'just a few cathedrals and old buildings and a pretty village or two'" (p. 189). Indeed, such bulldozing is what she has in mind, but she objects even more to the social barrier between classes, the split in society. She says, "I hate it, I hate all that. I hate a country so split up that . . . ." (p. 189).

Ella's creator also has dreams of a better age. Anna's vision of mankind appears in a surrealistic dream which begins with a vision of the Soviet Union, represented by red material; the material gathers in various countries of the world and for a moment Anna feels joy, but then she sees Africa. "Africa was black, but a deep, luminous, exciting black like a night when the moon is just below the horizon and will soon rise" (p. 298). Anna then becomes

frightened, too dizzy to see the spinning world; but when she does look again

. . . it is like a vision--time has gone and the whole history of man, the long story of mankind is present in what I see now, and it is like a great soaring hymn of joy and triumph in which pain is a small lively counterpoint. (p. 298)

The dream continues. The red areas and the other colors meld together into a whole, and then everything explodes: "The world had gone and there was chaos. I was alone in chaos" (p. 299).

Throughout the novel, dreams and visions of terror confront Anna. In one session with Mrs. Marks, Anna explains her fear of annihilation:

"And I don't want to be told when I suddenly have a vision (though God knows it's hard enough to come by) of a life that isn't full of hatred and fear and envy and competition every minute of the night and day that this is simply the old dream of the golden age brought up to date. . . ."

"Isn't it?" she [Mrs. Marks] said, smiling.

"No, because the dream of the golden age is a million times more powerful because it's possible, just as total destruction is possible. Probably because both are possible." (p. 472)

With its themes of fragmentation and holocaust, as well as its visions of the future, The Golden Notebook prepares the reader for the apocalyptic novels which follow.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FOUR-GATED CITY: MADNESS AND PROPHECY

The Four-Gated City is the fifth and final volume in the Children of Violence series. The five novels trace the life of Martha Quest from the time she is a fifteen-year old girl on the African veld to her death on an island off the coast of Scotland when she is about eighty years old. Paul Schlueter accurately describes the novel when he says:

. . . Mrs. Lessing presents in The Four-Gated City a searing picture of postwar London, the chaos and confusion of the 1950s and 1960s, and finally a devastatingly apocalyptic portrait of the end of both the twentieth century and civilization itself, as a means of portraying the dissolution of the entire mad mentality of our world.<sup>83</sup>

The novel, covering a period of approximately fifty years, contains numerous apocalyptic elements; letters, memos and notes placed in an "Appendix" tell of the destruction and its aftermath. Lessing describes the troubles and woes preceding the ultimate catastrophe, and she presents this chaos on two levels: the outer as seen in global and social destruction and the inner as seen in psychological breakdown. In traditional apocalyptic literature, rebirth occurs, and Lessing again examines mental breakdown as the beginning

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<sup>83</sup>Schlueter, The Novels of Doris Lessing, p. 64.

of the healing of the psyche. As in traditional apocalyptic literature, Lessing presents prophecies of destruction and doom, and she tells of the ultimate catastrophe itself, a modern-day Armageddon. Finally, her characters have visions of the perfect city, a man-made New Jerusalem, but their dreams never become a reality.

Lessing depicts the aftermath of World War II as one of world-wide chaos and madness. As in traditional literature, troubles and woes herald the beginning of the end. As the novel begins, the war has been over for five years, but reminders of it are everywhere. Blacked out windows can still be seen; bombed out sites are still in evidence; and London is described as a "doomed city, all cracked and thinned and darkened by war. . . ." <sup>84</sup> Martha describes the time as "the bad time," and she feels that "the texture of life was all heaviness, nastiness, fear" (p. 178). The "bad time" theme recurs throughout the novel. Martha is described as "a person who watched other people in the turmoil of life" (p. 199). She wonders what these people are waiting for, and she decides that perhaps they are waiting "for the bad time to be over" (p. 199). In the

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<sup>84</sup>Doris Lessing, The Four-Gated City (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969; Bantam Books, 1970), p. 37. (Hereafter quotations from the Bantam edition of The Four-Gated City are cited internally, with the page numbers indicated in parentheses following each quotation.)

1950s, the world is troubled by the Korean War, McCarthyism, the African independence movements, and the Communist movements on five continents. Lessing's narrator sees 1956 as "a climatic year, a watershed, a turning point . . . " (p. 291). It was the year of the Hungarian revolt and of British citizens questioning their role in Suez, "a year of protest and activity . . ." (p. 292). But the "bad time" seems to have subsided in that year, though just when is not certain. One would expect the end of a "bad time" to be received with at least some jubilation, but the narrator does not see it as joyous, and in describing its end, underscores a sense of futility:

When a very bad time is over there is no moment when one can say: This is it, now it's finished. In an atmosphere where everything is slow, dark, sluggish, where every event is soaked in suspicion and dislike and fear, then suddenly there intrudes an event of a different quality. But one looks at it with distrust, distrust being one's element at the time, like being deep under filthy water. The river suddenly floats down flowers--but you wouldn't dream of touching them, they are probably poisoned, a trap. (p. 292)

Perhaps the best illustration of the global situation is the arrangement of maps and clippings in Mark Coldridge's study. Here in a systematic form we find the horrors of the modern world pinpointed and catalogued. The walls of Mark's study present a panorama of a world gone mad. Unlike Anna Wulf, Mark Coldridge organizes his clippings, and he has maps that show areas where modern horrors are occurring. Anna's clippings had no arrangement, but were randomly

placed. Mark arranges his into groups and areas. On one wall of the study the subject is bombs--"atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, large bombs, small bombs . . . and the establishments which developed them, made them, and sold them" (p. 296). He uses colored flags to pinpoint areas where bombs have been made or have been used. Black flags on the map designate "factories and laboratories which researched, made and sold, materials for germ warfare, chemical warfare, and drugs used in the control and manipulation of the brain" (p. 296). Marion Vlastos says that "by documenting areas of destruction all over the earth, Mark is better able to see the world as a whole, to determine the true drift of man's intentions by fitting one fact with another."<sup>85</sup> Yellow flags show areas of contamination. On another wall "were markers denoting War, Famine, Riots, Poverty, Prisons" (p. 297). Throughout the novel, the walls continue to be filled until "there were no empty walls left. Not even a ceiling . . ." (p. 433). Roberta Rubenstein points out:

In cataloguing the insanities of contemporary life (pollution of the air, water, body, and mind; violence and the potential for nuclear holocaust; oppression and repression--the social issues that have always concerned her) Lessing describes an activity she has introduced earlier, in The Golden Notebook.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing," p. 249.

<sup>86</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 150.

Rubenstein goes on to say that "the newspaper clippings [in The Golden Notebook] were emblematic of the growing fragmentation of Anna Wulf's consciousness, . . ." but in The Four-Gated City, the clippings are seen as "the development toward the larger group consciousness."<sup>87</sup> The maps seem to help Mark piece things together. One day during the Aldermaston march for peace, his sister-in-law Phoebe tries to pin him down about what he really believes. When she asks him why he has maps in his study, he answers:

"Those are facts. There is one basic fact: that there are more and more and more, and bigger and nastier bombs everywhere, all the time, more and nastier weapons. If you think a few thousand people marching back and forth over the countryside is going to change that--then good luck to you." (p. 367)

Being a practical realist, Mark is going to do something more active than "marching back and forth over the countryside" (p. 367). Teaming up with the American industrialist, Wilhelm Esse Perkins, Mark sets out to plan and build a city modeled on the one in his novel A City in the Desert. Mr. Perkins, motivated by having read "a secret and confidential report (kept from the owners by the chemists they employed) on the results of certain chemical research in a factory where he had his shares" (p. 583), provides the money for Mark's project. They acquire permission to

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

build on a tract of land in Tunisia, where Mark plans to relocate people. His proposed project to rescue and relocate people is a positive response to the times. Mark's city never becomes the perfect city he has envisioned but becomes, instead, a camp for refugees, filled with tents, army huts, disease, and the exiled from the catastrophe.

A recurrent theme in Lessing's novels is the world-wide tendency towards war. Martha realizes early that the technology of war touches everyone. She reflects that at the Butts' country home, one finds the England, quiet and rural, that "one had always imagined . . . " (p. 179). But she realizes that her picture is not realistic. She sees that no place remains idyllic:

. . . ten miles away was a war place where new atomic weapons were being developed, in secret; and forty miles in another direction was a factory for the manufacture of gasses and poisons for use in war. (p. 179)

Modern horror touches everyone, is found everywhere. The novel is filled with descriptions of world-wide chaos. Mark's walls simply present the most dramatic and vivid description of its spreading. Mark's "Memorandum to Myself" describes the many accidents involving radioactive, toxic, or poisonous materials that have already occurred, and his memo emphasizes the frightening aspects of modern technology. Of the time immediately preceding the holocaust, Mark's son, Francis, says in a memo to Amanda that "the very first

symptom of the general collapse was an old one: nothing worked" (p. 604). He says there were accidents, violence, poisonous substances in the air and food. Mankind was going mad. He asserts: "The human race had driven itself mad, and these sudden outbreaks of senseless violence in individuals and communities were the early symptoms" (p. 613). Frederick Karl describes the society that is encompassed in the novel by calling it

a society that follows the holocaust of the Second World War, and that immediately precedes the apocalyptic vision that ends our present notion of the world and book. Yeats's rough beast has arrived; the 2,000-year cycle has entered a new phase.<sup>88</sup>

Additional troubles exist on the outer level. The Coldridge household itself may be symbolic of the troubled society. Roberta Rubenstein suggests that there are three domains which operate in the novel: "the outside world (political events, London, the social fabric, 'the times'), the community (the Coldridge household with its network of interrelationships), and the psyche of Martha Quest that interpenetrates with the two other spheres."<sup>89</sup> The Coldridge house, as Frederick Karl points out, "is one of the four that appear repeatedly in the novel, each with

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<sup>88</sup>Frederick R. Karl, "The Four-Gaited Beast of the Apocalypse: Doris Lessing's The Four-Gated City (1969)," in Old Lines, New Forces: Essays on the Contemporary British Novel, 1960-1970, ed. by Robert K. Morris (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1976), p. 183.

<sup>89</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 139.

its own kind of gate, four houses with four gates that are microcosms of English society, and, inevitably, of the world as Lessing envisages it."<sup>90</sup> Karl goes on to say that these gates are not entrances, but "barriers that close off exits or prevent egress."<sup>91</sup> In an earlier essay, Karl suggested that the four gates

all lead to houses of constriction, nightmare, impotence, not dissimilar to the four notebooks of the earlier novel The Golden Notebook. At each gate, Mrs. Lessing's Martha is seeking a path, similar to the faltering figure of Dante at the beginning of the Inferno."<sup>92</sup>

During her early days at the Coldridge house, Martha resolves to tell Mark she is leaving because she does not want to "be involved in all this . . . this atmosphere of threat, insecurity, and illness" (p. 110). Like its occupants, the house looks all right on the surface, but it is really in need of much attention and repair. It is crumbling from within. After Mark's brother Colin defects to Russia, and Colin's wife Sally kills herself, Mark and Martha find they do not know how to act. They are even unable to tell Paul of his mother's death. The narrator

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<sup>90</sup>Karl, "The Four-Gaited Beast," p. 183.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Karl, "The New Anatomy of Melancholy," p. 16.

suggests that "they had lost a sense of the ordinary machinery of life" (p. 165). Martha comes to realize "that the family was doomed" (p. 187), just as she comes to realize that mankind will suffer a terrible holocaust. The house itself is described as "layered"--the people split off or divided on their particular floors in their particular rooms.

Another good example of what is happening to society is illustrated during one of Martha's "breakdowns." She goes outside and looks at her fellow humans. What she finds is that man is a defective creature. She wonders where the healthy people are, for what she sees are "drugged cripples" (p. 509). She observes that

they all looked half drugged, or half asleep, dull, as if the creatures had been hypnotised or poisoned, for these people walked in their fouled and disgusting streets full of ordure and bits of refuse and paper as if they were not conscious of their existence here, were somewhere else; . . . their mouths were full of metal and foreign substances . . . and their guts were full of drugs . . . and their nervous systems were numbed by the drugs they took to alleviate the damage done by the din they had chosen to live in; the fear and tension of their lives. And they stank. (pp. 506-507)

Commenting on Martha's view of "human vileness," Karl says that the physical condition is not as frightening as the way people behave--as if they were "sleepwalking" (p. 507).<sup>93</sup> The behaviour of Jimmy Wood, a science-fiction writer,

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<sup>93</sup>Karl, "The Four-Gaited Beast," p. 190.

and Mark's partner, is also an example of what is happening to society. Of him Karl remarks:

. . . the symbol of breakdown in social morality and in humanity itself is Jimmy Wood . . . who represents the bland forces of military, science, and government which, with velvet glove, offer salvation while they are missing a human dimension: "It was as if Jimmy had been born with one of the compartments of the human mind developed to its furthest possibility, but this was at the cost to everything else."<sup>94</sup>

The outer world--global and social--is beset by troubles, madness, deterioration. As in traditional literature, chaos precedes the holocaust.

The outer struggles are paralleled by the inner ones. The inner struggles, chaos in the human psyche, are akin to those explored in The Golden Notebook. Roberta Rubenstein has pointed out the importance of the theme of fragmentation in The Four-Gated City, that she says is underscored by "The Dedication" to the novel. According to Rubenstein, the Sufi epigraph that makes up "The Dedication" to the novel "alludes . . . to the loss that results from categorization, from trying to keep substances separate."<sup>95</sup> Like Anna Wulf, Martha Quest recognizes that she and other people are fragmented. At times she becomes "Matty." Matty is Martha's other self whom she describes as "rather amusing, outspoken,

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., pp. 188-189.

<sup>95</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 128.

competently incompetent, free from convention" (p. 4). At other times she adopts names like "Phyllis Jones" (p. 17) to protect her real self. Colin's wife Sarah is forced into a divided self by the Coldridge family, who insists on calling her "Sally," and thereby denying her Jewishness. Lessing implies that Sally-Sarahs and Matty-Marthas are not uncommon. At one point, Mark is described as being "at least half a dozen different people, all operating apparently with perfect efficiency, side by side, and not recognizing the existence of the others" (p. 187).

Early in the novel, Martha feels the strain of having to remain alert to protect parts of herself. She reflects on this effort when she says, "this business of having to divide off, make boundaries--it was such a strain" (p. 35). Kathleen O'Fallon points out that in a dream Martha found herself going from one room to another, leaving her feeling "disconnected."<sup>96</sup> O'Fallon suggests "Martha's life is a long series of 'break-ups.'"<sup>97</sup> Martha is also aware that someone is watching her, a "watcher." She asks Lynda, Mark's wife who has been treated since childhood for everything from neurosis to psychosis, whether Lynda has

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<sup>96</sup>Kathleen O'Fallon, "Quest for a New Vision," World Literature Written in English 12 (November 1973):184.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

a "watcher" too. Lynda acknowledges that she does and warns Martha not tell anyone else. Lynda explains to Martha:

"About the two people. Sometimes you are more the one that watches, and sometimes that one gets far off and you are more the one who is watched. But they look out for that, you see, and when you make a mistake and say it, then that proves it. You're a schiz." (p. 226)

Martha knows that she must meet this "other person" head on, and that she must unlock certain areas of her life. At one point, she acknowledges that "she had been blocking off the pain [of her father's death] , and had blocked off half of her life with it" (p. 216). Rubenstein observes that Martha must come to terms with her "inner division" just as Anna Wulf tried to do:

Like Anna, Martha must find a way to accommodate fragmentation perceived in the phenomenal world as well as the inner one. The bipolar potential for breaking down into madness on the one side, and breaking through to psychic growth on the other side of the painful splits in consciousness, is carried over into the alternative fragmentary and unitive potentialities of the mind. The quest motif itself culminates with several "descents" into the demonic unconscious and an apocalyptic "ascent" into the idyllic dimension. . . .<sup>98</sup>

In The Four-Gated City, the troubled psyche is clearly a counterpart of the troubles in the outer world.

Traditional apocalyptic literature often ends with

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<sup>98</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 129.

rebirth or renewal. Martha achieves this renewal on the psychological level through what R. D. Laing and others have termed "breakthrough."<sup>99</sup> Laing says that "madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death."<sup>100</sup> Martha actually makes several journeys of self-discovery which begin in breakdown, madness or near madness, but which end in strength. A journey into "inner space"<sup>101</sup> is characterized by uncertainty, moments of great lucidity, and feelings of horror. O'Fallon, describing this type of quest, identifies three stages of the journey:

First, introspection triggered by a fragmented vision of the world and a desire to find some unifying factor within the self. Second, a battle with the monsters of illusion, self-destruction, hallucination, and emotionalism which bombard the mind. Finally, a rebirth into society with a vision of the oneness of human experience.<sup>102</sup>

O'Fallon's description recalls the Indian doctrine of the

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<sup>99</sup>R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1967), p. 147. The similarities between Lessing's and Laing's views are discussed by Marion Vlástos in "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy." Roberta Rubenstein discusses breakthrough in her chapter "Breaking Through" in The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>102</sup>O'Fallon, "Quest for a New Vision," p. 181.

ages, as described by Eliade--"eternal creation, deterioration, destruction, and re-creation"<sup>103</sup>--a familiar cycle in apocalyptic literature.

In The Four-Gated City, her various journeys into "inner space" begin when Martha finds within herself "a soft dark receptive intelligence" (p. 38) and a space she hopes she remembers later. Remembering that space becomes very important to Martha. O'Fallon says that "when Martha begins to realize the importance of connecting the fragments of her life . . . introspection becomes significant; this realization is embodied in her obsession for 'remembering.'"<sup>104</sup> Lessing describes in detail Martha "working" with Lynda. Martha emerges from these sessions with the idea that it is better to be mad than to be "a lump of lethargy" (p. 510). To journey inside herself, she realizes that she must be alone. She must go someplace where she will not be disturbed. She chooses Paul's house for her most intensive and exhausting trip into her self. She knows that in Paul's house are the rejects and misfits from society and that they will not intrude upon her privacy. She figures that they will assume that she is on drugs and will accept her as one of them. By eating and sleeping

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<sup>103</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 62.

<sup>104</sup>O'Fallon, "Quest for a New Vision," p. 184.

little, she is able to reach a high level of consciousness. One of the first "monsters" she encounters is the self-hater; she is soon "completely in the grip of this self-hating person, or aspect of her self" (p. 535). Vlastos sees Martha's confrontation with the self-hater as a confrontation with the evil within herself:

Facing the "self-hater" and the "Devil," she confronts the depths of her own nature and of the collective consciousness of humanity. In some sense Martha is able to recognize her own participation in human evil, as Anna does in her mad dreams at the end of The Notebook, without being morally threatened, and the effect of her courageous descent is that, like Anna, she gains psychic strength and, in Laing's terms, greater "ontological security."<sup>105</sup>

Her journeys are interrupted by short time periods during which she refuses to go on, and she makes notes which she feels are "like small signposts, or footmarks, for other people who may or may not find them" (p. 537).

During her inner journey at Paul's house, she goes through various phases and experiences different emotions. At times she is accompanied by the Devil. Rubenstein observes that

Martha descends into the darkest circle of hell within her own being, the demonic underside of her acceptable self, represented by the deliberately archetypal figure of the Devil. Like Anna Wulf, who eventually recognizes herself in the projected figures of the dwarflike joy-in-spite

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<sup>105</sup>Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing," p. 252.

figure, Martha recognizes herself in the horrifying underside of her being.<sup>106</sup>

Unable to shake loose from the Devil's hold, Martha becomes exhausted and sleeps. She dreams. Throughout the novel, Martha's dreams are a means of working through problems, a healing process. Lessing has commented on the significance of her own dreams:

Dreams have always been important to me. The hidden domain of our mind communicates with us through dreams. I dream a great deal and I scrutinize my dreams. The more I scrutinize the more I dream. When I'm stuck in a book I deliberately dream. . . . I fill my brain with the material for a new book, go to sleep, and I usually come up with a dream which resolves the dilemma.<sup>107</sup>

Martha describes her dream as a nightmare:

In sleep the most dreadful nightmares followed her. But she remembered that when she was a child there had been a long period when she had been frightened to sleep because of nightmares, and had used all kinds of tricks and techniques to outwit them. She remembered these now, used them. It occurred to her that she thought she was finally lost, was cast forever into this sea, but all the same she could say, I'm tired, I will sleep--and did. Or, asleep, say: I am in Hell, wake up, and did. Or performed the rituals before sleep that could ward off nightmares which she had learned through necessity as a child.

This thought lessened the grip of the Devil and of Hell. (p. 551)

At the end of her journey, Martha is still not free of the

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<sup>106</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 157.

<sup>107</sup>Quoted by Jonah Raskin, "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview," in A Small Personal Voice, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), pp. 66-67.

Devil, but she is ready to return to the Coldridge house.

At this stage she believed she would never lose him [the Devil]--that, like poor Lynda, she would carry him with her for always. She thought that the last few weeks had taken her right over the edge into a permanent stage of being plugged in to the sea of sound; and that its main, persistent, hammering, never-sleeping voice was the Devil's, the voice of the self-punisher. (p. 552)

She emerges from her journey with the strength and vision that will eventually carry her through the catastrophe and, thereafter, the ordeal of her life on the island off the coast of Scotland. Frederick Karl says that Martha "has learned among other things, how to hear things, how to comprehend psychic forces, how to descend into a purity of life denied anyone who lives actively in the world."<sup>108</sup>

Lois A. Marchino believes that "Doris Lessing's insistence on the importance of self-knowledge shapes all her novels."<sup>109</sup> She sees Lessing's female characters as "women whose lives are devoted to self-understanding; their quest is to know themselves and thereby to know their relationship to the world."<sup>110</sup> This journey of self-knowledge is seen by Roberta Rubenstein as one that either shrinks "the self . . . [or] produces new awareness, further psychological integration

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<sup>108</sup>Karl, "The Four-Gaited Beast," p. 186.

<sup>109</sup>Lois A. Marchino, "The Search for Self in the Novels of Doris Lessing," Studies in the Novel 4 (Summer 1972):252.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

and growth. . . ."<sup>111</sup> This new awareness eventually evolves into "a breakthrough to a new form of consciousness."<sup>112</sup> Martha completes all three stages of the journey for self-knowledge--introspection, the battle with monsters, and rebirth. She emerges better able to cope with the present and with the catastrophic future.

While traditional apocalyptic literature emphasizes the outer level, those who possess psychic powers do appear. For example, the Sibyl in The Prose Edda possesses the power of prophecy. Often these visionaries are like Cassandra, accurate in their predictions, but unheeded by those they are trying to help. Both Martha and Lynda possess unusual psychic powers. Martha has several experiences during which she is "plugged in" (p. 552) to certain wavelengths. One of her experiences in seeing the future comes when she foresees Dorothy's suicide attempt:

About a week before Dorothy slashed her wrists, Martha had seen, among the pictures that moved in her inner eye (very numerous these days), a scene of Dorothy in a lacy black petticoat, that had a rip in the lace under the left arm, leaning over the basin in the downstairs bathroom. Martha saw this from the back, and slightly to one side. Dorothy turned, blood running from one wrist. In the hand whose wrist was running blood, she held a razor blade, and was sawing at the other. . . . There was a smudge of blood on her cheekbone. (p. 320)

When Dorothy actually slashed her wrists, she wore the

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<sup>111</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 147.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

ripped black petticoat, and other details were similar to those in Martha's inner eye. Martha has seen scenes such as this before, but this time she wonders what her own responsibility is--what she should have done. To prepare the reader for the characters' telepathic powers that are to come in "Part Four," Lessing provides an epigraph:

Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving towards a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result of a need for specific organs. The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. In this age of the transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic and prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the past ten thousand years or so we have been given the possibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends on it.

The Sufis, Idries Shah

In this section, both Martha and Lynda try to convince Francis of the impending doom. Francis' account of these meetings appear in the "Appendix" in a letter to Amanda, in which he describes his mother's awareness of what was going to happen:

My mother, as far as she knew, was the first to have this premonition, in the shape of a "vision." Then others had had it too. The trouble was while the "visions," or the dreams, were consistent with each other, the time was hard to pinpoint. . . . It looked as if the catastrophe would involve radioactivity. The country would be uninhabitable for some time. There would be great loss of life. (p. 627)

Mark's "Memorandum to Myself" begins with prophecy. He predicts "the coming catastrophe" (p. 528) and warns that any positive action will be up to individuals, as governments have not acted and will not act responsibly. But Mark foresees that mankind will probably be unable to take positive action, and his "Memorandum" contains some of the reasons for mankind's inability to save itself. They prove to be true when the actual catastrophe strikes. He writes:

"1. We are all hypnotised by the idea of Armageddon, the flash brighter than a million suns, the apocalyptic convulsion, the two-minute war, instant death. Populace more than government; but governments as well. Everyone is stunned by an approaching annihilation like an animal dazzled by an approaching car.

"2. This prevents preparation, psychological and physical, for what is likely. Which will be local catastrophic occurrences--the poisoning of a country, or of an area; the death of part of the world; the contamination of an area for a certain period of time." (p. 554)

All of these visions and predictions are accurate and are documented in the "Appendix." But it is Lynda's vision as described in "Part Four" that comes frighteningly close to what the reality as described in the "Appendix" becomes:

Lynda had had, for the space of several days, a series of visions or pictures (on the inner television set) and the dreams like stills from the visions. These showed landscapes that were all known to Lynda. . . . They looked as if a kind of frozen dew had covered everything so that at first glance she had cried out, "England has been poisoned, it looks like a poisoned mouse lying dead in a corner." For everything had appeared as a faintly phosphorescent or begemmed stillness. (p. 566)

Roberta Rubenstein suggests that

Martha and Lynda had become part of a surreptitious group of "sensitives," including several psychiatrists who had the courage to buck the establishment view, dedicated to channeling their intuitions of the future in order to rescue civilization from impending annihilation.<sup>113</sup>

Both Martha and Lynda accept their roles as seers and accept responsibility for trying to save humanity. Their visions become a nightmarish reality.

The catastrophe that occurs is very much in keeping with Lynda's visions. The documents in the "Appendix" date 1995-2000, but the "accident" occurred in the 1970s. A vague account of the catastrophe is included in a letter written in 1997 from Martha to Francis. Martha recounts that even though plans were made to save a great number of people, she and others who worked to rescue people had not counted on mass hysteria. She also says there were so many predictions of woe that people were frightened and could not act rationally and responsibly. What actually occurs is not clear. Martha recounts rumours about nerve gas leaks and radioactive wastes from submarines. One rumour suggests that a Chinese plane carrying "nuclear devices" (p. 637) had crashed. At any rate, the "accident" contaminated England and the seas around it. Whatever the

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

cause, Martha sees it as "another foreseeable and preventable horror" (p. 638). In some of Mark Coldridge's papers, he suggests that England was not the only area to suffer from some sort of disaster. Mark's notes indicate that epidemics such as the Asian flu and bubonic plague wiped out whole groups of people, and he says at one point that "the world is full of exiles" (p. 650), indicating that people other than those in Great Britain are displaced. The "Appendix" suggests that people from various parts of the world have relocated and power structures have realigned as a result of the catastrophe. Frederick Karl sees the shift in power as the inevitable result of man's madness:

Society as we know it . . . has collapsed. The holocaust that informs the fifty-page Appendix of the book is not a radical break with what came before, but a logical extension of the earlier time's madness. Nerve gas, nuclear devices, the death of the West--these are the geographical Final Judgments, the Day of Armageddon, but without even the sense of good and evil battling each other. The West has simply exhausted its possibilities, and other geopolitical areas--chiefly Africa and China--have asserted their claims for power.<sup>114</sup>

In Judaeo-Christian theology, sinful man brings about Armageddon. In The Four-Gated City, too, man is responsible. Summing up the notes and letters found in the "Appendix," Roberta Rubenstein says:

Communications sent by Martha Quest, Mark Coldridge's private notes found after his death,

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<sup>114</sup>Karl, "The Four-Gaited Beast," p. 196.

the letters of Francis Coldridge (biological son of Mark and Lynda, and spiritual offspring of Martha as well), and other lesser exchanges and correspondences describe the pre-catastrophe era and the twenty-five years following the destructive event whose cause is vague but traceable to some human-political accident. Francis's section emphasizes that the cataclysm results not from extraordinary events but from the cumulative momentum of ordinary ones.<sup>115</sup>

Following the catastrophe, information about the actual event is sketchy, but the notes and letters found in the "Appendix" underscore the necessity for preserving whatever knowledge and memory that exist about the tragedy.

"Remembering" is important.

In the New Testament, John of Patmos sees, following the destruction of the world, a heavenly Jerusalem established on earth--a city of peace and harmony. In The Four-Gated City, such visions of a perfect city also occur. Martha Quest was fifteen years old and looking out over the African veld when she first got a glimpse of her perfect city:

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

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<sup>115</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 161.

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. . . ."116

Shortly after she arrives at the Coldridges' house, Martha and Mark discuss her vision. Mark becomes quite excited about Martha's "mythical city" and creates a more detailed version of it (pp. 139-140). The city as he describes it is carefully planned and emerges as a geometrically balanced whole. Mark takes Martha's idea of the four-gated city and incorporates it into his novel, A City in the Desert. But in Mark's revised version, this "magical city" is not the traditional New Jerusalem. Outside the city live a group of people who do not live in harmony as do those in the inner city:

Inside was harmony, order--joy. Outside people fought for power and money and recognition, there were soldiers, and a constant growing and overthrowing of dynasties based on the army. Then, one of the ruling families wanting an advantage over the others, sent envoys into the centre, asking to buy their secret. But the reply came back that the secret could not be sold, or taken: it could only be earned, or accepted as a gift. The rulers of the outer city were angry: they did not understand this answer. They overran the inner city, killing everyone. (p. 141)

Throughout The Four-Gated City, Lessing refers to Martha's city in her earlier vision. While Martha is trying to overcome fragmentation, she walks the streets of London, and she remembers her vision of the city when she was a teenager

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116Doris Lessing, Martha Quest (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1952; New American Library, 1970), p. 47.

on the veld. She realizes that, along with other memories, she has blocked off that vision. She reflects:

Somewhere in our minds there is an idea of a city. A City, rather! A solid, slow-moving thing, not far off that picture of a city presented by Mark, where streets ran north and south and east and west and known landmarks could be referred to through generations. (p. 302)

The general desire to find such a city is illustrated by the fact that after his book is published, Mark receives letters asking for the city's location. Even his niece, Elizabeth, demands that Mark give her the name and location of the city. Jean Pickering, who makes some interesting observations about the city, says that it represents

above all an image of integration. On the level of the collective, it represents an ideal state where all ages and races live together in harmony and beauty; on the level of the individual, it implies wholeness of self, the goal of individuation.<sup>117</sup>

Pickering then goes on to explain that the four-gated city is just that, a city; it is not The Garden. She points out that while both Jerusalem and Eden are "Paradise," they are not identical. Eden houses the "innocent," while Jerusalem is established for the "redeemed."<sup>118</sup> As she points out, Jerusalem follows Armageddon. After the holocaust, Mark does establish a city in the desert, but it

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<sup>117</sup>Jean Pickering, "Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Doris Lessing's Myth," Modern Fiction Studies 26 (Spring 1980):21.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

certainly is not the New Jerusalem. Martha seems to feel that her island off the Scottish coast is something of a utopia, but it is not the ideal city either. As in traditional Judaeo-Christian literature, the ideal city remains a vision of the future and a significant image.

The Four-Gated City ends with destruction, but Lessing offers a faint glimmer of hope. Martha sees that several of the children on the island possess extraordinary psychic powers. Perhaps Lessing is suggesting, as does Laing, that "each child is a new being, a potential prophet, a new spiritual prince, a new spark of light. . . . Who are we to decide that it is hopeless?"<sup>119</sup> Whatever hope is offered must be tempered by Francis Coldridge's remarks in the "Appendix." In his letters to Amanda, he questions whether "the human race cannot learn from experience" (p. 598), adding "the mass of the human race has never had a memory" (p. 598). Roberta Rubenstein says that Martha's "difficulty of 'remembering'" is due to the fact that "human beings cannot maintain the state of abnormally aware consciousness for long, the individual (like the collective) continues to repeat the same mistakes over and over again."<sup>120</sup>

Specifically, one of Martha's extraordinary children

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<sup>119</sup>Laing, The Politics of Experience, p. 30.

<sup>120</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 132.

Joseph seems to be a victim of society's inability to learn from the past. In her letter to Francis, Martha says that Joseph is one of the children who "both 'see' and 'hear'" and who "all carry with them a gentle strong authority. They don't have to be shielded from the knowledge of what the human race is in this century--they know it" (p. 647). She goes on to say that "they are beings who include that history in themselves and who have transcended it" (p. 647). She tells Francis that she is sending Joseph to the settlement in Nairobi. But once Joseph arrives in Nairobi, the head of the "Reconstitution and Rehabilitation Centre" tells Francis in a memo that Joseph is "subnormal to the 7th, and unfit for academic education. But fit for 3rd-grade work" (p. 649). He suggests that Joseph be put to work on a farm. Roberta Rubenstein says of the child:

Symbolically, he is both Martha's spiritual legacy to the next generation and through her, the spiritual offspring of Thomas Stern (Martha's lover in Landlocked): not only the seer who had predicted the psychic mutations of the human race which in fact develop on Martha's island, but the loving man who had awakened in Martha the potentialities of higher, unitive vision. The young child Joseph is, predictably, not "recognized"; he is only provisionally admitted to the camps of Africa, reclassified as "subnormal." . . . Like Martha Quest herself, Joseph is one of the new generation's children of violence, heir to the endless dialectic between collective cataclysm and extraordinary vision.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., pp. 165-166.

Rubenstein's interpretation is probably correct. For one thing, Lessing has taken care to create a reliable narrator in Martha Quest. One feels that Martha's judgments are accurate. Additionally, Lessing herself expresses hope for the "new man about to be born."<sup>122</sup> There is no reason to question Martha's assessment of Joseph.

The apocalyptic elements in The Four-Gated City are abundant and evident. While the novel does not end with great rejoicing and an ideal world, it does not end in total despair. Lessing seems to have confidence in the individual, but that confidence is certainly qualified. The Four-Gated City sets the tone for the novels which follow, The Memoirs of a Survivor and Shikasta.

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<sup>122</sup>Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice," p. 8.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR: A NEW DIMENSION

Doris Lessing's The Memoirs of a Survivor, called "a brilliant fable,"<sup>123</sup> by one reviewer, records the death of an unidentified city sometime in the future. Within the format of a journal, the narrator describes the last days of the decaying city and the disintegration of normal social relationships. As in traditional apocalyptic literature, The Memoirs of a Survivor catalogues the troubles and woes preceding the ultimate catastrophe, and the rebirth motif is present. As in both The Golden Notebook and The Four-Gated City, the main character suffers from fragmentation and finds "inner space"<sup>124</sup> and escape--a type of breakthrough characteristic of Lessing's novels. While the narrator does not experience the same descent into madness as Anna Wulf and Martha Quest do, she does experience self-awareness. Even though the narrator pictures the present as bleak, she suggests an alternative world, a garden, perhaps symbolic of Eden.

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<sup>123</sup>Maureen Howard, review of The Memoirs of a Survivor, by Doris Lessing, in The New York Times Book Review, 8 June 1975, sec. 7, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup>Laing, The Politics of Experience, p. 147.

A catastrophe or holocaust, as described in the "Appendix" of The Four-Gated City, has not yet occurred in The Memoirs of a Survivor, but the breakdown that precedes the end (an end not described, but only alluded to) is fully detailed in this novel. The breakdown is described as a slow, gradual process, the deterioration typical of apocalyptic literature. Eliade explains that some people hope for the end of a world suffering from "cosmic weariness."<sup>125</sup> He adds that "the belief that the catastrophe is the inevitable consequence of the 'old age' or decrepitude of the World appears to be comparatively common."<sup>126</sup> The narrator begins her journal with a description of the general state of society in a passage illustrating Francis Coldridge's observation in the "Appendix" of The Four-Gated City that prior to the holocaust, "nothing worked":

I shall begin this account at a time before we were talking about "it." We were still in the stage of generalised unease. . . . A great many things were bad, breaking down, giving up, or "giving cause for alarm," as the newscasts might put it. (p. 5)

In The Memoirs of a Survivor, very little works, and what

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<sup>125</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 58.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>127</sup>Doris Lessing, The Memoirs of a Survivor (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1975; Bantam Books, 1976), p. 5. (Hereafter quotations from the Bantam edition of The Memoirs of a Survivor are cited internally, with the page numbers indicated in parentheses following each quotation.)

does work works only spasmodically. Early in the novel, the narrator describes the government's failure to keep public services working: "We knew that all public services had stopped to the south and to the east, and that this state of affairs was spreading our way" (pp. 9-10). The word spreading suggests that the problems are akin to a malignancy, one that grows slowly but finally destroys all that it touches. The gangs that invade one neighborhood after another, and which pose an increasing threat as they move in from the country (p. 10), are also a sign of the government's failure:

. . . as food became more scarce, . . . the gangs became dangerous, and when they passed through the suburbs of our city, people ran inside and stayed out of their way.

This had been going on for months. Warnings . . . that gangs were moving through such-and-such an area, where the inhabitants had gone behind their locked doors until the danger had passed; that new gangs were approaching this or that area, . . . such alarms were part of our lives. (p. 10)

At first, the breakdown of government and society creates inconveniences. There are interruptions in electrical and water supplies, but the narrator explains that "[w]hile everything, all forms of social organization, broke up, we lived our lives as if nothing fundamental was happening" (p. 18).

The inconveniences become increasingly intolerable, but as government fails and as the social structures fade,

new means of coping evolve. Gerald, with Emily's help, begins to look after orphaned and stranded children. Gerald becomes the leader of a new social unit--a "family" of children led by children. They become adept at begging and foraging for supplies. They learn to cultivate gardens, to raise poultry and livestock, and to make candles. Their little commune becomes more and more self-sufficient and less and less dependent upon the products of technology. The gangs become more visible and more powerful. A shifting in the society from an organized government to tribal units becomes more apparent. The authorities exert almost no control over the people, and the street gangs wander at will. The narrator refers to those in authority as "the Talkers" and explains that everyone talked and listened, hoping for news:

We had to know what gangs were approaching, or rumoured to be approaching--gangs which, as I've said, were not all "kids" and "youngsters" now, were made up of every kind and age of person, were more and more tribes, were the new social unit. We had to know what shortages were expected or might be abating; if another suburb had decided to turn its back entirely on gas, electricity, and oil and revert to candle-power and ingenuity; if a new rubbish dump had been found; . . . where there were shops that might have hides or old blankets or rose hips for vitamin syrups, or recycled plastic objects, or metal things like sieves and saucepans, or whatever it was, whatever might be cast up from the dead time of plenty. (pp. 50-51)

Later, the resourceful street gangs are replaced by the very young, very savage children from the Underground.

These "underground gangs" do not even have pack loyalty:

They stole what they needed to live on, which was very little indeed. They wore clothes--just enough. They were . . . [ellipses in the original] no, they were not like animals who have been licked and purred over, and, like people, have found their way to good behaviour by watching exemplars. . . . They had no loyalty to each other, or, if so, a fitful and unpredictable loyalty. They would be hunting in a group one hour, and murdering one of their number the next. . . . There were thirty or forty in the pack in our neighbourhood, and for the first time I saw people showing uncontrolled reactions of real panic. (p. 175)

Later, too, the air becomes polluted, and the situation becomes more and more life threatening:

. . . the air we breathed had indeed become hard on our lungs, had been getting fouler and thicker for a long time. We had become used to it, were adapting: I, like everyone else, had been taking short reluctant breaths, as if rationing what we took into our lungs, our systems, could also ration the poisons--what poisons? (p. 191)

The breakdown and chaos which the narrator describes is not limited to her city; it is widespread, a shared, common experience. The narrator observes that "the news from other countries might just as well be from other planets, so far away did they seem now; and in any case, things went on there just the same as they did with us" (p. 114). From the very beginning of the book, the narrator insists that her journal records a common experience: ". . . the protracted period of unease and tension before the end was the same for everybody, everywhere" (p. 3).

The deterioration of the city, the erosion of tra-

ditional social structures, and the search for a better life are themes which Lessing examines over and over in this novel. Betsy Draine describes the theme of breakdown in The Memoirs of a Survivor:

In concrete terms, [the narrator] renders an account of her experience in the dying year of a great city somewhere in England. Her "memoirs" record, in terms of a particular life, how the institutions of a technology and bureaucratic society collapse from inner corruption, and how mankind, in the midst of cultural rot, finds itself faced with two alternatives--death or radical change.<sup>128</sup>

Turmoil fills the pages of the novel. The narrator sums up her feelings as she confronts the changes taking place:

Inside it was all chaos; the feeling one is taken over by, at the times in one's life when everything is in change, movement, destruction--or reconstruction, but that is not always evident at the time--a feeling of helplessness, as if one were being whirled about in a dust-devil or a centrifuge. (p. 81)

While life goes on with the appearance of normalcy, nothing remains of normal life.

Symbolic of times which are not normal is Emily's arrival. The narrator seems unaware that she is destined to become a surrogate mother. One day a man arrives, leaves Emily, who is approximately eleven or twelve, and leaves without explanation. The narrator accepts Emily and her dog Hugo, and the responsibility for them both. She

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<sup>128</sup>Betsy Draine, "Changing Frames: Doris Lessing's Memoirs of a Survivor," Studies in the Novel 11 (Spring 1979):54.

watches Emily's amazing metamorphosis, in a matter of months, from child into woman. Emily becomes the narrator's eyes and ears to the outside world, the world on the pavement. Emily eventually becomes a part of a gang led by her lover Gerald, and with him she shows amazing resourcefulness and the ability to adapt to a new lifestyle. Emily and Gerald are symbolic of the new generation in which Lessing finds hope. Perhaps they are her new generation "waiting to be born."<sup>129</sup> In addition, Emily may personify the narrator's growth toward wholeness. Roberta Rubenstein points out that when Emily arrives, the narrator is in a "state of psychological pregnancy," and that

[a]ccording to Jung, the appearance of the child archetype in individual psychic development is an anticipation of the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements within the personality, as well as a symbol of healing, of wholeness, of opposites mediated.<sup>130</sup>

During this period of unrest and uneasiness, people seem to be suffering from anxiety, perhaps Kermode's "eschatological anxiety"<sup>131</sup>--anxiety underscored by the

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<sup>129</sup> Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice," p. 8.

<sup>130</sup> Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 223. Rubenstein's chapter "Returning to the Center" contains a discussion of the egg imagery in The Memoirs of a Survivor and its meaning.

<sup>131</sup> Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p. 95.

narrator's discussion of "it." She says that people's starting to use the word "it" is "always a sign of crisis, of public anxiety" (p. 5), and adds that in the beginning it was impossible to identify "it":

We were still in the stage of generalised unease. Things weren't too good, they were even pretty bad. A great many things were bad, breaking down, giving up, or "giving cause for alarm," as the newscasts might put it. But "it" in the sense of something felt as an immediate threat which could be averted, no. (p. 5)

Later, she identifies "it" as an entity with several dimensions:

Perhaps, indeed, "it" is the secret theme of all literature and history. . . . I am sure that ever since there were men on earth, "it" has been talked of precisely in this way in times of crisis, since it is in crisis "it" becomes visible and our conceit sinks before its force. For "it" is a force, a power, taking the form of earthquake, a visiting comet . . . "it" can be, has been, pestilence, a war, the alteration of climate, a tyranny that twists men's minds, the savagery of a religion.

"It," in short, is the word for helpless ignorance, or of helpless awareness. "It" is a word for man's inadequacy?

"It," perhaps--on this occasion in history--was, above all, a consciousness of something ending. (pp. 153-154)

She later claims that "it" could be associated with the physical ailments which seemed to plague people. June, Emily's friend, suffers from vague physical complaints which make her "feel bad inside and everywhere" (p. 157). The narrator then concludes her definition of "it" by saying:

Perhaps, after all, one has to end by characterising "it" as a sort of cloud or emanation, but invisible, like the water vapour you know is present in the air of the room you sit in. . . . "It" was everywhere, in everything, moved in our blood, our minds. "It" was nothing that could be described once and for all, or pinned down, or kept stationary; "it" was an illness, a tiredness, boils; "it" was the pain of watching Emily, a fourteen-year-old girl, locked inside her necessity to--sweep away dead leaves; "it" was the price or unreliability of electricity supply; the way telephones didn't work; the migrating tribes of cannibals; was "them" and their antics; "it" was, finally, what you experienced . . . [ellipses in the original] and was the space behind the wall, just as much there as in our ordinary world. . . . (pp. 157-158)

Anxiety, a sense of uneasiness, is characteristic of modern as well as traditional apocalyptic literature. Doris Lessing's The Memoirs of a Survivor depicts a deteriorating world just before its end, a world similar to that described by Eliade:

. . . this world--the World of History--is unjust, abominable, demonic; fortunately it is already decaying, the catastrophes have begun, this old world is cracking everywhere; very soon it will be annihilated. . . .<sup>132</sup>

Unlike the world depicted in traditional apocalyptic literature, however, the world she portrays ends as does T. S. Eliot's, "not with a bang, but a whimper."

The breakdown described in The Memoirs of a Survivor is that of the outer world, the world of the sidewalk; however, a breakthrough occurs not in this outer world, but

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<sup>132</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 68.

in an inner one, the mind of the narrator. The walls which dissolve are symbolic of the confines of the psyche. But before dwelling on the meaning of the wall, it is necessary to look at the narrator's realization of the world behind the wall, a realization which will lead her on her journey of self-discovery.

The narrator's moving through the wall is not without preparation. She gradually becomes aware that the other world exists. At first, she is not even sure of what it is that she is becoming aware of:

I want to make the point that it is not as if an awareness of what went on behind walls and ceilings had been lacking before the start of--what? Here I do find difficulty, because there is nothing I can pinpoint, make definite. . . . [ellipses in the original] No, the consciousness of that other life, developing there so close to me, hidden from me, was a slow thing, coming precisely into the category of understanding we describe in the word "realise," with its connotation of a gradual opening into comprehension. (p. 7)

She goes on to explain that she "was on the edge of realising" (p. 7). As the wall becomes increasingly important, the narrator senses the significance of what is happening to her:

. . . all this time my ordinary life was in the foreground, the lit area--if I can put it like that--of a mystery that was taking place, had been going on for a long time, "somewhere else." I was feeling more and more that my ordinary daytime life was irrelevant. Unimportant. . . . I was feeling as if . . . what went on behind the wall might be every bit as important as my ordinary life in that neat and comfortable, if shabby flat. (p. 11)

When she first goes through the wall, she knows she has discovered an important space. She says, "I felt the most vivid expectancy, a longing: this place held what I needed, knew was there, had been waiting for . . . all my life" (p. 13). Like Martha Quest, the narrator often forgets the space she has found:

For days at a time I did not think of it. The knowledge of its being there, in whatever shape it was using for the moment, came to me in flashes during my ordinary life more and more often. But I would forget it, too, for days. When I was actually through that wall, nothing else seemed real. . . . looking back now, it is as if two ways of life, two lives, two worlds, lay side by side and closely connected. But then, one life excluded the other, and I did not expect the two worlds ever to link up. (p. 25)

The narrator does not seem anxious or concerned about lapses of memory. Unlike Martha Quest, she is not disturbed by a forgetting-then-remembering pattern. The wall provides that important "inner space" which Martha Quest and Anna Wulf worked so hard to find. While the wall adds to the narrator's sense of fragmentation, it is also the vehicle for her inward journey of self-discovery.

Although Alvin Sullivan says that both Briefing for a Descent into Hell and The Memoirs of a Survivor "are narrative glimpses of 'fragmented consciousness,'" <sup>133</sup> the

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<sup>133</sup>Alvin Sullivan, "The Memoirs of a Survivor: Lessing's Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies 26 (Spring 1980):157.

narrator, unlike Martha Quest, Lynda Coldridge, and Anna Wulf, does not spend time talking about or worrying about a fragmented personality. She is aware of the incompatibility between the inner and outer worlds. Rubenstein says:

The Narrator's task is not simply to turn her back on a fragmenting outer reality to indulge exclusively in the exploration of her inner landscape, but to reconcile the complementary dimensions of private and social experience, and to find a positive form for them within her own consciousness in order to survive.<sup>134</sup>

The narrator goes through the wall and forgets her outer life; then she returns to her flat, forgetting the experience on the other side. At one point, she does wish that she could leave the outer world entirely, but she will not abdicate her responsibility for Emily. All of this juggling of worlds and roles does not inflict on her the same kind of pain that it does on earlier Lessing protagonists. Alvin Sullivan points out that "Lessing's narrator is indeed the psychiatrist's patient, as indeed we all are,"<sup>135</sup> while Guido Kuns suggests that Lessing presents "madness as the inevitable, or indeed as the only appropriate mode of

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<sup>134</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 224.

<sup>135</sup>Sullivan, "Toward a Supreme Fiction," p. 160.

existence"<sup>136</sup> in the chaotic modern world. But the narrator does not make the "descent into madness" that Lessing's other protagonists make. Rubenstein points out that the narrator "does not 'descend' into basement-unconsciousness. Instead she lives in a flat 'on the ground floor, at earth-level.'"<sup>137</sup> Jean Pickering, who discusses the "dark side" of Anna Wulf's and Martha Quest's experiences, observes that "Martha opens new rooms in herself only by first going through a region of chaos and conflict. . . . the further one goes into one's own rooms, the more one discovers that they are inhabited by all humanity." She adds, "This perception is developed at length in Memoirs of a Survivor."<sup>138</sup> And so it is. But the narrator does not experience the same type of "descent" into madness as do Martha Quest and Anna Wulf, nor does she have the same type of violent, personal confrontation with the self-hater. Like Martha Quest she is aware of a "presence." The narrator finds this presence when she is behind the walls and refers to her as the "exiled inhabitant" (p. 14). Later, she is sure that the inhabitant "was somewhere near, probably

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<sup>136</sup>Guido Kuns, "Apocalypse and Utopia in Doris Lessing's The Memoirs of a Survivor," The International Fiction Review 7 (Summer 1980):79.

<sup>137</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 222.

<sup>138</sup>Pickering, "Marxism and Madness," p. 28.

watching [her]" (p. 41). Perhaps this presence is the "watcher" that Martha Quest was so aware of. Roberta Rubenstein makes an important observation about the difference between the narrator's breakthrough and those of Martha Quest and Lynda Coldridge. According to her, both Martha and Lynda

work to break through the psychic walls that restrict them, [but] the narrator of The Memoirs of a Survivor penetrates them quite easily and spontaneously as she concentrates on her white living room wall. Its paint barely covers a wallpaper scene of birds and trees, suggesting the thin veneer of civilization that conceals the organic pattern beneath it. Such an implication is in fact heightened during the course of the narrative . . . as the veneer dissolves and human civilization self-destructs.<sup>139</sup>

Whatever the degree and extent of her fragmentation, the narrator, like Lessing's other protagonists, must make that important journey inward, the journey of self-discovery which aims at unifying the personality. This she does by going through the walls, for her journey of self-discovery is inextricably linked with her passing through the walls. Rubenstein assures us "that the rooms the narrator enters beyond her wall are part of a psychological rather than physical location . . . for she notes that what is literally on the other side is the hall corridor of her building."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 222.

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*

And just what does the narrator find behind the wall? Sometimes she finds rooms in various stages of disarray. These are the rooms and furniture that she cleans, repairs, and paints. At other times she finds "personal" scenes, scenes from the past--hers, Emily's, and even Emily's mother's. She discovers parts of her forgotten past in these "personal" experiences. Both Anna Wulf and Martha Quest worked to recall the past, and much of their recovery of the past was through dreams. Jung's influence is again present. Betsy Draine explains Lessing's use of Jungian psychology:

The narrator, in fact, seems to seek in the imaginary world what Anna Wulf of The Golden Notebook sought in Jungian therapy (and later in madness)--a reintegration of the psyche through close attention to the neglected world of dream and fantasy. Lessing has made the narrator's journey into the dream world correspond exactly to Jung's description of the stages of significant dreaming. In the fantasy world . . . the narrator discovers first an etiology of suffering, then "a suggestion as to the course of treatment," and finally "a prognosis or anticipation of the future." The visions of origins of suffering come in what the narrator calls the "personal" scenes.<sup>141</sup>

Draine goes on to suggest that the scenes behind the wall present a cure for the social patterns which "keep repeating themselves,"<sup>142</sup> that as the narrator cleans and mends furniture ("old, dispensable psychological patterns"), she

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<sup>141</sup>Draine, "Changing Frames," p. 56.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

is "metaphorically enjoining herself to reorder her mental life by discarding some patterns and radically modifying others."<sup>143</sup> Mary Ann Singleton seems to agree with Draine's assessment: "The narrator carefully cleans and repairs one room and never sees it again, presumably a metaphor for working on, and through, a problem and freeing oneself from a destructive pattern."<sup>144</sup>

During one of her journeys behind the wall, the narrator encounters a six-sided carpeted room without furniture. The carpet "had a design, an intricate one, but the colours had an imminent existence, a potential, no more" (p. 79). Scraps of material lay about, and people were in the room. Someone took one of the scraps, matched it with the carpet, and "behold, the pattern answered that part of the carpet. This piece was laid exactly on the design, and brought it to life" (p. 80). What is important in this scene is that everyone cooperates and has a common goal. Rubenstein, who sees Jung's influence on Lessing in this particular scene, explains the motif of wholeness:

Images of wholeness, archetypal structures awaiting realization and psychic integration that increasingly populate this inner realm reveal their

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>144</sup>Singleton, The City and the Veld, p. 225.

Jungian basis most explicitly in the "centering" activity in which the Narrator participates. She finds herself in a hexagonal (mandala-shaped) room which, unlike the others, is occupied. . . . The occupants of the room are engaged in fitting multi-colored pieces of cloth into the carpet design, thereby bringing its pattern to life. The Narrator joins in this activity . . . [and] though the room vanishes as the others have done when she leaves them, the Narrator knows "it had not disappeared, and the work in it continued, must continue, would go on always" (p. 79). Symbolically, the process of self-realization--the Sufi "work"--remains the dynamic necessity of the growing personality, whether conscious or not.<sup>145</sup>

The narrator has earlier begun to understand "that the events on the pavement and what went on between me and Emily might have a connection with what I saw on my visits behind the wall" (p. 40). As Rubenstein has pointed out, "The ultimate goal of the interior journey is an escape from 'outer' chaos, a visionary exit from the persuasively described societal breakdown that the protagonist observes and an attempt to project a new form of order."<sup>146</sup> At the end of the novel, when the narrator, along with the children, goes through the wall one last time, her journey is completed. As she confronts the presence that has inhabited the rooms, her

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<sup>145</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 229. In her discussion of The Four-Gated City, Rubenstein discusses the significance of the mandala, and Betsy Draine in "Changing Frames" discusses the Jungian interpretation of the mandala.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

personality is, in effect, wholly integrated. Her journey is complete.

In The Golden Notebook and The Four-Gated City, Lessing's protagonists had visions of the perfect city, a New Jerusalem. In The Memoirs of a Survivor, the narrator also envisions a better place. She imagines that she and Emily will leave the decaying city and go to Wales to the Dolgelly's farm and paints an idyllic picture of the life they would lead on the farm--a life with "good bread, uncontaminated water from a deep well, fresh vegetables; love, kindness, the deep shelter of a family. And so we talked about the farm, our future, hers and mine, like a fable where we would walk hand in hand, together" (p. 34). Roberta Rubenstein points out that "Emily and the narrator share a vision of the 'golden age'--another reformulation of the nostalgia for Eden or unity that recurs throughout Lessing's fiction. . . ." <sup>147</sup> During one of her excursions behind the wall, the narrator discovers gardens, one on top of the other. The quietness and luxury of the gardens sharply contrasts with the violence on the sidewalk. Where the narrator expects to find more disheveled rooms, she finds instead a garden:

I was in a garden between four walls, old brick walls, and there was a fresh delightful sky above me that I

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 225.

knew was the sky of another world, not ours. This garden did have a few flowers in it, but mostly it had vegetables. There were beds neatly filled with greenery--carrot tops, lettuces, radishes, and there were tomatoes, and gooseberry bushes, and ripening melons. Some beds were raked and ready for planting; others had been turned and left open to the sun and air. It was a place filled with industry, usefulness, hope. I walked there under a fruitful sky, and thought of how people would be fed from this garden. (p. 159)

The fertility of the garden contrasts with the sterility of the outer world. As the narrator continues her journey, she finds that this is not the only garden, that below this one is another. It, too, is filled with vegetables, herbs, and flowers. The narrator's imagery here suggests a paradise:

Around every bed was a stream of clear water; the garden was a network of water channels. And, looking up and beyond the wall, I saw that the water came from the mountains four or five miles away. There was snow on them, although it was midsummer, and this was melted snow-water, very cold, and tasting of the air that blew across the mountains. (p. 160)

Commenting on the narrator's discovery, Guido Kuns says:

In Doris Lessing's more recent novels, the idea of a paradise underlying the hell of this world is a recurring theme. That paradise is, however, a hidden one which you can only see if you have learned to look with all your faculties, and not just with the cold eye of rationalism. Its clearest expression is perhaps to be found in *Memoirs*, . . . where the narrator stumbles through wreckage and rubble onto an incredibly peaceful and beautiful garden and finds that under that garden is another one, equally beautiful, equally fruitful, and equally sunlit. One must learn to look through reality to the Reality underneath, which is many-layered and inexhaustible. <sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Kuns, "Apocalypse and Utopia," p. 82.

Roberta Rubenstein, however, does not believe that the narrator has discovered a paradise:

Significantly, the underworld imaged in this novel is not hell, nor is it a paradise repeatedly destroyed by its opposite as in Charles Watkins's bifurcated consciousness in Briefing for a Descent into Hell. Rather, it is a generative place, and the Narrator's access to it reflects her growth of consciousness beyond the self-divisions in Lessing's preceding characters.<sup>149</sup>

Whether they form a paradise, a Garden of Eden, or merely a "generative place," the gardens beyond the wall are certainly idyllic compared to the outer world of the sidewalk.

Typically in traditional and apocalyptic literature, the theme of rebirth and/or renewal occurs. It is possible to interpret the ambiguous ending of The Memoirs of a Survivor as a rebirth. The narrator feels the walls opening up to her, and she feels compelled to call the others. They stand at the edge of the wall and see a lawn with a "giant black egg" on it, around the egg "stood Emily, Hugo, Gerald, her officer father, her large laughing gallant mother, and little Denis, the four-year-old criminal, clinging to Gerald's hand . . . " (p. 216). The narrator looks and finally finds her "exiled inhabitant":

No, I am not able to say clearly what she was like. She was beautiful: it is a word that will do. I only saw her for a moment, in a time like the fading of a spark on dark air--a glimpse: she turned

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<sup>149</sup>Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, p. 234.

her face just once to me, and all I can say is  
 . . . [ellipses in the original] nothing at all.  
 (p. 216)

As the lovely presence leads them out of the decaying outer world, the narrator describes their entry into a new dimension:

. . . beside Emily was Hugo, and lingering after them Gerald. Emily, yes, but quite beyond herself, transmuted, and in another key, and the yellow beast Hugo fitted her new self: a splendid animal, handsome, all kindly dignity and command, he walked beside her. . . . Both walked quickly behind that One who went ahead showing them the way out of this collapsed little world into another order of world altogether. . . . Gerald was drawn after them, but still he hesitated . . . while the brilliant fragments whirled around him. And then, at the very last moment, they came, his children came running, . . . and they all followed quickly on after the others as the last walls dissolved. (p. 217)

Their apotheosis is completed. Pickering points out that the walls dissolve "after a long winter."<sup>150</sup> In The Prose Edda before the final victory, before Ragnorok, the world suffers harsh winters. Before a new man can emerge, the world must suffer trials and tribulations. Of this final scene in the novel, Patrick Parrinder contends that they go through the walls

to their deliverance. That is all, though we may be entitled to guess that they have gone through, not to bare survival, but to an idyllic pastoral world like that which Emily and the narrator have earlier

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<sup>150</sup>Pickering, "Marxism and Madness," p. 29.

imagined.<sup>151</sup>

Among the various interpretations of the novel's ending, Parrinder's is in keeping with traditional apocalyptic literature. Guido Kuns accurately labels what he calls the novel's "pattern of crisis and transcendence," but he adds that

there are some remarkable innovations in that pattern. Whereas in the preceding novels the world crisis was postulated in the future and never precisely defined or explained, The Memoirs of a Survivor--itself situated in the future--gives a detailed description of the breakdown of civilization and indicates the reasons for that breakdown. The novel is an account of a highly complex technological civilization such as ours, collapsing not spectacularly by the dropping of a bomb or under pressures from outside, but breaking down from within. . . . While this world is dying, however, another one is coming into being.<sup>152</sup>

According to Betsy Draine, "The intention of the final passage is to fuse the two worlds into one new and different universe."<sup>153</sup> Whether Lessing intended the novel to end on a note of hope is, of course, open to debate. She seems to hold out hope but at the same time destroys that hope.

The Memoirs of a Survivor continues in the Lessing

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<sup>151</sup>Patrick Parrinder, "Descents into Hell: The Later Novels of Doris Lessing," Critical Quarterly 22 (Winter 1980):21-22.

<sup>152</sup>Kuns, "Apocalypse and Utopia," p. 80.

<sup>153</sup>Draine, "Changing Frames," p. 57.

tradition. Mary Ann Singleton identifies two of the "familiar themes" when she refers to "the death throes of the city" and to "the unification of the unconscious with the conscious mind to create the City, the total self."<sup>154</sup> In The Memoirs of a Survivor, Lessing continues in the apocalyptic tradition. Her themes of deterioration, "eschatological anxiety," the journey of self-discovery, and visions of a better world are typical of apocalyptic writings. As in The Four-Gated City, Lessing holds out some hope in The Memoirs of a Survivor, but she seems ambivalent about such hope. The final novel covered by this thesis, Shikasta, contains the traditional apocalyptic elements found in The Golden Notebook, The Four-Gated City, and The Memoirs of a Survivor.

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<sup>154</sup>Singleton, The City and the Veld, p. 223.

## CHAPTER VI

### SHIKASTA: GLOBAL ENTROPY

The final novel which this paper covers is the first novel in the series Canopus in Argos: Archives. Shikasta records the history of the world from Biblical times to the near future. At this point, Lessing has completed four volumes in the series. A fifth is in progress. In Shikasta, Lessing continues to expound on many of the themes and ideas that have been present in the earlier novels. In his review of this novel, George Stade says:

Doris Lessing's new novel has this in common with its predecessors: it forces us to think about first and last things, about what we are, how we got that way and where we are going. It forces us to look into the depths of the apocalyptic tide washing round us.<sup>155</sup>

Shikasta is indeed an apocalyptic novel containing many of the characteristics found in traditional apocalyptic literature. In this novel, there are forces of good and of evil battling for the minds and souls of men; there are deterioration and destruction resulting from evil and from man's failure to remember his past and the commandments given him;

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<sup>155</sup>George Stade, review of Shikasta, by Doris Lessing. In The New York Times Book Review, 4 November 1979, sec. 2, p. 1.

there are visionaries, people who prophesy the end; and there is at least the suggestion that a remnant of the good and faithful will be saved.

Traditional Biblical apocalyptic literature records a cosmic battle between good and evil, with the evil, in the person of Satan, being permanently defeated. For the first time in Lessing's novels, there is an easily recognizable, identifiable evil: Shammatt, the planet which interferes with the Canopean colony Shikasta (earth). In notes and reports, Johor, the Canopean emissary to earth, explains that in the beginning of its existence, Shikasta was one of the richest planets that Canopus had colonized--and it had the greatest potential. In the beginning, Shikasta was named Rohanda, "the fruitful."<sup>156</sup> It was not until later that the name was changed to Shikasta, meaning "the hurt, the damaged, the wounded one" (p. 24). Shikasta was originally a virtual paradise, and the giants and natives who lived there knew little of death or disease. But by the time the "Lock" was to be established, the final connec-

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<sup>156</sup>Doris Lessing, Shikasta, Canopus in Argos: Archives, Re: Colonised Planet 5, Personal, Psychological, Historical Documents, Relating to Visit by Johor (George Sherban), Emissary (Grade 9), 87th of the Period of the Last Days. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979; Vintage Books, 1981, p. 15. (Hereafter quotations from the Vintage edition of Shikasta are cited internally, with the page numbers indicated in parentheses following each quotation.)

tion of Shikasta with Canopus, the Canopeans were aware that something was wrong. It becomes apparent that the Lock is growing weaker, that the giants are beginning to show signs of the "Degenerative Disease" (p. 38), and that the "substance-of-we-feeling (SOWF)" (p. 73), a life-giving substance, is being obstructed. One cause of the beginning deterioration is the influence of Shammat, an enemy of Canopus. Johor comes upon Shammat's evil influence during his first visit to Shikasta. On a journey with David and Sais, two followers, Johor passes an area where he could "feel an evil message" coming from "a column" rising up to him (p. 58). After leaving the two followers, he returns to the area of the column. The land, which is likened to a paradise, gradually becomes devastated as he nears the transmitter column. Trees had been destroyed, animals and birds killed. As Johor reports, "[A]ll this killing and smashing had been for the sake of it. Oh, yes, this was Shammat all right!" (p. 65). As he nears the column, he becomes ill, and he recognizes the liquid emitting from it as Effluon 3.

Johor observes that

Effluon 3 had the property of drawing in and sending out qualities as needed--as programmed. It was the most sensitive and yet the strongest of conductors, needing no machinery to set it up, for it came into existence through the skilled use of concentrations of the mind. (p. 66)

He explains that Effluon 3 could be either healthful or

harmful, and he recognizes that Shammat has stolen the substance from Canopus. The difference between Shammat and Canopus is clearly illustrated by Johor's dream:

I saw the old Rohanda glowing and lovely, emitting its harmonies, rather as one does in the Planets-to-Scale Room. Between it and Canopus swung the silvery cord of our love. But over it fell a shadow, and this was a hideous face, pockmarked and pallid, with staring glaucous eyes. Hands like mouths went out to grasp and grab, and at their touch the planet shivered and its note changed. The hands tore out pieces of the planet, and crammed the mouth which sucked and gobbled and never had enough. Then this eating thing faded into the half-visible jet of the transmitter, which drew off the goodness and the strength, and then, as this column in its turn dissolved, I leaned forward in my dream, frantic to learn which it all meant, could mean . . . [ellipses in the original] I saw that the inhabitants of Shikasta had changed, had become of the same nature as the hungry jetting column: Shammat had fixed itself into the nature of the Shikasta breed, and it was they who were now the transmitter feeding Shammat. (pp. 67-68)

Evil has arrived in the once paradisaal world, and from this point in the novel, the evil presence of Shammat is recorded. During the "Period of Public Cautioners" described in "History of Shikasta, Vol. 997 . . . Excerpts from Summary Chapter," Shammat's influence is noted. The period is the time prior to the flood. One excerpt discusses the many religions which flourish on earth. Many of the representatives of the various religions were Shammat's agents, and Shammat was partially successful in its efforts to convert multitudes of inhabitants:

Shammat representatives were always on Shikasta, just as ours were. Shammat captured whole cultures, civilisations, so that they were never anything but out of our reach. Shammat was, from its own point of view, an entirely successful coloniser of Shikasta. But never entirely, never totally. (p. 112)

The excerpt goes on to describe Shikastans as greedy because of Shammat's influence: "They were set only for taking. Or for being given. They were all open mouths and hands held out for gifts--Shammat! All grab and grasp--Shammat! Shammat!" (p. 112). Later, during the 20th century, "The Century of Destruction," letters from Tafta ("Supreme Lord of Shikasta") to Shammat reveal Shammat's continuing influence. Shammat's evil presence is felt almost from the beginning of Shikasta's existence and continues throughout its history. "Shammat's nature has always been that of an exploiter, a drainer, a feeder, a parasite. She has never been able to comprehend that other empires may be based on higher motives" (p. 343). Good and evil are locked in an ongoing cosmological struggle. Unlike writers of Biblical scripture who foresee the complete destruction of evil and the triumph of good, Lessing merely hints that the Canopeans will be able to strengthen the Lock and provide enough SOWF for harmony to prevail. Letters at the end of the novel, particularly Kassim Sherban's, suggest that the early paradisal past may be repeating itself. Kassim relates how he, George, and some followers discover the place for their city:

Suddenly we all knew quite clearly where the city should be. We knew it all at once. Then we found a spring, in the middle of the place. That was how this city was begun. It is going to be a star city, five points.

We found the right soil for bricks nearby and for adobe. There is everything we can need. We have already started the gardens and the fields. . . .

The first houses are already up, and the central circular place is paved, and the basin of the fountain is made. As we build, wonderful patterns appear as if our hands were being taught in a way we know nothing about.

It is high up here, very high, with marvellous tall sky over us, a pale clear crystalline blue, and the great birds circling in it. (p. 363)

Kassim, George, and the others are in harmony with the cosmos. But no New Jerusalem comes forth from heaven, and whether good has finally triumphed over evil is left unclear.

Deterioration is one of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature. In Shikasta, the giants are the best example of such deterioration. Whereas they once lived many thousands of years and were at peace and harmony with the universe, they soon begin to show signs of the "Degenerative Disease." The giants were originally from Canopus' Colony 10, were approximately nine feet tall and lived for twelve thousand years. When first introduced on Shikasta, their life span fell to two thousand years, but almost immediately things began to improve. Their life span increases, they grow taller, and they exhibit increased mental powers. By the time of Johor's first report, the giants are eighteen feet tall. The natives who had evolved

on Shikasta lived about five hundred years and were eight to nine feet tall. At first no indication of the "Degenerative Disease" was evident. During "The Second Stage," a period which lasted for some time, the civilization created by the giants was quite remarkable.

Through geometric cities the giants maintained contact with Canopus. Johor explains that the giants, whose mental facilities were superior to those of the natives, taught the natives how to maintain contact with Canopus--"with their Mother, their Maintainer, their Friend, and what they called God, the divine" (p. 25). During this time

everybody accepted that their very existence depended on voluntary submission to the great Whole, and that this submission, this obedience, was not serfdom or slavery--states that had never existed on the planet, and which they knew nothing of--but the source of their health and their future and their progress. (p. 26)

The giants were still about eighteen feet tall, and the natives were approximately nine feet tall with a thousand-year life span. Humans and animals lived in harmony, and through patterns of stones, Shikastans (then called Rohandans) kept in touch with their benefactor. To maintain a "mental flow back and forth" (p. 34) between Canopus and Shikasta, the Lock was maintained: "Canopean strength was beamed continually into Rohanda. Rohanda's new, always deepening strengths were beamed continually back to

Canopus" (p. 35). Johor begins his first mission by looking for signs of the "Degenerative Disease." Johor meets with the giants to warn them of evil (Shammatt) and to tell them that they must be relocated. He also warns of the reduction of power and resources on Shikasta. The giants begin to exhibit the first signs of the "Degenerative Disease" when some insist on remaining on the marred planet. Johor describes the signs of the "Degenerative Disease":

I said to them that those who decided to stay would be committing Disobedience. For the first time in their history they would not be in conformity with Canopean Law. . . .

I said that disobedience to the Master Plan was always, everywhere, the first sign of the Degenerative Disease . . . [ellipses in the original] and looked to find noble faces and comprehending eyes that were so no longer, for on to the faces had come peevishness and self-assertion, and into the eyes, vagueness. (pp. 46-47)

This assertion of individuality is the beginning of the end for the giants. Benjamin DeMott says, "We learn . . . of [Lessing's] conviction that the dawn of self-consciousness marks the beginning of the fall of man."<sup>157</sup> Most of the giants obey, but a few remain behind. The natives are also afflicted with the "Degenerative Disease." Physical ailments plague them, and they must leave their beautiful cities. Rohanda's early paradisaal beginnings

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<sup>157</sup>Benjamin DeMott, review of Shikasta, by Doris Lessing, in Saturday Review, December 1979, p. 55.

are soon ended. The next time Johor sees the giants their condition has weakened; eventually their race will die out. When he encounters the natives, they are already getting shorter, and death becomes part of their world. By the time Johor returns as George Sherban during the "Last Days," the natives' size and their life span have drastically decreased. According to Eliade, deterioration in height and life span is found in the myths of various civilizations. What Lessing describes in Shikasta is similar to the Indian "krta yuga," which Eliade discusses in Myth and Reality:

As to the myth of the "perfection of the beginnings," it is easily recognized in the purity, intelligence, bliss, and longevity of human life during the krta yuga, the First Age. In the course of the following yugas there is a progressive deterioration in man's intelligence and morality as well as in his bodily stature and longevity. . . . The Buddhists too dwell on the immense shortening of human life--80,000 years and even more ("immeasurable length," according to some traditions) at the beginning of the cycle and only ten years at the end of it.<sup>158</sup>

Lessing acknowledges that her starting point is the Old Testament, and Eliade points out that the Jews recognize "the loss of Paradise, the progressive shortening of the span of human life, the Flood that annihilated humanity except for a few privileged individuals."<sup>159</sup> Paul Gray

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<sup>158</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 62.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

accurately sums up the pattern of deterioration found in Shikasta when he observes:

After many Edenic millennia an "unfortunate cosmic pattern" breaks this lock and introduces cacophony and dissonance into the new world. Almost immediately the inhabitants display symptoms of the "Degenerative Disease," a bellicose assertion of ego against the grain of the common good. Life-spans, which had stretched to a thousand years, begin shrinking dramatically; natural fulfillment is replaced by restless desires and dissatisfactions. The Canopean overseers sadly change Rohanda's name to Shikasta, "the hurt, the damaged, the wounded one." The period of earth's recorded history is about to begin.<sup>160</sup>

Another sign of deterioration is the loss of memory, a recurrent theme in Lessing's novels. The forgetting-remembering pattern has been examined in The Four-Gated City and in The Memoirs of a Survivor. Johor sees that one year after the Lock had failed, the natives had turned the giants into gods in their tales. As people do in The Prose Edda, the natives forget who their real benefactors are. In the Nordic myth, God "drowned the world and all living creatures" because humans had disregarded "God's commands, turned to the lusts of the world."<sup>161</sup> Humans cannot remember, and as the narrator in The Prose Edda points out, "In the end they lost the very name of God and there was

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<sup>160</sup>Paul Gray, review of Shikasta, by Doris Lessing, in Time, 22 October 1979, p. 101.

<sup>161</sup>Sturluson, The Prose Edda, p. 23.

not to be found in all the world a man who knew his Maker."<sup>162</sup> People then proceed to create or re-create the gods. In Shikasta, they not only forget their creator, they forget "the knowledge and uses of sex" (p. 56), how to care for children, and even their individual, immediate past lives. Johor tries to teach or re-teach them. He explains the necessity of the SOWF; he tells them not to harm themselves or their children; he warns them of Shammat; and he reminds them to love and help one another, giving them the same commandments he had given the giants earlier. Moses-like, Johor instructs Sais and her father David, making them missionaries for Canopus. Johor even leaves Sais the Signature, the neck ornament which enables him to keep in direct touch with Canopus. But human beings cannot remember. In her journal, Rachel Sherban records her attempts to remember and understand. She knows that her brother George (Johor) remembers and understands things that she has not been able to grasp, things she feels she should be able to understand. Rachel wonders "if you have to spend your whole life suddenly understanding facts that were perfectly obvious all the time" (p. 216). Later, when she comes to some understanding, her journal reads:

Now that I am looking back, and linking this with other times I was with George and Hasan I realise that I often did not take any notice of the beginnings of

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<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

conversations. George and Hasan were talking, mostly Hasan, with George listening very intently. George sometimes nodded or gave a quiet smile as he does when something pleases him. I understood that evening. I understood that I was understanding. (p. 226)

Eliade calls such a realization "an 'awakening' or . . . new consciousness of a situation that existed from the beginning but that one was unable to realize."<sup>163</sup> Johor spends much time instructing the giants and then the natives about their past. But the people forget their Canopean connection, they forget their divine benefactors, and they forget Johor's commandments. Even some of the emissaries from Canopus fall under the influence of the Shikasta lifestyle, forgetting their mission. Taufiq, who becomes John Brent-Oxford, loses touch with Canopus; therefore, Johor must visit Shikasta to help Taufiq complete his assignment. Eliade devotes an entire chapter to "Mythologies of Memory and Forgetting." He points out that for the Indian "'[f]orgetting' is equivalent . . . to 'sleep' and . . . to the loss of self; . . . [it is] equivalent to ignorance, slavery (captivity), and death."<sup>164</sup> Even those who have left Shikasta and are stranded in Zone Six, the place of re-entry, try to enter Shikasta once again. They return to Shikasta full of promises to do better, but most

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<sup>163</sup>Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 118.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-119.

of the time, once they are under Shikasta's influence, they forget. Johor discusses Ben as an example of a forgetful one:

[Ben] had not given up, . . . but then, it was not until he had left Shikasta, after months or years or a full life-span . . . that he remembered back in Zone Six, what he had set out to do. He had meant to save himself by the use of the terrors and hazards of Shikasta so that he would crystallise into a substance that could survive and withstand, but when he came to himself he realised he had spent his life again in self-indulgence and weakness and a falling away into forgetfulness. (p. 9)

Perhaps Lessing is using a format to underscore the importance of memory, when she tells her story in the form of reports and documents written by the Canopean envoys and in the form of historical accounts contained in Canopean Archives.

The pattern of destruction exists from the very beginning of the novel. Johor reports on his missions to the many colonies, observing:

This is a catastrophic universe, always; and subject to sudden reversals, upheavals, changes, cataclysms, with joy never anything but the song of substance under pressure forced into new forms and shapes. But poor Shikasta--no, I have not wanted to think about it more than I had to. . . . Shikasta was always there, it is on our agenda--the cosmic agenda. . . . And when I was sent again, on my second visit, at the Time of the Destruction of the Cities, to report on the results of such a long slow atrophy, I kept my thoughts well within the limits of my task. (pp. 3-4)

Destruction begins early on Shikasta. Johor reports that the "cause of the disaster was what the word dis-aster

implies: a fault in the stars" (p. 21). He goes on to describe how the early breakdown begins:

We had very little notice of the crisis. There was no reason to expect it. But the balances of Canopus and her System were suddenly not right. We had to find out what was wrong, and very quickly. We did. It was Rohanda. She was out of phase, and rapidly worsening. The Lock was weakening. (p. 23)

But the majority of the novel deals with the 20th century, what the Canopeans call "The Century of Destruction."

Excerpts from the History of Shikasta covering the 20th century are interspersed throughout the novel with reports from Canopean envoys, entries in Rachel Sherban's journal, and letters from various individuals. The excerpt from "History of Shikasta, vol. 3012, The Century of Destruction" describes World Wars I and II and illustrates the emphasis placed on technology for war and on propaganda for the masses. The destructiveness of the two wars is described, and the capacity for global destruction is stressed. This first entry also highlights colonial rule and the defects of imperialism. The period following World War II is described as follows:

. . . every major city in the northern hemisphere lived inside a ring of terror: each had anything up to thirty weapons aimed at it, every one of which could reduce it and its inhabitants to ash in seconds--pointed from artificial satellites in the skies, directed from underwater ships that ceaselessly patrolled the seas, directed from land bases perhaps halfway across the globe. These were controlled by machines which everyone knew were not

infallible--and everybody knew that more than once the destruction of cities and areas had been avoided by a "miracle." But the populations were never told how often these "miracles" had taken place--near-lethal accidents between machines in the skies, collisions between machines under the oceans, weapons only just not unleashed from the power bases. Looking from outside at this planet it was as if at a totally crazed species. (pp. 89-90)

The section then describes the "Isolated Northern Continent" as "heaped with waste, with wreckage, with the spoils of the rest of the world" (p. 90), and the people as "maddened creatures," adding, "[S]mall voices that rose in protest were not enough to halt the processes that had been set in motion and were sustained by greed. By the lack of substance-of-we-feeling" (p. 90). Following these descriptions, the excerpt from volume 3012 continues, "Chaos ruled. . . . The time of the epidemics and diseases, the time of famine and mass deaths had come" (p. 92). Then events of World War III are recounted:

The war began in error. A mechanism went wrong, and major cities were blasted into death-giving dusts. That something of this kind was bound to happen had been plentifully forecast by technicians of all countries . . . [ellipses in the original] but the Shammatt influences were too strong.

In a short time, nearly the whole of the northern hemisphere was in ruins. . . . these ruins were uninhabitable, the earth around them poisoned.

Weapons that had been kept secret now filled the skies, and the dying survivors, staggering and weeping and vomiting in their ruins, lifted their eyes to watch titanic battles being fought, and with their last breaths muttered of "Gods" and "Devils" and "Angels" and "Hell." (pp. 92-93)

"The Armies of the Young," their effect on society much the same as in The Memoirs of a Survivor, are described:

Already the cities were helpless before the aimless, random, unorganised violence characteristic of small groups of the young, male and female, who "for no reason" destroyed anything they could. The amenities on which the cities of Shikasta were dependent for even an approximation to comfortable living--telephones, transport, parks, public buildings, anything in fact that came into the public domain--might at any moment be destroyed, defaced, or made temporarily inoperative. The cities were no longer safe at night, for these groups of young robbed, assaulted, murdered, always on impulse--and without ill-feeling, almost as a game. (pp. 231-232)

What Lessing has so often described is being described again. Whole areas of the earth are blighted by famine, epidemics, death, poverty, neglect, and disruption of the family. And then the young appear and find new ways of surviving in a new world--the young become the harbingers of destruction.

The Canopean archivists record what is happening on the global level in impersonal terms. In Rachel Sherban's journal, a more personal record describes the sterile, short, poverty-riddled lives of acquaintances. Her description of the Moslem family of Naseem, Shireen, and Fatima is particularly poignant. She recognizes, as she watches them, "the awfulness of . . . poverty" (p. 241). Later she finds out that Naseem has died of malnutrition, and Shireen has died in childbirth. Three of their children become, in a children's camp, among the many orphans of

the world. The final description of the period between World Wars II and III, Summary Chapter," begins with these lines:

This was a period of furious activity.

The inhabitants of Shikasta, engaged in destroying themselves, soon to face the intensive, if short, final phase of their long orgy of mutual destruction, were not entirely unaware of their situation. A feeling of foreboding was general, but was not commensurate with the situation, nor specific to the various dangers. Alarms and warnings were frequent, but related to an aspect or part of the situation: these preoccupied them for a while, and were then forgotten as another crisis arose and seemed overriding. A few Shikastans, and in all countries, understood quite well what was happening. (pp. 341-342)

As in The Memoirs of a Survivor, people achieve little, but talk a great deal. Using a technique she has employed in The Four-Gated City, Lessing has not described the final phase of destruction but leaves the reader with letters that describe the process of surviving. As in The Four-Gated City, the dominance of the West has been destroyed, and the Chinese become the new imperialists. Mankind destroys itself because humans are greedy, irresponsible, and wasteful. They succumb to the "grab and grasp" (p. 112) materialism so rampant on Shikasta. They forget God and His laws and allow evil to control their destiny.

As in the other novels covered in this thesis, breakdown is not only social, but also psychological. Towards the end of the novel, Johor and other envoys add notes to the summary chapter of the "Period between World

War II and III," explaining that the white races need their morale bolstered after the "'yellow'" races and "'coloured'" races have prevailed (p. 348). The "'white races'" have trouble adjusting themselves to their new inferior status. The notes highlight the fragmentation of the white race:

The "white races," subjugated, insulted, famished, deprived, with large masses of its [sic] population drawn off for cheap labour for the use of the reviving parts of the globe, with nothing of its wealth, and little of its culture left, was unable to see itself as part of a whole as ever it had been. The Shikastan compartmentalism of mind reigned supreme, almost unchallenged--except by our servants and agents, continually at work trying to restore balances, and to heal these woeful defects of imaginative understanding. (pp. 348-349)

Earlier John Brent-Oxford's fragmentation is recorded by Johor:

He was handicapped because of his self-division. His suppressed inner qualities made him disappointed with what he was. He knew he had greater qualities than any he was using but did not know what they were. This restlessness had caused him to drink too much, indulge in bouts of self-denigration and cynicism. (p. 78)

Johor goes on to explain that John Brent-Oxford had had several breakdowns, breakdowns not being uncommon among politicians. In Johor's eight case histories it becomes apparent that most of the "Terrorist Types" suffer from mild to severe madness. Most of them have in common a loveless, unnurtured childhood. These cases highlight a society which is frightened of its children, a society whose children never reach their potential because they are

emotionally starved. Lessing continues to repeat themes. She even re-introduces characters such as Lynda Coldridge, the seer in The Four-Gated City, who somehow "plugs in" to George Sherban's mind. In her notes and letters, Lynda best describes fragmentation from the perspective of one who really understands the process. Lynda says one woman "was about twenty feet up looking down at herself walking across the bridge" (p. 184). This woman has a "watcher" as did Martha Quest, Lynda herself, and the narrator in The Memoirs of a Survivor. Lynda claims that

[w]e are several people fitted inside each other. Chinese boxes. Our bodies are the outside box. Or the inside one if you like. If you get a shock, like your best friend saying no I won't marry you I am going to marry your friend Arabella instead then anything can happen. I like watching myself from outside. It makes this living on and on and on and on seem not important. (p. 184)

Later, Lynda remembers the boxes and asks, "If a person is a set of Chinese boxes, one inside another, then is that what the world is?" (p. 187). She carries her analogy one step further: "So perhaps there is another world that looks at our world, this dreadful place. Hell" (p. 187). In Shikasta, Lessing describes a mad world filled with fragmented people.

As in traditional apocalyptic literature and as in Lessing's previous novels, visionaries foresee the impending doom. Lynda Coldridge is one of those with psychic capac-

ities. Attempting to explain her unusual ability, she suggests that most people are able to receive five percent. They are able to use only five percent of their capabilities. She compares this reception to voltage. If a person who is set to receive five percent comes in contact with six percent or more, there will be a shock. But persons who can receive more will not be "shaking to pieces" (p. 186) if they come into contact with more than five percent. Those who can receive and transmit more than five percent are, according to Lynda, quite normal:

The answer is some people are born to receive not 5 percent but perhaps 6 percent. Or 7 percent. Or even more. But if you are a 5 percent person and suddenly a shock opens you to 6 then you are "mad." I am sure I was born a 6 percent person, not mad at all. But they made me mad because I told what I knew. If I had kept my mouth shut I would have lived a peaceful life. (p. 186)

In a letter to Benjamin Sherban, she explains that after "The Wrath," there will be only a few people left alive. Lynda, as well as George Sherban and Dr. Herbert, are able to "plug in" to others' minds. George Sherban has been able to reach John Brent-Oxford through John's dreams: "He dreamed. I fed in the material that would shape his dream" (p. 81). In her Introduction, Lessing says that she believes "that it is possible, and not only for novelists, to 'plug in' to an overmind, or Ur-mind, or unconscious, or what you will, and that this accounts for a great many

improbabilities and 'coincidences'" (p. ix). Part of the hope for humanity lies in those who possess psychic powers, those who can foresee the future and "plug in" to the collective unconscious.

A vision of utopia is also present in this novel. Certainly the beginning of the novel details the loss of one paradise after another. A utopian society once existed but later ended in deterioration and destruction. George Sherban, like Martha Quest, has his own dream of the perfect society. In a letter he describes this dream:

There was a civilisation once--where?--it doesn't matter. The Middle East perhaps, China, India. . . . [ellipses in the original] It lasted a long long time. Thousands of years. We can't think like that now: continuity, cultures not changing very much, generation after generation. It was a civilisation where there were rich and poor, but not great extremes. It was well balanced, too, trade and agriculture, and the use of minerals, all in harmony with each other. People lived a long time, perhaps a thousand years. Perhaps five hundred. But it doesn't matter, a long time. Of course now we despise the past and think that children were mostly born to die because of ignorance. But these people were not ignorant. They knew how not to have too many children and to live at peace with their land, and their neighbors. (p. 285)

He goes on to say that in his dream, the few people on earth knew who they were and what their lives were for. The cosmos and the people existed in harmony with one another. At the end of the novel, Lessing suggests that the civilization which will emerge from the catastrophe will be somewhat akin to the early paradisaal beginnings. Kassim Sherban is at work building his "star city" (p. 363)

in the middle of which will be a fountain. No New Jerusalem is established, no Garden of Eden is re-entered, but Kassim Sherban's city signals the hope for new beginnings, so typical of apocalyptic writing.

The pattern of destruction followed by rebirth recurs in traditional apocalyptic myths. In The Prose Edda, the earth and its inhabitants, including the mortal gods, are all destroyed. Two people, however, emerge from a tree to repopulate the earth. In the Book of Revelation, the faithful will be saved following the Battle of Armageddon. In Shikasta, too, there are those who survive the destruction, and there is hope. In letters, some of the survivors record their experiences. Benjamin Sherban writes George that five hundred have survived and are located somewhere in the Pacific. His description of the camp is somewhat similar to Martha Quest's description of her island in the "Appendix" to The Four-Gated City. Other letters describe camps and conditions. Kassim Sherban's letter describes what is probably a typical village. He explains that going into a village, a stranger is given food for a week; then he tries to find work in order to earn food. But Kassim, looking for facts, says, "There are fewer facts in the world now than there were before the smash-up" (p. 358). He points out that he

keeps meeting people who know him. Apparently many of the survivors are the "special people"--of the group who have earlier instructed George. Patrick Parrinder compares these survivors to Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s "karass."<sup>165</sup> He suggests that they are the hope of the future and explains what Vonnegut meant by a "karass":

The karass, as Kurt Vonnegut Jr's narrator explains in Cat's Cradle (1963), is a kind of team to which, unknown to themselves, various scattered human individuals belong. The teams are organised by God to do His will without ever discovering what they are doing. One may, however, come to recognise the fellow-members of one's karass. . . . In Shikasta, the Canopean envoy Johor seeks to exert conscious control over a karass whose members include the surviving Coldridges. The chief task of this karass is to foster the growth of a new generation of children with ESP capacities. In effect, these children are a new mutation of the species, to whom it is given to recover the mental outlook of the Shikastans of the Golden Age. Without written orders or plans, these new people begin to rebuild the old geometrical cities.<sup>166</sup>

In Shikasta, Lessing continues to suggest that the child is the hope of the future. It is Kassim Sherban, one of the family's adopted children, who will build the new five-pointed city and who will gather facts so that history will be passed on. In Johor's report on "The Shikastan Situation," he relates a Sufi-like story about

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<sup>165</sup>Parrinder, Descents into Hell, p. 11.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

a village that celebrates the child. The child in the story is the symbol of hope, and the celebration becomes a tradition that is passed on from generation to generation. Johor repeats the words of the visitor who initiated the ritual over a thousand years before:

"And this is the point, you see, this is always the point which they must remember: that every child has the capacity to be everything. A child was a miracle, a wonder! A child held all the history of the human race, that stretched back, back, further than they could imagine." (p. 167)

Reviewing Shikasta, David Lodge has accurately summed up its main ideas:

The basic myth articulated here, and underlying all Doris Lessing's work since The Four-Gated City, is a very old one, which can be traced back through Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought for two millennia: the myth of the consuming destruction of a corrupt and fallen world from which a brave new world will be born.<sup>167</sup>

In "The Summary Chapter" of the period between the two wars, the archivist points out that Shammatt knew that order and harmony would be restored between Canopus and her planets and that the Lock would be re-established. One age has been replaced by another.

George's dream of a utopian society does not become a reality in Shikasta, but Kassim Sherban's plans for a new city signify hope for the future. Shikasta contains

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<sup>167</sup>David Lodge, review of Shikasta, by Doris Lessing, New Statesman, 30 November 1979, p. 860.

traditional apocalyptic elements and themes with which Lessing's readers are familiar. The form of the novel, with its letters, reports, and historical documents, embodies the fragmented view of the world that the Shikastans themselves seem unable to rid themselves of. Lessing sees the world on a disastrous course, as it uses technology and science to arm itself and create more lethal weapons. She sees that humans are both villains and victims, limited by their fragmented view, obsessed with greed and chained to a technology which they cannot control. They are also, in Shikasta at least, pawns on the cosmic chess board, controlled by beings from outer space, beings they neither recognize nor understand. Lessing continues to be ambiguous, and it is difficult for the reader to know whether she believes people have any capability to avert impending doom. Shikasta does not provide a definite answer.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

During the seventeen years following the publication of The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing's novels become increasingly apocalyptic. She paints a vivid picture of the terrors preceding the holocaust, a holocaust which seems inevitable. In both The Four-Gated City and Shikasta, Lessing sees the final catastrophe as the result of an accident. In The Memoirs of a Survivor, the final catastrophe has not occurred but seems a certainty. Lessing sees human beings as responsible for the impending doom. In Biblical literature, Satan stands behind the fall of man, but man himself seals his own doom. In all four novels, greed and lack of individual responsibility are underscored. Lessing describes the technology of war as powerful and all-pervasive, overcoming many of the effects of individual protests against a world-wide war machine. She implies that man can hope to avert the final catastrophe only by accepting individual responsibility and by seeing the world as a whole. In Shikasta, Rachel Sherban is surprised when she realizes that her parents are aware of the necessity of overcoming geo-national and

geo-political boundaries but so few other people recognize the holistic scheme.

The pattern of destruction followed by rebirth or re-creation is clearly evident in the four novels. The troubles and woes in The Golden Notebook, The Four-Gated City, The Memoirs of a Survivor, and Shikasta exist on both the outer level and the inner level. In all four novels, breakthrough occurs. In Revelation, calamities befall the earth and all its inhabitants prior to the establishment of the New Jerusalem. Eliade sees this pattern of destruction and re-creation in many sacred myths. The difference between Lessing and traditional apocalyptic writers lies in the kind of hope she sees for humanity after the final catastrophe.

Lessing seems to suggest that there is hope in the child, "the future prophet." But her novels are ambiguous on this point. In The Four-Gated City, it is not entirely clear whether Joseph is indeed super in any way. While she seems to believe in the "new man about to be born," in the children, and in the visionaries, she does not wholeheartedly affirm the young. In Shikasta, the young are described in these words:

But there the young are, in their hordes, their gangs, their groups, their cults, their political parties, their sects, shouting slogans, infinitely divided, antagonistic to each other, always in the

right, jostling for command. There they are--the future, and it is self-condemned. (p. 174)

So while Joseph and Kassim Sherban may embody hope for some sort of future, Lessing remains ambivalent.

In the novels, Lessing also offers some hope in the "special" individuals, that is, those who have accepted their individual responsibility and who are able to "plug in" to the collective unconscious. But the impact of these special people is minimal. Lynda Coldridge and Martha Quest manage to warn and to save a few people from the disaster, the narrator in The Memoirs of a Survivor rescues a few of the young, and the Sherbans set up camps for the few survivors. But many die. In The Four-Gated City, those who do survive seem to be getting ready for war again. One of Lessing's themes is quite clear--there is no hope that humanity can ever learn from the past. The old mistakes continue to be repeated.

In her novels, Lessing depicts breakdown as being essential before the individual can break through to consciousness. Perhaps Pickering is correct when she interprets Lessing's evolutionary motif: "It appears that the human race, as well as the individual, must go through a region of chaos and conflict before it can proceed on its evolutionary path."<sup>168</sup> Anna Wulf's "raving cannibal"

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<sup>168</sup>Pickering, "Marxism and Madness," p. 29.

theory may be true for the collective, as well as for the individual. But whether Lessing believes that the human race can evolve to a state of moral and collective consciousness is unclear. To her, it seems more likely that man will destroy himself before the process can be completed. In his review of Shikasta, David Lodge comments on Lessing's warnings of the impending catastrophe. He says that she writes "not so much in the hope of averting the catastrophe, as to offer some quasi-religious faith and hope for the future beyond."<sup>169</sup> Lodge's observation seems to be particularly true of The Memoirs of a Survivor. Lessing's optimism, in any case, is certainly guarded.

While most of the patterns of apocalyptic literature--troubles and woes heralding the end, destruction resulting from evil and humanity's separation from God, rebirth or rebuilding occurring after the catastrophe--are present in Lessing's novels, two are notably absent. In none of her novels does she predict the coming of the Antichrist followed by the return of the true Christ. Johor is a missionary, but he is no Christ figure. In none of her novels does she portray the founding of the New Jerusalem. She hints of utopias or rebuilt cities, but not of a heavenly city. In only one of the novels, Shikasta, does

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<sup>169</sup>Lodge, review of Shikasta, p. 860.

she clearly identify good and evil. In The Golden Notebook, The Four-Gated City, and less obviously in The Memoirs of a Survivor, evil resides in the individual, and that arduous and necessary journey of self-knowledge must be successfully completed for the individual to realize, confront, and defeat the evil. In these four novels, written during a seventeen-year period, Lessing proves to be a modern writer in the apocalyptic tradition.

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