The Talking Cure

Doris Lessing's Antipsychiatry

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The spectacular success of psychoanalysis in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* sharply contrasts the failure of therapy in Doris Lessing's fictional world. Indeed, the two novelists reveal the central ambiguity of psychiatry, its capacity for good and evil. The enormous growth of the profession in the twentieth century has brought with it enormous problems, and the growing pessimism about psychiatry is as conspicuous as the optimism of a generation ago. The "triumph of the therapeutic"—to use Philip Rieff's expression—has created a new secular mythology in which the psychiatrist, replacing the priest or shaman, is both exalted and feared for his almost limitless power.[1] "The psychiatrist is the most important nongovernmental decision maker in modern life," writes the author of a recent book detailing the uses and abuses of psychiatric power.[2] In an age of skepticism and disbelief, the psychiatrist is viewed as the final authority on mental health and illness. He has the power to institutionalize people, often against their will, to confer "patient" status with all the privileges and liabilities associated with loss of responsibility, and to influence decisions that touch upon nearly every aspect of society from childrearing to moral standards.

In the last two decades psychiatrists have become increasingly critical of verbal therapy, the talking cure, and the pendulum is now swinging in the

direction of organic or "medical" approaches to mental illness: a heavy reliance upon drugs like tranquilizers, barbiturates, and the phenothiazines, and more drastic approaches such as electroshock and electroconvulsive therapy. Herein lies a major dilemma. Is it the psychiatrist's task to liberate a patient from a restrictive society, encourage his adaptation to a healthy society, or compel his submission to a totalitarian society? In a science that is notoriously filled with value judgments (and sometimes filled with notoriously bad judgments), is the psychiatrist a progressive or reactionary figure? What are the limits of his power?

For more than a quarter of a century, Doris Lessing has wrestled with the questions posed above in her fiction. She has established herself as the most eloquent voice in the growing antipsychiatry movement. Like the other subjects to which she repeatedly returns—Marxism, feminism, mysticism—her attitude toward psychiatry has remained essentially constant. Her characters are particularly vulnerable to mental breakdowns, and they embark upon odysseys that lead them to the doorstep of psychiatry and, if they are lucky, beyond. They are endlessly medicated, tranquilized, psychoanalyzed, and institutionalized. The unfortunate characters, dependent upon conventional psychiatrists, lose their minds and become burned out shells, victims of what Lessing calls a Dark Age approach to mental illness. The fortunate ones, relying on different therapeutic guides, work through their madness to achieve higher understanding and creativity.

Lessing's view of psychiatry can be easily seen in the anecdotal "Afterward" to *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell* (1971). Subtitled "A Small, Relevant Reminiscence," the "Afterward" describes Lessing's experience with the psychiatric community. She tells how she once wrote a story for a film based on a close friendship with a man whose senses were different from the normal person's. The point of the film, Lessing says, is that the "hero's or protagonist's extra sensitivity and perception must be a handicap in a society organized as ours is, to favor the conforming, the average, the obedient." The film-makers were puzzled by the script and asked the same question: "What is wrong with the man in the film?" Startled by the inappropriateness of the question and because the real-life original had been contradictorily diagnosed by the medical establishment, Lessing decided to send the script to two doctors. One was the consulting psychiatrist at a teaching hospital attached to a large university, the other a neurologist working at a large London teaching hospital. She asked the eminent authorities to diagnose her fictional character as if he were a real patient. Their verdict? "They were kind enough to do so, taking trouble over it, and time. But their skilled and compassionate diagnoses, while authoritative, were quite different from each other's. They agreed about nothing at all."[3]

Lessing's fictional therapists confirm this bewildering subjectivity. They display a wide range of attitudes and approaches toward mental illness, and frequently they are less benign than the two actual psychiatrists who

responded to Lessing's query. They include the nonmedical Jungian analyst, Mrs. Marks, in Lessing's masterpiece, *The Golden Notebook.* Her pet name, Mother Sugar, indicates a "whole way of looking at life—traditional, rooted, conservative, in spite of its scandalous familiarity with everything amoral" (p. 5). They also embrace the bland-looking Dr. Lamb in *The Four-Gated City,* who skillfully "explodes" the benumbed Martha Quest, as well as the anonymous Doctor X and Doctor Y in *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell,* who disagree violently on the best therapeutic stratagem for curing Professor Charles Watkins' amnesia. Only Mrs. Marks is sympathetically portrayed, not because of her professional training or point of view, but because she remains a caring woman who is able to listen empathically to Anna and offer pragmatic advice. As Lessing's psychiatrists become more medical, they become more dangerous to their patients. Doctor X's refrain in *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell*—"E.C.T. should be attempted"—echoes the punitive philosophy inherent in Lessing's psychiatric community.

In the autobiographical *A Small Personal Voice* (1974), Lessing acknowledges that the fictional Mrs. Marks is based on the novelist's actual psychotherapist. The decision to write on psychiatric themes, Lessing adds, was less a matter of conscious choice than inner necessity. When she began *The Golden Notebook* in the 1950s, she was in analysis and, like her fictional heroine Anna Wulf, able to transmute her therapeutic experiences into art. Her feelings toward her analyst were deeply ambivalent:

> My own psychotherapist was somewhat like Mrs. Marks. She was everything I disliked. I was then aggressively rational, antireligious, and a radical. She was Roman Catholic, Jungian, and conservative. It was very upsetting to me at the time, but I found out it didn't matter a damn. I couldn't stand her terminology, but she was a marvelous person. She was one of those rare individuals who know how to help others. If she had used another set of words, if she had talked Freud talk, or aggressive atheism, it wouldn't have made a difference.[4]

The analyst was helpful, not through the art of psychotherapy, the validity of which Lessing rejects, but through the act of friendship—the ability to empathize and offer insights that are not necessarily psychoanalytic. In a letter to a critic, Lessing has described her therapy as "paying for a friend, which I needed desperately, to counterbalance certain very destructive things in my life. I think usually what people are doing when they are in analysis or therapy or whatever, is paying for a friend."[5] Not that Lessing portrays an extra-analytic relationship in *The Golden Notebook.* There is no violation of the patient-analyst relationship, and Anna remains a model patient. Nevertheless, she is able to reject the analyst's interpretations without dismissing Mrs. Marks's goodwill.

Unlike other novelists, such as Plath and Greenberg, Lessing shows little interest in symptomatology or the dynamics of transference. Nor is she interested in revealing the particulars of her own therapy. Indeed, the structure of *The Golden Notebook* makes autobiographical inferences difficult and, apart from a few suggestive comments Lessing makes in *A Small Personal*

Voice about her parents' struggle against mental illness, we cannot discuss her fiction in terms of her actual therapy, as we did in *The Bell Jar* and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*.[6] An extremely intelligent writer who remains committed to ideas and their moral consequences, Lessing writes about psychotherapy with authenticity. Nevertheless, one senses that she has now become indifferent to the lively exchanges between patient and analyst that the author of *The Golden Notebook* popularized two decades ago. "For the last twenty years I have been closely involved with psychiatrists and mentally ill people. I did not make a deliberate choice in the matter, but I started a process which is now common. Twenty years ago it was considered unusual to have a psychiatrist. Now, almost everyone I know has had a breakdown, is in psychoanalysis, or pops in and out of mental hospitals. Mental illness is part of the mainstream" (*A Small Personal Voice,* p. 69).

Lessing has always criticized the politics of psychoanalysis. Although she does not endorse the Marxist claim that therapy is counterproductive (an idea her early characters occasionally echo), she does regard the inherent differences in the patient-analyst relationship as analogous to political inequality. And inequality can become exploitation. She identifies all forms of psychotherapy with an antidemocratic spirit: patient and analyst are locked into rigid roles, the former submitting blindly to the clinical dogmas of the latter. She views the psychiatrist as the apologist of a treatment designed to perpetuate a repressive sociopolitical structure. For a novelist who believes

that mental illness and psychological breakdown are potentially curative in overcoming the false dichotomies of society, Lessing nevertheless views therapists as reactionary figures. Psychiatry remains, in her judgment, irrevocably opposed to social enlightenment, political reform, and personal transcendence. Far from guiding a patient through a breakdown, the analyst —as the word implies—contributes to his fragmentation. The talking cure becomes a coping cure, loading to conformity and obedience.

Lessing also condemns the medico psychopathological model of illness. (The one exception is Stalin, whom Anna concedes in *The Golden Notebook* was "clinically insane.") She rejects the effort to diagnose or classify mental illness, arguing that such labeling is meaningless and dehumanizing. She remains skeptical of symptomatology on the grounds that it reduces a person to patient status. And she remains firmly opposed to Freud. 'The Freudians describe the conscious as a small lit area, all white, and the unconscious as a great dark marsh fall of monsters. In their view, the monsters reach up, grab you by the ankles, and try to drag you down. But the unconscious can be what you make of it, good or bad, helpful or unhelpful. Our culture has made an enemy of the unconscious" *(A Small Personal Voice,* p. 67). She also remains dubious of Jungian analysis, fearing entrapment in its quaint mythic system. In her more recent novels she has rejected the entire concept of mental illness, shunning the words "neurosis" and "psychosis" in favor of a non-clinical and non-pejorative "craziness."

There are, however, contradictions in Lessing's vision of psychological breakdown. Her repudiation of psychopathology and its schema of neurosis and psychosis would seem to ally her with Thomas Szasz, whose influential *The Myth of Mental Illness* does away not only with nebulous psychiatric classification but also with the existence of mental illness. Lessing would certainly endorse Szasz's impassioned efforts to point out and correct the injustices that have been perpetrated in the name of psychiatry: involuntary institutionalization, the widespread use of medication, electroshock, and—the most invasive of all therapies—the leucotomy or pre-frontal lobotomy.[7] Unlike Szasz, Lessing affirms the power of unconscious forces, and her characters inexplicably lose control. Moreover, her mysticism remains alien to Szasz's rationalism. The metaphor of "plugging into madness" evokes a malevolent frequency or wavelength "in the air" which compels her characters to break down. This concept of mental illness is much closer to that of R. D. Laing, the other outspoken leader of the antipsychiatry movement. Laing regards psychosis as a potentially reparative process, a journey through inner space, that can lead to higher creativity and mental functioning. As with Laing's patients, Lessing's protagonists go mad in highly stylized ways. Madness and mysticism are almost identical phenomena in Lessing's world.

But there is an obvious danger in romanticizing mental illness: Few psychotics behave as well as Lessing's, and if psychosis is potentially creative

to some people, it is nevertheless destructive to most people. Additionally, there has been a shift in Lessing's assumptions of reality. Her early fiction grows out of the tradition of social realism, with all its assumptions of normative consciousness. Her later fiction dramatizes characters who possess telepathic powers suggestive of an evolving human consciousness, an idea Lessing has acquired from her reading of Sufi philosophy.[8] Paradoxically, although she argues (along with Szasz) for a demystification of mental illness, she seems to have embraced (along with Laing) an older, demonological model of madness.

Lessing's interest in psychology begins as early as *Martha Quest* (1952), Volume I of the five-volume *Bildungsroman, Children of Violence,* which traces the heroine from her early childhood in fictional Zambesia (Southern Africa) in the first quarter of the twentieth century to her death at the end of the war-ravaged century. A sprawling canvas filled with hundreds of events and characters, the *Children of Violence* series documents Lessing's belief that civilization is moving inexorably toward nuclear holocaust. This is precisely what happens in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), the final volume in which atomic warfare has decimated the planet and produced an odd species of mutants who embody the hope for future regeneration. Even as a young woman, Martha is interested in psychology, hoping to discover in it an explanation of the terrifying destructiveness of human nature. Others in her life also are enamored of psychological theory. Her friend Solly Cohen "was in love (there

is no other word for it) with psychology; he passionately defended everything to do with it, even when his heroes contradicted each other" (*Martha Quest,* p. 18). Martha eagerly devours these volumes only to emerge from her readings saddened by the oppressive determinism of the "numerous sects who agreed on only one thing, that it was the first five years of life which laid an unalterable basis for everything that followed" (p. 19).

In Volume II*, A Proper Marriage* (1954), Martha reluctantly continues her study of psychology, disappointed by the novelists who depicted women in literature according to what male authors believed. ". . . there always came a point where Martha turned from the novelists and tale tellers to that section of the bookcase which was full of books called *The Psychology of*... , *The Behavior of A Guide to* ... , with the half-formulated thought that the novelists had not caught up with life . . ." (p. 322). Once again her reading of psychology yields nothing fruitful. Instead of illuminating the complexity of human nature or the mystery of inner life, the psychology texts reinforce the bias of male authors. The association of psychology with stale psychologisms continues in the next two volumes of the *Children of Violence* series, *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958) and *Landlocked* (1965).

Lessing's most profound exploration of psychological breakdown is made in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), regarded as "the most considerable single work by an English author in the 1960s."[9] Here Lessing first begins to

write about the theme of breakdown as a method to heal the false dichotomies and divisions of the self. The structure of *The Golden Notebook* is unusually complex, consisting of a novel within a novel—a 60,000 word conventional short novel called *Free Women* which serves as the skeleton or frame. (The entire novel is huge, nearly one-quarter of a million words long.) *Free Women* is divided into five sections, each separated by stages of the four notebooks: Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue. Anna Wulf keeps four notebooks instead of one because of a need "to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness—of breakdown" (p. vii). At the end of Lessing's novel Anna's fragments come together to produce a new creation, the Golden notebook, in which her inner tensions have been reconciled and healed, revealing the triumph of the second theme, unity. In the inner Golden notebook Anna and her male counterpart Saul Green break down and are then reunited. From this experience arises a new Anna, strengthened and healed. There are actually two Annas in Lessing's novel, one "real" and the other "fictional." The real Anna is writing the notebooks, and she has also written a novel called *Frontiers of War,* which she has grown to hate. The other Anna is the central character of *Free Women.* Only toward the end of Lessing's story, do we realize that *Free Women* has been written by the real Anna. The discovery is astonishing because Anna has been suffering from writer's block and repeatedly claims to have given up art, a problem that leads her into psychoanalysis with Mrs. Marks. The fictional Anna is thus the

literary creation of the real Anna, who, in turn, is a fictional creation of Doris Lessing, the supreme creator playing off reality and illusion.

Anna enters psychoanalysis because of a paralyzing inability to feel emotion and because of growing cynicism of the psychological impulse behind her writing. The two problems are related. Her emotional paralysis appears to be a defense against the disturbing dreams she calls "joy-in-destruction," suggestive of unconscious aggression. Anna is the first fictional protagonist we have seen who enters therapy specifically because of an inability to write. Foreshadowing Roth's *My Life as a Man, The Golden Notebook* painstakingly analyzes the relationship between artistic creation and psychopathology. Anna's inner violence produces numbness and self-alienation; her writings, including diary entries, autobiographical recollections, and novel, reflect her troubled state. She sees her art as a reflection of the artist's divided consciousness and society's hopeless fragmentation. She coldly dismisses the emotions behind *Frontiers of War* as nostalgia, a word she equates with sentimentality, and she condemns her novel for containing the same nihilistic longing for dissolution from which wars are made. She criticizes herself for being too fragmented to write the kind of novel which interests her, a book "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life" (p. 61). Yet she also mistrusts herself for the artistic urge to shape a story into a coherent work of fiction instead of reproducing the raw incidents

of life. Unwilling to falsify experience, she vows to give up writing.

Although Anna repudiates art, she cannot prevent herself from transmuting her conflicts into literature. Her mistrust of psychoanalysis appears in her proliferation of fictional therapists based upon her ex-lover Michael, a psychiatrist with whom she lived for five years. In the Yellow notebook, devoted to stories based upon her experiences, Anna works on a manuscript called *The Shadow of the Third* in which her alter ego, Ella, is writing a novel about suicide (paralleling the theme of suicide in *Free Women).* Ella is having an affair with a psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Tanner, who embodies Anna's divided consciousness and ambivalence toward therapy. Later, in *The Shadow of the Third,* Ella has an affair with another psychiatrist, Cy Maitland, who specializes in leucotomies. Both Paul Tanner and Cy Maitland are fictional images of Michael, a "witch-doctor," whose decision to return to his wife devastates Anna and sends her into deep depression.

The "Shadow" in the title of Anna's manuscript in the Yellow notebook refers to the Jungian concept of the unconscious side of personality. Lessing's experience with Jungian analysis informs the psychology of *The Golden Notebook,* and a basic knowledge of Jungian terminology is helpful for an understanding of the novel. In Jungian theory, the shadow complements the conscious self and may be in harmony or disharmony with it. Jung defines the shadow as the hidden personality fragment which has been split off from the

conscious self. It is often perceived as the " 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the content of the personal unconscious.[10] Another Jungian concept Lessing uses in *The Golden Notebook* is the anima and animus. The anima is the female side of man, the mother in him; the animus is the male side of woman, the father in her. Psychological health and balance, Jung maintained, requires the positive acceptance of the element of the opposite sex within the self, the integration of male and female. The process of integration Jung called individuation, a "coming to self-hood" or "self-realization." Accordingly, Ella and Paul Tanner are deeply split individuals, and their relationship betrays their inability to live with each other or with themselves. Idealistic and cynical, generous and cruel, Paul is a walking contradiction. His inner split reflects Ella's (and Anna's) self-division. Neither Ella nor Paul is able to reconcile the antinomies of human existence and the male/female split within each individual.

Paul Tanner serves as a projection screen in the Yellow notebook, not unlike the role of the yellow wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story. He reflects the conviction of his creator, Anna Wulf, and *her* creator, Doris Lessing, that no coherent system of thought can hope to describe or resolve the irrationality of human nature. When Ella tries to imagine Paul's wife, whom she has never seen, she becomes wildly jealous and possessive, almost as if she were another person. Only by projecting herself into another

character does Ella/Anna recognize the shadowy underside of human personality. Under Paul's questioning, Ella admits to truths she has never realized. She sees the discrepancy between her idealized portrait of herself and the actual portrait, which she finds reprehensible. Just as Paul's negative personality increasingly disturbs Ella, who finds herself less emotionally stable than she imagined, so does Paul become another person, a "self-hating rake, free, casual, heartless" (p. 207). His split toward psychiatry echoes Anna's ambivalence toward art. He takes his work with his patients seriously, but he makes fun of the jargon he uses. And he seems to have a perverse desire to mock the truths he holds most dear. Condemning himself and his profession, Paul asks Ella: "What sort of a doctor is it who sees his patients as symptoms of a world sickness?" (p. 212). The judgment coincides exactly with the viewpoint of the two novelists of *The Golden Notebook,* Anna Wulf and Doris Lessing.

Interestingly, although Anna has had an affair with a psychiatrist, she does not see her therapist, Mrs. Marks, as an extension of Michael. Nor is Mrs. Marks a self-divided figure, as are Anna's fictional therapists, Paul Tanner and Cy Maitland. Lessing thus avoids the solipsistic danger of creating a therapist in the author's own image, a problem other writers, including Fitzgerald, Eliot, and Plath, failed to solve. Mrs. Marks is neither schizoid nor self-mocking. In a novel that dazzlingly juxtaposes illusion and reality, she maintains a remarkably consistent identity. A cultivated and articulate

therapist, and a "most intelligent wise old woman," Mrs. Marks has a dry ironic style that never interferes with the compassion she feels for Anna. Her silence is as impressive as her speech. The office in which her patient sits three times a week reflects dignity and taste. The walls are covered with reproductions of masterpieces and, along with the statues, the office resembles an art gallery—a setting which gives Anna pleasure.

Like the incomplete portrait of Dr. Fried in *I Never Promised Ton a Rose Garden,* Mrs. Marks is not a fully developed literary creation—and for perhaps the same reason. Because Mother Sugar is based on Lessing's own therapist, the novelist probably did not wish to compromise the privacy or speculate on the inner life of the "good, kind, infinitely generous woman."[11] Lessing does not idealize Mrs. Marks, however, and Anna resents the therapist's detachment and impersonality. Because the analyst does not doubt her own profession nor question the theoretical assumptions of her work, she appears close minded to Anna. And her impersonality maddens Anna, who tries to force the analyst outside of her professional role. She succeeds twice in momentarily breaking Mrs. Marks's equanimity, but even when the analyst's wry smile turns to a frown, she maintains self-control. Like Dr. Fried, Mrs. Marks functions less as an autonomous character than as an instrument of therapy, voicing a traditional Jungian point of view. At the end of *The Golden Notebook* she remains unchanged by her experience with Anna.

Mrs. Marks is especially interested in the psychoanalysis of writers, and her sessions with Anna constitute one of the most serious discussions in literature about the relationship between creativity and neurosis. The two women predictably disagree over the question of art. "I became a psychotherapist because I once believed myself to be an artist" (p. 234), Mrs. Marks cryptically remarks, implying a vicarious participation in the creative process. (Was she at one time an artist?) Her office certainly looks like a shrine to art, and her understanding of mythology is formidable. Despite her reverence for art, however, she maintains that the "artist writes out of an incapacity to live" (p. 62). She thus repeats Freud's error that the artist is a neurotic who, failing to make his dreams come true in the real world, escapes into art as a substitute gratification. Anna rightly objects to this view of creativity and to the magisterial tone of Mrs. Marks's pronouncements. . . this business about art and the artist has become so debased, the property of every sloppy-minded amateur that any person with a real connection with the arts wants to run a hundred miles at the sight of the small satisfied nod, the complacent smile" (p. 62). The remark anticipates Roth's *My Life as a Man* in which he also takes issue with psychoanalysts who make definitive pronouncements over the creative process. In Anna's judgment, Mrs. Marks cannot help voicing clichés that diminish the dignity of art.

Anna also objects to the analyst's subordination of personal conflicts to the collective unconscious, a process that devalues history in favor of myth.

Implicit in the Jungian analyst's view of the timelessness of art is a conservatism toward human nature that carries over to sociopolitical issues. Anna complains, with considerable justification, that her own psychoanalysis has never moved outside the realm of primitive myth. From her experiences she is forced to conclude that psychoanalysis is "essentially a process where one is forced back into infantilism and then rescued from it by crystallizing what one learns into a sort of intellectual primitivism—one is forced back into myth, and folk lore and everything that belongs to the savage or undeveloped stages of society" (p. 468). She accuses the analyst of practicing a form of mythotherapy (though not the type found in John Barth's existential novel *The End of the Road)*[12] No matter what dream or emotion or conflict Anna dredges up in therapy, Mrs. Marks will locate its mythic origins or find a mythic analogue, thus impersonalizing the patient's unique experience. "As far as you are concerned, I've gone beyond the childish, I've transmuted it and saved it, by embodying it in myth. But in fact all I do, or you do, is to fish among the childish memories of an individual, and merge them with the art or ideas that belong to the childhood of a people" (pp. 468-469). Individuation, Anna continues, is nothing more than the discovery of the universality of experience, a process which, she fears, denies the uniqueness of the individual and the possibility of breaking through or transcending the present. When pressed to elaborate on the possibility of further development of the human race, Anna says, foreshadowing *The Four-Gated City: "Yes,*

there's a hint of something—there's a crack in that man's personality like a gap in a dam, and through that gap the future might pour in a different shape —terrible perhaps, or marvelous, but something new . . ." (p. 473). Rejecting Mother Sugar's efforts to diminish pain by encapsulating it in primitive myth, Anna prefers to endure her suffering.

How valid are Anna's criticisms here? Is she rationalizing, as she has done about the writer's block to which she admits only at the end of the novel? Or is she, as we suspect, accurately reflecting Lessing's condemnation of psychoanalysis? Anna expresses the mistrust of many patients who find themselves in an ontological no-win position in psychotherapy. On the one hand, they fear they can manipulate the analyst by telling him what he wishes to hear, thus "confirming" the truth of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, they believe that the analyst will dismiss as "rationalization" or "denial" their legitimate doubts about an interpretation. This is what Mrs. Marks appears to do, accusing Anna of "using our experience together to re-enforce your rationalizations for not writing" (p. 474), a charge the patient bitterly denies. Analyst and patient reach an uneasy standoff here, though it is clear that Lessing's sympathy lies with Anna's point of view. On at least one issue, however, Anna is incorrect—the assumption that "Psychoanalysis stands or falls on whether it makes better human beings, morally better, not clinically more healthy" (p. 470). Psychoanalysis has moral implications, of course, and ideally it makes individuals more aware and therefore more sensitive to

moral concerns. Nevertheless, it is not identical with moral philosophy or religion, neither of which has been conspicuously successful in improving human nature.

In Mrs. Marks's defense, she has an uncanny ability to read Anna's mind, especially the intuition that the writer has been keeping a diary of her experiences in therapy. Mrs. Marks is also prophetic in the belief that Anna will soon write fiction again. The analyst's patience is extraordinary, and she tirelessly affirms Anna's creativity and independence as a free woman. When Anna meets the psychological chameleon Saul Green, who functions as her symbolic counterpart, male-female, brother-sister, she remembers how Mother Sugar " 'taught' me about the obsessions of jealousy being part homosexuality. But the lesson at the time seemed rather academic, nothing to do with me, Anna. I wondered if I wanted to make love with that woman he was with now" (p. 587). Many of the analyst's other insights prove valuable to Anna, including the recognition that the unconscious can be benevolent as well as malevolent, that "All self-knowledge is knowing, on deeper and deeper levels, what one knew before" (p. 239), and that the process of writing a diary will represent the beginning of the unfreezing or releasing of the writer's block that holds Anna captive.

Readers looking to *The Golden Notebook* for an unambiguous statement about the relationship between the creative and therapeutic process will

doubtlessly be disappointed, however. Many of Anna's objections to psychoanalysis coincide with her suspicion of art, further complicating Lessing's position. Anna sees the creative and therapeutic process as the endeavor to turn the formless into form, naming the ineffable. Both the artist and analyst universalize experience and make use of the repetition-compulsion principle, in which painful experiences are repeated over and over again in an effort to master the anxiety underlying them. "Literature is analysis after the event" (p. 228), Anna realizes, as psychoanalysis is. The end result, she says, is that "all the pain, and the killing and the violence is safely held in the story" where it cannot hurt her (p. 470). Contrary to logic, the conclusion depresses her.

Does therapy cure Anna's writer's block? Without endorsing the validity of Mrs. Marks's psychoanalytic theory, Lessing affirms the analyst's enthusiastic support of Anna and by implication the therapeutic value of art. Anna's diaries allow her to focus on her feelings and defuse her self-destructiveness. Throughout her sessions with Mrs. Marks, Anna has denied suffering from writer's block, and it is significant that she admits the problem not to her analyst but to Saul Green near the end of the Blue notebook. Although the admission confirms the analyst's diagnosis, Anna's major insights derive not from therapy but from the act of writing, which forces her to be introspective. Immediately after the admission, Anna buys the Golden notebook, which represents the working through or integration of her

conflicting selves. In naming her private demons, she is able to achieve a degree of mastery over them. Both literature and psychoanalysis imply the act of naming, the creation of useful fictions by which to live. Like the heroine of the *Children of Violence* series, with whom she has so much in common, Anna undertakes a quest into the deepest recesses of the unconscious self. If she is appalled by the selfishness of the "I, I, I, I," the naked ego, she also realizes she is ultimately responsible for her own actions, including sickness or health. "I haven't done time with the witch-doctors not to know that no one does anything to me, I do it to myself" (p. 622).

Curiously, despite Anna's long psychoanalysis (from January 1950 to April 1954), neither she nor Mrs. Marks explores the most crucial psychological determinant of personality development: the parent-child relationship. Recent psychoanalytic research has stressed the decisive importance of the mother's role in the formation of child development and the extent to which early patterns of mothering are reproduced when the child becomes an adult and bears children. Studies in the area of identity formation and the process of separation and individuation have confirmed the importance of concepts which Freud and the other early psychoanalytic pioneers insufficiently emphasized: mirroring, empathy, healthy self-love. Whereas Freud asserted the biological inferiority of women, and consequently reinforced destructive cultural biases, modern analysts—influenced by the feminist movement—arc more sensitive to the growing

number of women who choose both parenthood and career, a synthesis which has been harder for women to achieve than men. (Men have obviously enjoyed greater cultural opportunity than women to fulfill Freud's definition of psychological health, the ability to love and work.) Yet how does a daughter growing up in a traditional society reject her mother's values in favor of a more self-fulfilling role involving both love and work? The daughter's struggle for independence is Fraught with anxiety and guilt, Esther Menaker has observed, for she must counter-identify with her mother to achieve a more positive self-image:

> This tendency to counter-identification, to a sometimes almost conscious decision not to repeat the life-style or personality of a parent, is particularly common among little girls who have repudiated the traditional feminine role as their mothers have lived it. Clinical experience with young women in recent years has made it clear that a major factor in this repudiation is the little girl's experience of her mother's unhappiness, her lack of fulfillment, her bitter feeling that life has cheated her and, above all, her low opinion of herself. In this depreciated self-image, the mother has accepted the male-oriented social attitude toward woman as an inferior, as a second-class citizen.[13]

Lessing's refusal to discuss Anna's relationship to her parents in *The Golden Notebook* becomes more conspicuous in light of the wealth of material revealed about other aspects of her life, including the parental surrogates in the novel: Molly, the Communist party, and the men in whom she merges her identity.[14] Indeed, it is impossible to believe that not once during her four-year analysis does Anna comment upon her parents. Nevertheless, no critic

has pointed out this huge gap in her therapy. Significantly, the few comments Anna makes about her parents are expressed, not during psychoanalysis, but in her fiction—the completed novel *Free Women* and the uncompleted manuscript *The Shadow of the Third.* Only through the protective disguise of fiction does Anna (and Lessing) allow herself to touch upon this most troubling of subjects. Since we cannot be certain whether the parents of the "fictional" Anna or Ella coincide exactly with the parents of the "real" Anna, we must be especially cautious about making autobiographical inferences from the novelist's art.

The form of *The Golden Notebook* defends Anna against autobiographical exposure and the accusation of basing her art entirely upon her life. *The Shadow of the Third* is a more exaggerated version of her life than either the notebooks or *Free Women;* yet, it is also a more revealing and truthful portrait of the severity of her fears. Similarly, Lessing cannot be equated with the "real" Anna, at least not in any literal or obvious way. (Lessing has apparently never suffered from writer's block, for example, nor did her mother die early, as does Anna's.) The novelist thus stands twice removed from the artist heroines of *Free Women* and *The Shadow of the Third.* Lessing remains the mysterious figure behind the veil, always eluding the reader's sight. Many of the distinctions among the two Annas and Ella are more apparent than real, however, and we can discern major similarities of personality and artistic vision uniting the fictional writers with their creator.

The only time Anna thinks about her mother in *Free Women* occurs early in the novel during a heated discussion with Molly, who tends to dominate her friend. Stung by Molly's insensitivity to her problem with writing, Anna manages to avoid counterattacking her friend—a counterattack that would have been a repetition of ancient battles with her mother. "Anna nearly said, stubbornly, 'But I'm not an extension of you,' but knew it was something she might have said to her mother, so stopped herself. Anna could remember her mother very little; she had died so early; but at moments like these, she was able to form for herself the image of somebody strong and dominating, whom Anna had had to fight" (pp. 41-42). Although we learn nothing else about Anna's mother in *Free Women,* there is the suggestion of a troubled relationship—an intrusive mother who regards her daughter as an extension of herself. In the notebooks, Anna's discussion of Maryrose's mother may be relevant to her own mother, as well as a foreshadowing of Mrs. Quest in *The Four-Gated City.* "I remember Maryrose's mother, a dominating neurotic woman who has sapped all the vitality out of the girl, a woman of about fifty, as vigorous and fussy as an old hen. . . . When she was there Maryrose sank into a state of listless irritation, a nervous exhaustion. She knew she ought to fight her mother, but did not have the moral energy" (p. 99).

Two of the most severe obstacles to a child's happiness are the loss of the mother and rejection by the father. Anna suffers from this double blow.

Bereft of the mother from an early age, the daughter has been raised by a father whose rejection of her must have been devastating. In *The Shadow of the Third,* Anna writes about Ella's grim relationship with her father, an embittered ex-Indian army officer now in retirement. Stunned by a question from Paul Tanner, Ella admits her father never liked her—an admission Anna makes for the first time. *"'Like* me?' The question was startling to Ella. Not once had she asked herself whether her father liked her. She turned to Paul in a flash of recognition, laughing: 'What a question. But you know, I don't know?' And added, in a small voice: 'No, come to think of it, and I never have, I don't believe he does, not really"' (p. 191). Although she does not idealize her father, as Esther Greenwood does in *The Bell Jar,* she fails to express the keen disappointment one might expect from a rejected child.

Later, in *The Shadow of the Third,* Anna elaborates on Ella's feelings toward her long-dead mother and remote father. Visiting him, Ella learns for the first time about her parents' unhappy marriage. The story of the marriage remains obscure, with Ella's mother emerging (like Paul Tanner's wife) as the shadow of the third figure in Anna's imagination. "Your mother was altogether too good for me," the father enigmatically begins. Under questioning, he admits his wife was frigid, sexless. "She didn't give a damn about me, but she was jealous as a sick cat" (p. 462). Instead of trying to help her overcome her sexual repulsion, he looks elsewhere for satisfaction, "buying himself a woman. The father coldly thwarts Ella's wish to learn more

about her parents. Not only does he deny any connection to his dead wife, he disclaims kinship with his living daughter. He remains emotionally withdrawn, uncaring, unresponsive. He characterizes all people, including Ella's child, as "cannibals," waiting to devour the father. "People are just cannibals unless they leave each other alone" (p. 464). Accusing Ella of being a "modern woman," he abruptly ends the conversation. Another visit with him proves equally unsatisfactory. Each story she imagines about her father contains the same pattern of defeat, death, and bitter irony.

Ella's dream of a disintegrating house may symbolize a repetition of her parents' disintegrating marriage and home life. Anna struggles with many of the conflicts that defined Ella's parents' unhappy marriage. The sexual frigidity of Ella's mother shows up as a generalized numbness, loss of feeling, and anesthesia within Anna. Indeed, Anna enters analysis because of her inability to feel pleasure or pain. Writing about herself in the third person, she observes, during the beginning of therapy: "Anna Wulf is sitting in a chair in front of a soul-doctor. She is there because she cannot deeply feel about anything. She is frozen" (p. 234). Unlike Ella's mother, who remains frigid throughout her life, Anna enters into satisfying sexual relationships. And yet both Anna and Ella are sexually repelled by their husbands shortly after marriage. (Anna's unhappy marriage to Max Wulf may be a repetition of the failure of her parents' marriage.) An unselfish and generous person, Anna becomes wildly jealous (like her mother?) of the wife of her ex-lover Michael.

In *The Shadow of the Third,* she tortures herself by imagining the invisible woman to whom Michael keeps returning. In the Blue notebook, Anna also feels a strong jealousy toward Saul Green, who leaves her for other women. "I am mad, obsessed with a cold jealousy which I have never experienced before" (pp. 575-576).

It is impossible to prove that Anna's jealousy and emotional block are part of her maternal legacy, but it seems logical that in profound ways she is her mother's daughter, and thus the product of a psychosocial background that could be usefully explored in analysis. Since mental illness is often a family affair, in which there is a reciprocal interaction of the social and familial environment, on the one hand, and the development of pathology, on the other, we need to know specific information about the mother-daughter relationship. Was the mother available or absent to the daughter? Was Anna able as a child to separate successfully from the mother? If not, this might help to explain her identity diffusion in later life and the need to lose herself in symbiotic relationships with other men and women. Was Anna disappointed by her mother and consequently filled with bitterness and aggression? If so, this might account for the "return of the repressed" in later life, along with the fear that she must conceal her anger at all cost, lest it destroy the love object, whether it be a parent, Michael, or her own daughter. At what age did Anna's mother die, and what was her response to the death? Maternal loss is one of the underlying patterns in *The Golden Notebook* and

most likely the origin of Anna's separation anxiety. Was the mother replaced by another woman in the family, or was Anna forced to mother herself, a role she conscientiously performs for her own daughter Janet, who is also raised by a single parent? In short, to appreciate Anna's predicament and the courageous struggle to become a free woman, one must know something about her family history and the enigmatic figure in her life who is conspicuously missing from the patient's analysis and the writer's biography.

So too is Anna her father's daughter, and there seems to be a relationship between the father's cynicism and the corrosive nihilism from which the daughter suffers. "Nothing is more powerful than this nihilism," Anna writes in her notebooks, "an angry readiness to throw everything overboard, a willingness, a longing to become part of dissolution" (p. 64). The statement is a philosophically more profound version of the father's deadly bitterness. The father's dominant response to life—to retreat into a safe place where emotions cannot touch him—is also the daughter's characteristic defense against pain. Anna retreats so deeply into herself, in fact, that she denies the existence of emotions—the presenting symptom she brings into analysis. The pattern of defeat, death, and grim irony links Ella and Anna to their fathers. Additionally, one of Ella's revelations is the discovery that her father writes poetry, "poems about solitude, loss, fortitude, the adventures of isolation" (p. 465). These are subjects similar to the ones Anna writes about. Unlike Anna, the father does not wish to be published. After writing poems,

the father locks them up, uninterested in sharing them with other readers. Yet Anna, we remember, suffers from writer's block, which does not seem very different from the old man's embittered silence. Moreover, after Michael abandons Anna, she enters into masochistic relationships with other men who reenact the father's rejection of her.

Nowhere in *The Golden Notebook* is there evidence to suggest that Anna's parents were warm, empathic, loving. Indeed, there is striking evidence to the contrary. "The consequence of the parental self-object's inability to be a joyful mirror to a child's healthy assertiveness," Heinz Kohut has argued in *The Restoration of the Self,* "may be a lifetime of abrasiveness, bitterness, and sadism that cannot be discharged. . . [15] It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the severe problems which drive Anna into therapy—the extreme detachment from herself and others, the feelings of isolation, apathy, and inferiority, and the diffuse rage and anxiety—are the consequences of her parents' flawed empathic quality. Clinical experience would suggest that Anna's sadomasochistic feelings derive from narcissistic injuries suffered at the hands of chronically cold parents. Anna's problems of low self-esteem, self-mockery, dependent relationships with uncaring men, and fears of fragmentation imply an unstable self, which, in Kohutian terms, originates from the inability to merge with healthy, loving parents (omnipotent self-objects). The child's narcissistic vulnerability need not derive from a single traumatic event, such as the death of a parent, although Anna's mother

obviously dies when her daughter is young, but from a family environment of faulty empathic mirroring. Far from compensating for this severe maternal loss by offering his daughter an affirmative mirroring of life, the father allies himself with negation and death, thus reinforcing the daughter's crushing rejection. It is no wonder that Anna sees darkness everywhere.

Oddly enough, although Lessing meticulously analyzes the violence and chaos of Anna's emotions and the extent to which they reflect the madness of the twentieth century, the novelist evades the question of the patient's personal history, the complicated interlockings connecting one family generation to another. *The Golden Notebook* chronicles the history of war throughout Anna's century' but not the warfare of her own family. Nor does Lessing trace Anna's self-aggression to its personal antecedents. For instance, Anna has a recurrent nightmare about destruction which, under pressure from Mrs. Marks to name it, she calls "joy-in-spite." The dream manifests itself in different forms and images, beginning as a peasant wooden vase, then looking like a species of elf or pixie, and then transforming itself into an "old man, almost dwarf-like, infinitely more terrifying than the vase-object, because he was part human" (p. 477). There are further transformations of the dream which the Jungian analyst interprets mythically, preferring to deal with primitive gods and goddesses than with the significant figures in Anna's life. The weakness of Mrs. Marks's interpretation is that it ignores Anna's private myth system; for by transmuting the patient's dreams into ancient

myths and the collective unconscious, the Jungian analyst neglects the personal experiences which give birth to Anna's dreams. The problem with Anna's analysis, in other words, is that she universalizes the meaning of her conflicts before she particularizes them. It is like engaging in dream interpretation without first knowing the dreamer's free associations; the effort is doomed to failure. Symbols have different meanings to different people and unlike Jung, who made little effort to discover the dreamer's free associations, Freud insisted that analysis could not succeed without this knowledge.

An important unexplored area in *The Golden Notebook* is the link between Ella's father, whom we may infer as the reflection of Anna's father, and the cruel old man in the dream who represents "pure spite, malice, joy in a destructive impulse" (p. 477). At times male and other times female, the figure in the dream is lively despite having a wooden leg, crutch, hump, or other deformation. The creature embodies "purposeless, undirected, causeless spite" (p. 478). A later dream of the dwarfed malicious man assumes a more explicitly sexual meaning. "He had a great protruding penis sticking out through his clothes, it menaced me, was dangerous, because I knew the old man hated me and wanted to hurt me" (p. 562). Anna becomes the old-man/woman-dwarf figure and, along with her counterpart Saul Green, ritualistically descends into a "cocoon of madness" to live out sadomasochistic fantasies. Persuaded by Mrs. Marks to "dream the dream

positively," Anna achieves wholeness through integration of the anima and animus, the female and male elements of the psyche.[16]

A Freudian interpretation of the nightmare of "joy-in-spite" would explore the possibility that Anna's dream of a malevolent old man symbolizes her anguish over a father who disappointed her, first by denying her the parental love necessary for a child's well-being, then by openly excluding her from his life. The father's body deformity may reflect both an actual war injury, which rendered him unfit for further duty ("He got unfit for the army and was in the administration for a time," Ella vaguely tells Paul [p. 190]), and Anna's fears of the annihilation of the self. The "great protruding penis" in the dream has an obvious Oedipal symbolism; yet, the pre-Oedipal longing to merge with the father's power has an emotional no less than sexual significance. Given the fact that Anna has spent the greater part of her adolescence living alone with her father (in the notebooks she says she has lived with him through the age of 15), we can assume his decisive impact upon her and the consequences of her emotional estrangement. In a rare admission to her analyst, Anna refers to the feeling of "violent repulsion and shame and curiosity" she experienced when she saw her father naked, along with her wish to see him dead (p. 474). Mrs. Marks remains curiously uninterested in pursuing this theme, and Anna does not expand upon it. The subject of the child's sexuality and aggression toward the father is of the greatest importance in Anna's troubled life, however, and therefore deserves

the highest priority in her psychoanalysis. And since the repetition-compulsion principle informs the structure of *The Golden Notebook,* it becomes imperative to determine the extent to which Anna's life repeats her parents' lives. Once this knowledge is gained, the daughter can then realistically hope to break the vicious circle of family history.[17]

Interestingly, Anna is a better parent to her daughter Janet than her own parents were to her; yet, once again we learn surprisingly little about the mother-daughter relationship. It is almost as if Anna's feelings toward Janet are too personal or private for Lessing to describe fully. Anna makes a significant observation about motherhood but does not fully elaborate upon it. "The control and discipline of being a mother came so hard to me, that I can't delude myself that if I'd been a man, and not forced into self-control, I'd have been any different" (p. 334). Anna's struggle against a dominating mother is not repeated in the next generation, and her relationship with Janet is non-conflicted. There are a few clues, though, to suggest Anna's ambivalence toward her. In the beginning of the Blue notebook, she records a "feeling of unreality" coming over her in January 1950 in the presence of her young daughter. When Janet asks her mother to play with her, Anna cannot respond. She acts like a machine, divorced of feeling, and she experiences the schizoid like detachment that frightens her. In analysis she admits to experiencing hostility toward Michael, who has been making unfair demands on her, but she does not also consider the possibility of tension toward her

daughter. Mrs. Marks unfortunately allows the discussion to wander into the area of art, which is not the crucial issue of Anna's diary entry. It would be remarkable to assume that a daughter who has been denied love by her parents could herself be a model mother to her child without experiencing the usual or unusual problems of being a parent. Anna slips into mild depression when Janet leaves home for school, reminding her of the void in her life before her daughter was born. Yet this only emphasizes her love for Janet. In a world of inconstancy and disappointment, Anna's single-minded devotion to Janet is extraordinary. "I don't care about anyone in the world except Janet," she writes in the Blue notebook (p. 544), able to preserve at least one area in her life from chaos, pain, and confusion.

There is a surrogate child in *The Golden Notebook* who embodies Anna's destructive feelings toward motherhood and children: Molly's son Tommy. He is in both the notebooks and in *Free Women,* but there is no "biographical" explanation for the fact that Anna has him attempt suicide in her novel. In the "real" notebooks, for example, Tommy does not appear to be suicidal. Yet, there is a psychological explanation for Anna's decision to blind him in her art. In *Free Women: 2,* Tommy begins to read Anna's notebooks without her permission. "Anna tensed herself and sat quiet; she could not endure that anyone should see those notebooks and yet she felt that Tommy had a right to see them: but she could not have explained why" (p. 265). She feels violated by the intrusion and enraged to the point where she wishes to hurt an object,

Tommy. "She told herself that his state of mind had infected her; that she was being invaded by his emotions; marveled that what appeared in his face as gleams of spite and hatred appeared in his voice briefly as shrillness or hardness—should be the outward signs of such a violent inward storm . . (p. 266). Asked by Tommy why she keeps four notebooks instead of one, she says the result would be chaos. Almost immediately after Tommy glances at the notebooks, he attempts suicide by shooting himself in the head. He lives but is permanently blinded.

Since these details have no basis in objective reality, Tommy's symbolic self-destruction may represent a projection of Anna's ambivalence toward children, the fear that her innermost thoughts (which she can express only in highly encoded fictional form) will have a lethal effect on her child. Tommy is the "bad" child in the same way that Janet is the "good" child. Significantly, although *Free Women* is written after the completion of Anna's psychoanalysis and thus after the resolution of her writer's block, the novelist still splits up her feelings toward children. This strengthens the suspicion that Anna's emotional block has been a defense against destructive feelings she will not allow herself to verbalize. The woman who has been bitterly rejected by her parents is horrified at the possibility of similarly hurting her own child. To preserve the good object, she must also create a bad object to keep the two separate. Tommy is literally blinded by Anna's emotions, a striking confirmation of Freud's theory of the omnipotence of thought. The bad

mother in Anna may well be the internalization of her own mother whom she cannot bring herself to talk about in psychoanalysis. Ironically, Tommy's blindness has the effect of artificially healing his own divided personality, but it is a false resolution which Lessing unambiguously rejects.

Despite the fact that Anna's ambivalence toward children never emerges during therapy, she unconsciously recognizes the split. In the last section of *Free Women,* she records a dream she often has had about two children. "One was Janet, plump and glossy with health. The other was Tommy, a small baby, and she was starving him. Her breasts were empty, because Janet had had all the milk in them; and so Tommy was thin and puny, dwindling before her eyes from starvation" (p. 651). Once awake, she can find no reason for the dream of having starved Tommy, yet Anna Wulf the novelist darkly realizes the split in the feelings toward the child. Anna achieves therapeutic relief not from psychoanalysis but from the act of fiction, a process allowing her to verbalize truths too painful to admit even to a sympathetic analyst.

Another crucial issue that fails to show up in Anna's psychoanalysis is the origin of her identity as an artist. From an early age she has played the "game" of inventing the world. "I used at night to sit up in bed and play what I called 'the game.' First I created the room I sat in, object by object, 'naming' everything, bed, chair, curtains, till it was whole in my mind, then move out of

the room, creating the house, then out of the house, slowly creating the street, then rise into the air, looking down on London . . (p. 548). Not content to stop with London, the young Anna would create the world, continent by continent, ocean by ocean, even as she would hold on to the contents of the house and imagine the swarming life in a drop of water. Anna's game of inventing the universe, creating life out of nothing, is a metaphor of the artistic process. As a young child, she was developing the imaginative powers that would later be essential to the artist. The game also represents the mind's effort toward unity and wholeness, an escape from the claustrophobia of her room. Frederick Karl has characterized Lessing's fiction as the "literature of enclosure." [18] The room suggests both a desire to seek refuge from external onslaughts and the fear of nightmarish repetition, destiny inexorably repeating itself. In the inner Golden notebook, Anna makes a revealing connection between her terrifying childhood nightmares and the game of invention. ". . . before I slept each night I lay awake, remembering everything in the day that had a quality of fear hidden in it; which might become part of a nightmare. I had to 'name' the frightening things, over and over, in a terrible litany; like a sort of disinfection by the conscious mind before I slept. But now, asleep, it was not making past events harmless, by naming them, but *making sure they were still there"* (p. 616).

By naming and recreating the universe the artist can escape from the constraints of reality and restore order to a fragmented inner world. Anna's

inventive powers thus preserved the child from psychic extinction. Art functions as a counterphobic activity, an act of exorcism. Yet, later in her life, Anna has a terrible fear that her writings not only falsify reality but contain a violence that will literally blind the reader—as happens to Tommy. Again we wonder about the events occurring during Anna's unreconstructed childhood: why she had to retreat into the claustrophobic world to escape from intolerable reality.

Anna's reluctance to communicate to her analyst the ambivalence she feels toward her parents and child reflects, no doubt, Lessing's mistrust of psychoanalysis. Apart from whatever biographical decisions compelled Lessing not to divulge her own therapy to the reading public, there were literary concerns. In a revealing exchange with Mrs. Marks, Anna acknowledges that although the analyst has helped her to break down shame and guilt, the reader who has not undergone a similar experience cannot be expected to accept unthinkable ideas like Oedipal drives. The person reading about this feeling, Anna says, "without the subjective experience, the breaking down, would be shocked, as by the sight of blood or a word that has associations of shame, and the shock would swallow everything else" (p. 474). Lessing raises several of the fundamental limits of the fictional psychiatric case study that we have been exploring in the literature of the talking cure: the difficulty of suspending disbelief, the problem of writing about intimate subjects without engaging in sensationalism, and the delicate issue of

confidentiality and discretion.

Lessing also recognizes that intellectual knowledge does not always produce emotional change in the patient or a sense of conviction in the reader. Insight is not enough for emotional change; it must be validated by the process of working through. Freud's unwavering faith in knowledge as power has been modified by contemporary analysts who emphasize the importance of empathic mirroring and the growth of self-esteem. "Early deficits in the development of healthy narcissism cannot be corrected by insight into these processes *alone* Esther Menaker remarks, "but require actual support from the therapist in the form of affirmation and acceptance of the patient's total personality."[19] The deficits in the formation of Anna's healthy narcissism are restored not mainly by the empathic Mother Sugar but by the novelist's alter ego, Saul Green. And since Saul Green is Anna's literary creation, it is the artistic process which provides the empathic self-mirroring that heals the artist's narcissistic injury. Art alone is therapeutic for Anna and by implication Doris Lessing. By contrast, psychoanalysis is deemed inartistic and consequently devalued.

Lessing does provide us with one clue, however, that suggests a fascinating psychoanalytic link between Anna Wulf and the heroine of the last volume of *Children of Violence.* The clue involves an outline for a future novel that Anna jots down in *The Golden Notebook.* The novel is to be based on a

story Mother Sugar tells her about a patient who entered therapy because he was in deep distress. Finding nothing wrong with him, the analyst asks to see the members of his family. One by one, Mrs. Marks interviews them and judges diem perfectly normal. Then the mother comes. "She, apparently 'normal,' was in fact extremely neurotic, but maintaining her balance by passing it on to her family, particularly to the youngest son. Eventually Mother Sugar treated the mother, though there was terrible trouble getting her to come for treatment. And the young man who had come in the first place found the pressure lifting off him" (p. 536). The point of the story, as Mrs. Marks defines it, is that often the most normal member of a family may be the sickest. Due to a strong personality, he or she manages to survive largely because the illness is expressed through weaker family members. Mental illness is often a family affair, as we suggested earlier. Anna considers transmuting Mrs. Marks's anecdote into a short novel but nothing comes of it. Nor is there an explicit family relationship in *The Golden Notebook* that falls into this pattern. But in *The Four-Gated City,* we see a striking example of this family constellation and, not surprisingly, it involves the *Bildungsroman* heroine Martha Quest and her severely disturbed mother.

* * *

In the 17-year interval between the first and last volumes of the

prodigious series, Lessing's extraordinary heroine has grown and matured. She has also accelerated the voyage into madness, both as observer and participant, that Lessing views as characteristic of the psychic landscape of the century. Like Anna Wulf, Martha becomes increasingly hostile to all forms of psychotherapy, including Jungian analysis. Her suspicions are confirmed when she decides to read up on psychology before visiting Dr. Lamb. "The two great exemplars, forming as they did the two faces or poles of the science, or art, were easy. 'Freud' and 'Jung' were easy" (p. 222). Martha examines so many psychology texts that she emerges from her independent study with the equivalent of a university course. Her reading convinces her of only one essential fact: "That these practitioners of a science, or an art, agreed about absolutely nothing." The conclusion foreshadows the "Afterward" to *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell,* where Lessing uses identical language to emphasize the hopeless confusion of psychiatry.

Hence the maddening diagnoses of Martha's friend, Lynda Coldridge, who for years has been labeled, categorized, and victimized by the psychiatric establishment. The novelist's language sounds like a parody of *DSM-3,* the latest reference guide to psychiatric nosology. "Lynda had been diagnosed by a large variety of doctors: there had been a large variety of diagnoses. She was depressed; she was a manic depressive; she was paranoid; she was schizophrenic. Most frequently, the last. Also, in another division, or classification, she was neurotic; she was psychotic. Most frequently, the

latter" (p. 193). When Martha asks Dr. Lamb to define Lynda's schizophrenia, he equivocates, confessing that "there are different theories." Nor is he willing to define the diagnosis he has attached to Martha: "manic-depressive, with schizoid tendencies" (p. 237). Martha suppresses an old joke: "If that's depression, then where's the mania?" Dr. Lamb is not an evil man, but he embodies the potential for evil that has accompanied the unrestrained growth of modern psychiatry. A pleasant middle-aged man with thoughtful eyes and dry wit, he is "not a bad sort of chap," as Mark Coldridge neutrally observes. The psychiatrist has a "strong guarded face" and "armored look" which give him an impenetrable appearance to his patients. Lessing's anger toward the psychiatrist arises not from his bland character but from the unlimited power invested in him by an unquestioning society. Even the cynical Martha finds herself succumbing to this power as she asks herself how the image of the infallible doctor has developed historically. She asks, Why do Dr. Lamb's medical degrees give him the right to make Godlike pronouncements? And how did people cope with their problems a hundred years ago before the birth of this secular religion and brave new world?

In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing sympathetically portrays Anna's therapist without endorsing Jungian psychoanalysis, but in *The Four-Gated City* all the therapists are cold, rigid, unempathic. Martha is infuriated by Dr. Lamb's language, dogma, and the purring "Hmmm" of his responses. Although Lessing does not identify his psychiatric orientation, he seems ominously

Freudian in his preoccupation with Martha's sexuality. Witness the psychiatrist's following remark, with its accusatory tone and baiting quality. "And of course, the other reason you are sleeping with Mark is because you are saying to me, I don't find you attractive, Dr. Lamb, I have another man" (p. 242). Martha snaps back, "Rubbish!" The doctor's empathic failure is appalling, as is his sexual stereotyping. He calls Martha's intelligence "masculine" in anticipation of the sexism of the Freudian analyst Mrs. Johns, who cannot imagine that a woman may commit herself to a political movement without losing her femininity.

Why then does Martha visit Dr. Lamb? Quite simply, because she has nowhere else to go for help. Her breakdown occurs immediately after she receives a series of letters from her mother, announcing her intention to travel to England from Africa for a visit. Mrs. Quest's letters throw Martha into turmoil. Each letter has the same structure, beginning with "My darling girl" and ending with "Your loving mother." In between are pages of "reproof, reproach, hatred." A study in abnormal psychology, Mrs. Quest is poisoned by racial hatred, religious fanaticism, and morbid fear of sexuality. All women are "filthy pigs" to her, including her daughter. Like the mother Mrs. Marks mentions to Anna in *The Golden Notebook,* the strong-willed Mrs. Quest is normal on the surface but severely disturbed underneath. She passes along her illness to her self-effacing daughter. Lessing implies that Mrs. Quest's neurotic pattern of self-martyrdom has undermined Martha's health and

weakened her self-esteem. Long-forgotten childhood and adolescent conflicts continue to cripple the mother-daughter relationship, despite Mrs. Quest's ineffectual denial:

> This business of illness—and had not her whole life been involved with it? —was not as simple as it seemed. As for Martha's being ill, Mrs. Quest had unpleasant memories that went back to her adolescence. The old lady could not quite remember the incident, the words, but lying awake at night rehearsing conversations that had taken place (might have taken place?), she heard herself saying: That's not true, you are always accusing me. How can I make you ill? Why should I want to make you ill? All I want is to look after you, what is my life for if it isn't to sacrifice it, for you ... (p. 279).

Not only does Lessing offer a more extended treatment of the embattled mother-daughter relationship in *The Four-Gated City* than in *The Golden Notebook,* but May Quest seems to be the oppressive mother whom Anna Wulf cannot remember during psychoanalysis. Indeed, Mrs. Quest has a catastrophic influence on her daughter's life and has been symbolically dead and unavailable for years, again recalling Anna's long-dead mother. Whenever Martha allows herself to think about the tormented childhood years with her mother, the 35-year-old daughter breaks down in tears, infantilized. "Martha heard herself crying. She wept, while a small girl wept with her, Mama, Mama, why are you so cold, so unkind, why did you never love me?" (p. 232). Mother and daughter are incapable of being together for a moment without wounding each other. Mrs. Quest's words are like daggers to Martha.

In the presence of her mother, Martha's identity dissolves and she walks around in shock. She remembers herself as a violent, aggressive adolescent who would use any weapon in the fight for survival against an intrusive and overbearing mother. Filled with self-loathing which she projects onto everyone, Mrs. Quest has always belittled her daughter's sexuality and gender identity, as Martha relates to Dr. Lamb. "My mother was a woman who hated her own sexuality and she hated mine too. She wanted me to be a boy always —before I was born" (p. 241). Mrs. Quest's grim marriage is a repetition of the parental union Anna fictionalizes in *The Shadow of the Third.* Husband and wife remain lonely, brooding, embittered. Born and trained as a nurse in England, she marries Martha's father and is then uprooted and taken to the African veld, which remains her prison for the rest of her life. Mrs. Quest is herself a victim of social and historical forces; her own mother had died in childbirth, perhaps linking procreation with death in the daughter's imagination. Mrs. Quest's husband is later crippled during World War I, which deepens her rage against life. The mother's domination of her family causes them to resent bitterly their dependency on her. The only way Martha can free herself is to repudiate her mother's destructive values and, like Anna Wulf, attempt to block off her rage.

Paralleling Mrs. Marks's anecdote in *The Golden Notebook* about the patient who brings his mother with him into analysis only to discover that the mother is the sick one in the family, Martha arranges for an interview

between Mrs. Quest and Dr. Lamb. Lessing invests the scene with pathos and humor. Mrs. Quest arranges to see Dr. Lamb in the belief he will treat her arthritis. She cowers in bed before the cab arrives, holding her clothes to her chin like a shield. She departs alone to the psychiatrist and returns in the afternoon with the announcement that she has decided to leave for Africa. Martha's telephone call to Dr. Lamb provides her with the details of her mother's first and last visit to a psychiatrist. She learns that her mother has spent the entire session verbally abusing her daughter to Dr. Lamb and pouring out years of resentment. He asks one question: "If you two don't get on, perhaps it would be better if you weren't in the same house." Mrs. Quest haughtily agrees and before racing out thanks him in a "schizophrenic" way. "It was nice talking to you—it's not often Martha lets me meet one of her friends" (p. 286). The structure of the session corresponds to her letters to Martha, filled with reproaches framed with sweet words. After Mrs. Quest's departure, Martha begins to recover from her breakdown, and her own sessions with Dr. Lamb end. Less than a year later Mrs. Quest dies.

The death of Mrs. Quest does not release Martha from a lifetime of suffering, though. If Dr. Lamb were a more sensitive therapist, he would have encouraged Martha to focus on the tangled mother-daughter relationship and her responses to a pathological parent. How can Martha, or anyone, grow up normally in a family where the mother bitterly despises herself and her offspring? How does a helpless child defend herself against years of

reproaches? How does one become loving in defiance to an unloving environment? These are only the more obvious questions that must be thrashed out in therapy. The more subtle questions involve the link between Mrs. Quest's schizophrenia (a clinical diagnosis Lessing apparently accepts here) and Martha's "Self-Watcher," a mysterious schizoid like detachment from reality characterized by apathy, loss of feeling, withdrawal. Martha's defense against an intrusive mother is passive resistance, beneath which lies rage, her buried "self-hater." Toward the end of The Four-Gated City, Martha "plugs into" the violent self-hater without recognizing its link to her maternal identification. Anna Wulf also experiences rage without tracing it back to feelings engendered by maternal abandonment and paternal rejection.

Motherhood is an immensely problematic subject to Martha, and Mrs. Quest's failure as a mother prompts Martha to give up her own daughter, Caroline, in an earlier novel in the series, A Proper Marriage, in the hope that the girl will be set free from the nightmare of repetition. But in The Four-Gated City, Martha painfully knows that a child is never set free by this illusory independence, especially since her daughter has been left with a woman, Elaine Talbot, who has been utterly dominated by another intrusive mother—a woman who is, ironically, friendly with Mrs. Quest.[20] None of these issues is revealed in Martha's therapy, just as Anna Wulf cannot discuss her family to Mrs. Marks. In fact, the family is a much more intractable problem to the Lessing protagonist than other seemingly more explosive

issues, such as sexuality. Nor does Martha explore her ambivalent friendship with Lynda Coldridge, in whose house and with whose family Martha lives for most of the novel. To what extent are Lynda's mental illness, sexual frigidity, and inability to live with her family a repetition of Mrs. Quest's tragic life? Is Martha's participation in Lynda's breakdown, in which both women become "switched in to Hating," a reenactment of the pathological merging that may have characterized Martha's early childhood? And how does Martha's ability to replace Lynda in the Coldridge family reflect the adaptive behavior that enabled her to break away from Mrs. Quest's destructive grasp?

The dialectical tension between patient and analyst in The Golden Notebook is singularly absent from The Four-Gated City. Mrs. Marks's talking cure has been replaced by Dr. Lamb's "Explosion" therapy, a cruel parody of the early cathartic treatment of Breuer and Freud. Producing catharsis without insight or relief, psychiatric treatment crushes Martha's spirit. After each session she collapses into lethargy, depleted of energy. Her decision to terminate therapy is based on "economics, psychic economics." In Lessing's judgment, it is the best decision Martha makes in her life, sparing her from the fate awaiting Lynda and the other victimized patients in the novel. Dr. Lamb's failure to provide empathy and insight reflects Lessing's conviction that psychiatry has become the instrument of oppression. Before beginning therapy, Martha has disagreed with Lynda's conclusion that psychiatrists are "all the same." Events justify Lynda's cynicism.

Lynda's story is Lessing's exemplum of the antipsychiatry movement. As a child she is treated by a less sophisticated version of Dr. Lamb. She is taken to an expensive mental home where she receives electroshock treatments and insulin therapy. Gifted by visionary powers, which her doctors dismiss as hallucinations, she submits to the psychiatric establishment to avoid further punishment. Despite the doctors' reassurances, she knows she is getting worse. She marries Mark Coldridge precipitously in the hope he will rescue her from despair. No one can save her—electroshock therapy has permanently altered her brain. She finds an ambiguous haven with Dr. Lamb and his mind-numbing drugs. Failing to break the addiction, she remains at the end a psychological cripple, Lessing's warning against the power of the therapeutic state.

Through Lynda's story, Martha discovers that the rejection of psychotherapy is the first step toward health. Madness can be overcome, she believes, by riding it out or voyaging through it. Lessing rejects the twentieth-century model of psychopathology based on disease-object intrusion in favor of an older model of demonological madness based on spirit intrusion—the transference of a foreign spirit into the human object.[21] This is implicit in Mark Coldridge's description of his wife's illness. "It's as if. . . not that *she* is mad, but there's madness. A kind of wavelength of madness—and she hooks into it and out, when she wants. I could hook into it just as easily. Or it could hook into me—it's in the air" (p. 398). Martha's quiet response, "Or into me,"

becomes terrifyingly prophetic a hundred pages later when she too breaks down. It is not a question of an individual mind falling ill, Lessing implies, but the mind discovering a mad wavelength, a channel that remains outside normal receptivity. The guide for the voyage through inner space is not a psychotherapist, anxious to impose a reductive clinical framework upon a patient, but a knowing friend who has also been mad and who has journeyed back from the unknown shore. In the words of the only psychoanalyst Lessing endorses, "Instead of the *degradation* ceremonial of psychiatric examination, diagnosis and prognostication, we need, for those who are ready for it (in psychiatric terminology, often those who are about to go into a schizophrenic breakdown), an *initiation* ceremonial, through which the person will be guided with full social encouragement and sanction into inner space and time, by people who have been there and back again. Psychiatrically, this would appear as ex-patients helping future patients to go mad."[22]

This is, of course, R. D. Laing speaking. *The Four-Gated City* affirms the Laingian belief that psychological breakdown represents a charting of new psychic territory, a painful but potentially curative self-discovery that radically shocks normative consciousness into higher functioning. Critics have documented Laing's influence on Lessing's fiction, though curiously, she has denied the connection.[23] How successful is she in evoking the wavelength of madness? Readers will probably disagree. During Martha's breakdown she becomes a radio, television set, camera. Aural and visual imagery flood her

consciousness. Lessing shatters normal syntax and uses metaphors to an oppressive degree to convey Martha's word salads. The novelist also juxtaposes cryptic songs and allusions with jiggling rhymes and Dali landscapes to suggest that madness may lead not only to breakdown but breakthrough. For some readers, however, the effect of the hypnotic rhetorical flourishes during Martha's mad scenes recalls Dr. Lamb's "explosion" therapy, resulting in a sensory overload.

Predictably, there are ambiguities and contradictions in Lessing's vision of madness. She hints at a static rather than dynamic model of consciousness, like a computer in its functions and malfunctions. Despite her rejection of the Freudian unconscious, her own model of the mind seems less complex and less accessible to illumination. She fails to explain how one successfully rides out the mad journey or the precise experience of the psychotic's hyper-sanity. She offers one of the most stylized views of madness in literature. Notwithstanding Lynda's threats to harm herself or others, she is incapable of real violence, just as both Martha and Anna Wulf are too sensitive to injure anyone. Indeed, Martha's madness is remarkably controlled. She always remains sensible and considerate, never so far removed from reality that she cannot pull herself together to converse with a stranger who, upon hearing that she is "on a trip," has come to inquire about her health. Martha and Lynda have little difficulty in managing each other's illness. Each woman displays a selflessness and generosity suggestive of a perfect marriage—or an idealized

relationship with the analyst. Like her controlled regressions, Martha's "self-hater" is extraordinarily well-behaved, lacking the destructive and irrational power often accompanying mental illness.

The criticisms above may be too harsh for a novelist who has given us an epical journey into madness and beyond. The anguished intensity of *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four-Gated City* elevates them above nearly all other novels dealing with psychological breakdown and recovery'. No psychological system, psychoanalysis or otherwise, is free from glaring contradictions, and we cannot criticize a novelist for failing to resolve ambiguities other thinkers have been unable to solve. If our sympathy for *The Four-Gated City* diminishes, it is because of Martha Quest's uncharacteristically elitist belief that those who have not lived through a severe breakdown lack the imagination and authenticity achieved by the initiate. Matching the stridency of R. D. Laing, Lessing now maintains that madness demonstrates creative rebellion against repressive civilization, while normalcy betrays mindless acquiescence. Her characters therefore have only two choices—madness or conformity. "Better mad, if the price for not being mad is to be a lump of lethargy that will use any kind of stratagem so as to remain a lump, remain non-perceptive and heavy" (p. 510). Along with the condemnation of psychiatry is the belief that characters like Lynda need never have been ill, that their illnesses were in fact *caused* by psychiatry and modern science. The marriage of madness and mysticism has led to the expulsion of all

psychotherapists, who are now cast into the role of scapegoats. Lessing spells this out in capital letters:

FINALLY: THE CENTRAL FACT, IF AT ANY TIME AT ALL I HAD GONE TO A DOCTOR OR TO A PSYCHIATRIST, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THAT. I'M OVER THE EDGE. BUT EVEN IF I STAY HERE I CAN MANAGE (LIKE LYNDA). WHY? BECAUSE I KNOW JUST THAT SMALL AMOUNT ABOUT IT NOT TO LET MYSELF BE STAMPEDED. IF AT ANY MOMENT I'D GIVEN IN DURING THIS SESSION I'D HAVE BEEN SWEPT AWAY. WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT I KNOW, THROUGH LYNDA, I'D NOT FIAVE BEEN ABLE TO HOLD ON. THROUGH HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS IN ALL THE BOOKS, THROUGH MY OWN EXPERIENCE, THROUGH LYNDA—BUT WITHOUT THESE, A DOCTOR OR A PSYCHIATRIST WOULD HAVE NEEDED ONLY TO USE THE LANGUAGE OF THE SELF-HATER AND THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THAT. FINIS, MARTHA! BRING OUT YOUR MACHINES. BRING OUT YOUR DRUGS! YES, YES, YOU KNOW BEST DOCTOR, I'LL DO WHAT YOU SAY: I'M TOO SCARED NOT TO (p. 553).

Many of Lessing's readers, like those of T. S. Eliot's, have implicitly shared her condemnation of psychotherapy. But as we have seen, neither the polite Jungian debates between Anna Wulf and Mrs. Marks nor the hostile confrontations between Martha Quest and Dr. Lamb exhaust the rich promise of psychotherapy, which can be more rigorously analytical than the former

and more empathic than the latter. Indeed, while Lessing's seriousness as a novelist is above reproach, her treatment of psychoanalysis hardly does justice to the talking cure. The issue is not whether there are transcendent realities "beyond psychiatry" but whether the novelist has fully imagined a psychoanalytic interpretation of her fictional reality. An empathic woman whose consolation sweetens Anna's life, Mrs. Marks reveals a startling indifference to the fundamental questions that most therapists would raise, questions involving her patient's origins and family interactions. Nor is Dr. Lamb, who has actually witnessed Mrs. Quest's madness, even vaguely interested in Martha's background. He remains more preoccupied with his own self-importance than with reconstructions of Martha's past history or present reality.

Ironically, Lessing's equation of the family with illness and despair lends itself to psychoanalytic scrutiny. Although the novelist is sympathetic to Laing's radical psychiatry and his celebration of madness, her fictional therapists ignore one of his most profound insights. "Our impression, comparing the families of schizophrenics with other families, is that they are relatively closed systems, and that the future patient is particularly enclosed within the family system."[24] Lessing's rejection of psychotherapy would have been more persuasive had she created a fictional therapist who properly focused on the protagonist's family conflicts and whose questions probed into history, biography, and sociology. Only then could the novelist legitimately

have dismissed psychotherapy as destructive to the arrival of a transcendent reality. Whether viewed from a traditional Freudian point of view, a Laingian existentialist and phenomenological perspective, or a Kohutian self-psychological vantage point, the conflicts of Anna Wulf and Martha Quest lead inescapably to severe disruptions in the parent-child bond and the absence of love and empathy. Any psychotherapy that conspicuously avoids this crucial subject must necessarily remain inadequate and incomplete.

Nor must a psychoanalytic approach emphasize pathology' at the expense of creativity. There are intriguing clinical implications which Dr. Lamb fails to explore between Martha's aberrant family background and the development of her extrasensory perception and communication. Is there a link between Mrs. Quest's intrusiveness and pathological merging, on the one hand, and Martha's belief, which Lessing objectively validates, in her power to read thoughts and merge with other minds, on the other hand? If so, Martha's telepathic merging may be an outgrowth of her mother's pathological symbiosis. This interpretation would suggest not simply the presence of illness in Martha's family but, more importantly, her ability to devise constructive solutions to external and intrapsychic conflicts, a creative malady not unlike the examples we have seen created by earlier writers. For readers who reject Lessing's increasing preoccupation with telepathic phenomena, Martha's extrasensory perception may be viewed as a metaphor of the artist's imagination which, by its very nature, affirms the power of

sympathy or empathy.

The Golden Notebook and *The Four-Gated City* represent Lessing's major statements on the talking cure. Dr. Lamb assures Martha that when her analysis is finished she will see it in "proportion." The word recalls Virginia Woolfs psychiatrist in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Sir William Bradshaw, whose divine omniscience similarly protects England from lunacy.[25] As *The Four-Gated City* moves toward its apocalyptic conclusion, the massive destruction of the earth gives rise to the hope of repopulation by an extraordinary race of half-completed creatures endowed with visionary powers deemed "hallucinations" by uncomprehending psychiatrists. In her more recent fiction, Lessing continues to rely upon psychiatric case studies to subvert widespread assumptions about mental illness, but one senses a hardening of her position. In *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell*, Professor Charles Watkins embarks upon a voyage through inner space paralleling the introspective journeys of Anna Wulf and Martha Quest. But gone is the warmly ironic portrait of Mrs. Marks. Gone also is Dr. Lamb. Instead we see two psychiatrists, Doctor X and Doctor Y, who betray the nameless faces of the therapeutic state. The insecure Doctor X argues for medication and electroshock therapy, while the more compassionate Doctor Y urges restraint and a renewed effort to discover the meaning of Watkins' amnesia. The patient remains dubious of all therapy, voicing Lessing's warning against treating inner voyages as medical illnesses. In despair, Watkins rejects the

little light of Doctor Y (Doctor Why) and submits to Doctor X's punishing shockiatry. At the end of the novel, Professor Watkins regains his memory but loses the significance of his magical trip into the extraterrestrial Crystal that has come to save humanity from self-destruction. Thanks to the help of psychiatry, he is now ready for a real descent into hell.

Notes

1 Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

2 Jonas Robitscher, *The Powers of Psychiatry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 8. The author, a psychiatrist and lawyer, impressively details the ways in which the almost unchecked power of psychiatry infringes upon a free society.

3 Doris Lessing, *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell* (1971; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1977), pp. 277-278. Other Lessing novels referred to include, in order of publication, *Martha Quest* [*Children of Violence,* Vol. 1] (1952; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964); *A Proper Marriage* [*Children of Violence,* Vol. 2] (1954; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964); *A Ripple from the Storm [Children of Violence,* Vol. 3] (1958; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966); *The Golden Notebook* (1962; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1979); *Landlocked [Children of Violence,* Vol. 4] (1965; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966); *The Four-Gated City [Children of Violence,* Vol. 5] (1969; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1979). All references come from these editions. For a bibliography see Dee Seligman, ed., *Doris Lessing: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (Westport, Gann.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

4 Doris Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice,* Paul Schlueter, ed. (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 68. All references come from this edition.

5 Letter from Doris Lessing to Roberta Rubenstein, 28 March 1977. In Roberta Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 110-111, n.4. Rubenstein's book is indispensable for Lessing scholars.

6 No biographical study of Lessing has yet appeared, and the little information we have about her life

comes from *A Small Personal Voice.* She begins the essay "My Father" by saying that "We use our parents like recurring dreams, to be entered into when needed; they are always there for love or for hate; but it occurs to me that I was not always there for my father" (p. 83). The salient detail she reveals about her father was the amputation of his leg in a battle during World War I and its effect on his life:

> His leg was cut off at mid-thigh, he was shell-shocked, he was very ill for many months, with a prolonged depression afterwards. "You should always remember that sometimes people are all seething underneath. You don't know what terrible things people have to fight against. You should look at a person's eyes, that's how you tell. . . .When I was like that, after I lost my leg, I went to a nice doctor man and said I was going mad, but he said, don't worry, everyone locks up things like that. You don't know—horrible, horrible, awful things. I was afraid of myself, of what I used to dream. I wasn't myself at all" (pp. 88-89).

Marrying his nurse in 1919, he left England with her and traveled to Persia, where Doris was born in the same year. In 1925, they moved to Southern Rhodesia where they eked out a difficult living. The mother apparently suffered most of all. "After a period of neurotic illness, which was a protest against her situation, she became brave and resourceful. But she never saw that her husband was not living in a real world, that he had made a captive of her common sense" (p. 91). Lessing has not spoken very much about her own life. "I married in my teens, when I was far too young, and had two children. That marriage was a failure and I married again" (p. 46). When her second marriage failed, she left Rhodesia with her third child, a son, and settled in England where she has lived ever since.

7 Between the early 1940s and the 1950s, when it ceased to be popular, there were an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 lobotomies performed in the United States. See *Robitscher,* op. cit., p. 88.

8 See Lessing's essay on Sufism in *A Small Personal Voice,* pp. 129-137. "Sufism believes itself to be the substance of that current which can develop man to a higher stage in his evolution. It is not contemptuous of the world. 'Be in the world, but not of it,' is the aim" (p. 133).

9 Frederick R. Karl, "Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy," *Contemporary Literature,* Vol. 13 (Winter 1972), p. 1.

10 Carl G. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Unconscious." Quoted in Liliane Frey-Rohn, *From Freud to Jung,* Fred E. Engreen and Evelyn K. Engreen, trans. (New York: Delta, 1976), p. 59.

11 Quoted by Rubenstein, op. cit., p. in, n. 14. Rubenstein also notes that Lessing's therapist was a Jungian Roman Catholic who converted from Judaism.

12 John Barth, *The End of the Road* (New York: Bantam, 1969). Jacob Homer's devilish psychiatrist defines *mythotherapy* as follows: "Mythotherapy is based on two assumptions: that human existence precedes human essence, if either of the two terms really signifies anything; and that a man is free not only to choose his own essence but to change it at will" (p. 88). He advises Jake to change roles or masks at will, lest the patient become immobilized. Jake's mythotherapy fails, however, because of his fatal commitment to life.

13 Esther Menaker, "Some Inner Conflicts of Women in a Changing Society," in Alan Roland and Barbara Harris, eds., *Career and Motherhood,* (New York: Human Science Press, 1979), p. 89.

14 See Phyllis Sternberg-Perrakis, *"The Golden Notebook:* Separation and Symbiosis," in *American Imago,* Vol. 38, No. 4 (Winter 1981), pp. 407-428. "Although Anna's mother herself plays a very small role in Anna's conscious life, she is visible everywhere in *The Golden Notebook* in the many mother figures in the novel" (p. 410). Apart from this suggestive article (which does not explore Anna's relationship to her parents), there is no mention of the obvious gap in Anna's psychoanalysis. Critics have commented on the mother-daughter relationship in the *Children of Violence* series, however. See Linnea Aycock, 'The Mother-Daughter Relationship in the *Children of Violence* Series," *Anonymous: A Journal for the Woman Writer,* Vol. 1 (Spring 1974), pp. 48-55. For an Eriksonian approach to *Children of Violence* see Ellen Cronan Rose, "The Eriksonian *Bildungsroman:* An Approach Through Doris Lessing," *Hartford Studies in Literature,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1975), pp. 1-15, and also her *The Tree Outside the Window: Doris Lessing's Children of Violence* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1976).

15 Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), p. 130.

16 For an excellent critical discussion of Anna Wulf's integration, see Ruben-stein's chapter on *The*

Golden Notebook, pp. 71-112. Also see her essay, "Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook:* The Meaning of its Shape," *American Imago,* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 40-58.

17 Lessing's future biographers must inevitably confront the question of her relationship to her parents and their objective resemblance to the fictionalized parents in her novels. For example, Lessing's father's leg was amputated during World War I; Ella's father "got unfit for the army and was in the administration for a time" (p. 190); and the cruel old man in Anna's recurrent dream has a wooden leg, a crutch, a hump, or a similar deformity. Just as the spiteful old man in Ella's dream embodies joy and vitality, so does Lessing's brief biographical sketch of her father call attention to his vigor before the terrible disfigurement. "I think the best of my father died in that war, that his spirit was crippled by it. The people I've met, particularly the women, who knew him young, speak of his high spirits, his energy, his enjoyment of life. . . . I do not think these people would have easily recognized the ill, irritable, abstracted, hypochondriac man I knew" *(A Small Personal Voice,* p. 86).

18 Karl, op. cit., pp. 20-26.

19 Esther Menaker, "Self-Psychology Illustrated on the Issue of Moral Masochism: Clinical Implications," *American Journal Of Psychoanalysis,* Vol. 41, No. 4 (1981), p. 305.

20 Aycock, op. cit., pp. 51-54. "Caroline cannot escape from her mother any more than Martha herself can. Later Martha sees the sad irony of the situation. Caroline has not escaped the problems associated with Martha. She ultimately becomes more involved with Martha's parents than Martha is. And someday she will have to know that her mother deserted her" (p. 53).

21 See Henri Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), especially pp. 3-52.

22 R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Pantheon, 1967), p. 89.

23 Several critics have documented the numerous close parallels between Charles Watkins' journey in Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell,* op. cit., and Jessie Watkins' similar journey in Laing's case study, "A Ten-Day Voyage," in *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Pantheon, 1967). See Marion Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psycho-politics and Prophecy," *PMLA,* Vol. 91, No. 2 (March 1976), pp. 245-257; Roberta Rubenstein,

"Briefing on Inner Space: Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing," *The Psychoanalytic Review,* Vol. 63, No. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 83-93; Douglass Bolling, "Structure and Theme in *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell,"* in Annis Pratt and L. S. Dembo, eds., *Doris Lessing: Critical Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), PP-133-147• Oddly enough, Lessing denied having read Laing's *The Politics of Experience.* See her letter to Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing,* op. cit., pp. 196-197, n. 7.

24 R. D. Laing and A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 213. For a useful discussion of Laing see Robert Boyers, ed., *R. D. Laing & Anti-Psychiatry* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974). In an article generally unsympathetic to Laing's assumptions of reality (namely, the belief that reality is "crazy"), the Yale psychiatrist Theodore Lidz acknowledges that Laing has made an important contribution in establishing a link between family structure and schizophrenia:

> We have seen results of research conducted in many parts of the world, and one thing is clear: there has never been a schizophrenic who came from a stable family—at least we can't find any. The hallmark of the thought disorder we identify as a schizophrenic reaction is that it does not lie simply in the patient. There's something wrong in the communication of one or both parents, a disturbing quality in the pattern of the family's interpersonal relations that one can begin to bet on (p. 166).

25 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968). "Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion . . ." (p. no). For a discussion of the relationship between madness and the female condition in four representative female writers, see Barbara Hill Rigney, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Two of the writers in Rigney's book are Woolf and Lessing, and she briefly compares their hostility toward psychiatry. "Sir William Bradshaw humiliates his patients by forcing them to drink milk in bed, but Dr. Lamb's medications are far more potent" (p. 81).

The story of Virginia Woolf's experience with psychiatry is depressing and deserves brief mention here. The source of the fictional Sir William Bradshaw was the eminent

psychiatrist Sir George Savage (1842-1921), President of the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain. An old friend of the illustrious Stephen family, he treated Virginia for many years. An advocate of the Weir Mitchell Rest Cure, he prescribed the same treatment for her as Charlotte Perkins Gilman received: enforced rest, complete isolation, and rich diet. The results were as catastrophic. Like Gilman, Woolf bitterly resented the prohibition from work, and her long history of psychiatric treatment—none of which involved modern depth psychology—contributed to her despair. Her correspondence indicates the extent to which she regarded her psychiatric treatment as punishment. "Think—not one moment's freedom from doctor discipline—perfectly strange—conventional men; 'you shan't read this' and 'you shan't write a word' and 'you shall lie still and drink milk'—for six months" (Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, eds., *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978], Vol. IV, p. 180). For her husband's account of her mental illness and psychiatric treatment, see Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Tears 1911 to 1918* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), especially pp. 75-82; 150-165. Also see Jean O. Love, *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), and Jan Ellen Goldstein, "The Woolfs' Response to Freud: Water Spiders, Singing Canaries, and the Second Apple," Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips, eds., *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 232-255.

Ironically, one of the greatest achievements of the Hogarth Press, which Leonard and Virginia Woolf owned and ran, was the publication of Freud's work in English. (The Hogarth Press publishes the *Standard Edition*.) In *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Tears 1919-1939* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), Leonard Woolf recounts their first and only meeting with Freud, in 1939, after the analyst had fled Vienna for London:

> I feel no call to praise the famous men whom I have known. Nearly all famous men are disappointing or bores, or both. Freud was neither; he had an aura, not of fame, but of greatness. The terrible cancer of the mouth which killed him only eight months later had already attacked him. It was not an easy interview. He was extraordinarily courteous in a formal, old-fashioned way—for instance, almost ceremoniously he presented Virginia with a flower. There was something about him as of a half-extinct volcano, something somber, suppressed, reserved. He gave me the feeling which only a very few people

whom I have met gave me, a feeling of great gentleness, but behind the gentleness, great strength (pp. 168-169).

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