Doris Lessing's Rhodesia: History into Fiction

Eve Bertelsen

Dark Girl's Song
My love who has the tall pale face
Sits talking by the fire at evening,
Visits the country of the cold canals,
Goes to where the Northern spires are.
I say to him, 'My love, the summer's soon.
I have a dress, and scarlet shoes for the sea.'
My love who has the tall pale face
Is clever, and often very kind.

Doris Lessing (1959)
Fourteen Poems

An African once said to me that beyond the white man's more obvious crimes in Africa there was the unforgivable one that 'Even the best of you use Africa as a peg to hang your egos on.' To this crime Mr. Van der Post is open. So are all the rest of us.

Doris Lessing (1958)
Review in the New Statesman

I Introduction

Doris Lessing was born of British parents in Persia in 1919 and lived in Rhodesia from 1925 to 1949, from the ages of 6 to 30. A large number of novels, poems, plays, stories and articles derive from her Rhodesian experience. In this paper I address three main fictional areas: the novel The Grass is Singing (1950), her Collected African Stories, some written in the 40's and 50's (1964), and the novel sequence Children of Violence which comprises five novels: Martha Quest (1952), A Proper Marriage (1954),

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A Ripple from the Storm (1958), Landlocked (1965) and The Four-Gated City (1969). My aim here is to introduce into the discussion of Lessing's fictional versions of Africa a mode of analysis relatively unused in Lessing studies to date. In response to the current debate I propose an hypothesis regarding the various and often wholly separate 'Lessings' appropriated from these texts by normative criticism, especially in the U.S.: Lessing the documenter of Rhodesian life; Lessing the feminist, explorer of the state of mid-century womanhood; Lessing the seer, whose prophetic wisdom penetrates through history and culture to the essential given truth of the ages. I shall refer to this body of commentary more closely as I proceed. At the outset the point I wish to make is a broad one.

It seems to me that what unites the various tendencies enumerated above is that they all subscribe to the notion of a single meaning for any given text. This single meaning is then elaborated to encompass a selective reading of Lessing’s whole oeuvre. For this criticism a literary text is self-coherent and encloses a single approvable meaning which it is the critic’s task to release: she must constitute herself as an equivalently self-coherent subject and demonstrate by her commentary the continuity and unity of the text. By achieving a high degree of interiority with the text she proceeds to systematise the text, filling in its gaps and smoothing over its contradictions in order to produce from it one relatively coherent discourse, an ‘organic unity’ of both form and meaning. Thus the critical discourse repeats the text, rehearsing what has already been said, but more harmoniously, concealing its ruptures and delivering its secret.2

The normative organic reading of a text finds opportunist parallels in political or ideological readings in which the multiplicity of the text must be brought into conformity with a single Marxist or feminist or liberal meaning. In each case disruptive layers of discourse are suppressed or designated secondary functions and incompleteness rectified. It is this perennial effort then, to put together a single coherent and assimilable text I wish to address.

There are at present at least three distinct readings of Lessing’s oeuvre. (a) Firstly, there is the documentary or naturalistic reading. Here the fiction is applauded for its empirical accuracy.3 Identifiable facts and events and elements of local colour are checked against more readily verifiable (historical) accounts of Rhodesian life. The conclusion is that Lessing is a reliable social historian. Some allowance is made for artistic reconstruction (licence), but the mythopoeic elements of the stories are largely suppressed. For this analysis there is a firm cut-off point when Lessing takes off into
metaphor or myth, areas not amenable to verification by the historian.

(b) The second approach selects to focus on the text’s *persona(e)*. This involves a fuller realistic appraisal, and depends on Romantic aesthetics in one of its two common inflections — either the ‘organic’ New Criticism or, in more radical commentary, on the insights of the Goldmann-Lukács school. Here there is more concentration on the personal dimension of the narratives. The heroine is read as ‘typical’, partly a vehicle for rendering the author’s own life experience, partly generalising and evaluative metaphor. Attention is given to elements of autobiography. Sometimes the appeal is to empirical evidence as in (a), but the chief emphasis is on the personal, and the ‘felt effect’ of history in the life of the individual. Naïve versions simply conflate Lessing with her narrators/personae/characters, but more sophisticated commentaries invoke the genre of *bildung*, and trace a systematic unfolding in the lives of leading characters, a personal evolution through specific phases of psychological or psychic development. Where Martha Quest in the historical reading is an undoubted authority on colonial farming, Salisbury society and the machinations of the Rhodesian Labour Party, in the personal version she suffers the common fate of 20th century woman, the traumas of adolescence and marriage, and the frustrations of harmonising the conflicting demands of the personal and the political. This reading has some use for both the historical and the mythopoeic elements in the texts, but synthesises both of these into a version of ‘individual development’. All is grist to the mill of *bildung*, and subject to its dominant structuration of the discourse.

(c) Increasingly common in studies of Lessing from the 70’s onwards are *archetypal* readings of the texts. At worst these characterise Lessing as a guru, a spontaneous fountainhead of inspired wisdom. In several recent carefully documented and scholarly studies, however, emerges an impressive enquiry into the structuring archetypes of the fiction, the influence of dialectical strategies, literary forms, the respective pressures exerted by Marxist and Sufi thought in the work, etc. The tendency of these decidedly mythopoeic versions of Lessing is to abandon for the most part the determinate historical and material contexts of the fiction (Rhodesia, the political Lessing, biography) and produce highly consistent texts of an impressive aesthetic and philosophical order. While such a criticism with its intelligent attention to *genre* can accommodate the full range of Lessing’s output
from social-realism to sci-fi (a versatility not available to (a) and (b)),
it tends to create yet another ranking of the texts in which, because of
its mythopoeic emphasis, some early stories are vastly over-read, and
novels like *Ripple from the Storm*, with its dissection of Communist
politics the happy hunting-ground of the historians, are reduced to
Lessing's least significant achievements.

It is interesting that when mutual challenges arise between these
groupings of critics they make it abundantly clear that they are in fact
reading (and re-constituting) entirely different texts. 6

II Proposal

I have questioned the way many of Lessing's critics assume the spontaneous
unity of a literary text and proceed by repetition to appropriate and display
such a coherence and meaning. It seems to me that literary criticism is very
little, cognitively, if it is merely the facsimile or imitation of its object. 7
In order for criticism to yield any useful knowledge about a text it must, in
reconstituting its object, not merely 'repeat' its apparent unity and apparent
meaning, but investigate it in such a way that it demonstrates the rules of its
functioning. Its aim should be to explore process. Such an investigation will
reveal the *multiplicity* of the text rather than its single germ of truth, and
rather than its organic coherence, its very *incompleteness*. It seems to me
evident that Lessing's oeuvre and its individual component texts have a
number of meanings to offer. This also seems a more challenging idea —
namely, that each book is not merely an extension of one pre-existent
theme, but that the very principle of generation of each text is precisely the
incompatibility of its several conflicting meanings.

One can adopt an alternative approach then, which sees multiplicity and
conflict not as a flaw or limitation in the work to be rapidly remedied by the
critic, but as the text's very openness to reality. One can regard the author's
attempt to reconcile such conflict as the primary artistic impulse. Instead of
smoothing over textual problems then, one would work to recognise and
differentiate this conflict of competing meanings, and so penetrate through
to the text's structuring principle, its *raison d'être*. If the author's desire to
resolve and harmonise tensions is the true reason for the text's composition,
it seems a pity for the critic in her turn to intervene and complete the text,
and in doing so, suppress its most interesting and instructive aspect. 8
It is the text's principle of organisation then, which we wish to scrutinise. It is
the *structure* of a work which makes it available to knowledge, for in its
structuration we can discern the various ways in which the text absorbs,
transforms or displaces those elements, historical, personal or aesthetic,
which derive from the determinate conditions of its production.

In order to understand Lessing's literary version of Africa we will have to look closely at this layering of meanings in her discourse. For this purpose I am going to propose a model which will allow me while preserving a high degree of autonomy for the fiction, also to relate it to history.

**Displacement**

Lessing's literary productions are not the simple expression of her personal, social and political positions, nor are they a verifiable record of Rhodesian life. Any attempt to ascertain the full cultural meaning of Lessing's fictional Rhodesia must take into account the important operation within it of literature itself — the ways in which literary tradition and its forms impose themselves upon the writer, defining in advance the range of her creative freedom, and often displacing an explicit social or political project. The 'meaning' of a text would in this view be seen as the process by means of which its competing discourses transform political, social or personal material into 'art'. This occurs through the material processes of language we term 'literary tradition' and 'literary form'. Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey tell us that 'A literary text . . . presents ideological contradictions in the form of their resolution'. The distinctive strategy of literature consists in a 'prior' recasting of its themes in such a way that their final resolution becomes possible. This is accomplished by means of a series of 'more or less complex displacements'.

I would like to suggest two such displacements central to fiction, and of great importance in Lessing's work.

The first is the necessary personalisation in fiction of social conflict or contradiction. By depicting systemic (historical) relations in the form of their immediate appearance — intersubjective relations among persons — fiction insists on the resolution of such problems by acts of individual choice. The resulting scenario invariably represents historical tensions as hostile to the individual. A further effect of literary form involves the displacement of contradiction via metaphor or symbol onto a timeless plane, where material problems are recast as part of an immutable order of Nature. In this second case of metaphoric displacement, history and its contradictions are acknowledged, but frozen in a natural order and thereby ratified.

The usefulness of such a formulation for our present project is obvious. These displacements correspond closely with the three readings of Lessing texts I have resumed above. And it will also become clear that I take these readings to point to the existence of at least three distinct layers of discourse in the texts themselves.
The 'real' context (objective systemic conditions/Rhodesian 'history')
Displacement to the 'personal' (intersubjective relations)
Displacement to metaphor/'myth' (supra-historical Nature)

Reading a)
Documentary discourse

Reading b)
Bildungsroman

Reading c)
Mythopoesis/archetypal discourse

Metonymic and Metaphoric

Some linguistic evidence for how literary form actually effects such displacements within the body of the text, within its language, is supplied by Roman Jakobson and applied to fiction by critics such as Fowler and Lodge. Working with the two axes indicating the basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour, viz. selection and combination, these critics demonstrate how metaphor is constructed. Selection is produced on the basis of equivalence (the paradigmatic or timeless axis); combination, the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity (the diachronic axis). The projection of the principle of one axis into the other is the basic strategy of literary language. According to Jakobson (op.cit.), 'The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination'. For further discussion of this supportive linguistic work readers must go to the relevant critics. In short, these critics show how authors of fiction, by an incremental process involving repetition of key words and phrases strategically distributed throughout the discourse, as well as by the use of parallelism of rhythm and phrase (usually based on equivalent syntactic units), construct within prose discourse (basically metonymic in its procedures and proceeding by contiguity) a metaphoric layer of meaning (which proceeds by equivalence — i.e. reiterated phrases articulate with each other on the basis of a poetical or musical logic, rather than the normal empirical effects and procedures we expect of prose). The effect of such metaphor is to generalise meaning by proposing a series of equations in which objective events come to reflect inner states, for once the musical logic of metaphor gains ascendancy things can be equated on the magical basis of almost any similarity, including mere sound or rhythmic position. This lends additional weight to Macherey’s proposal on displacements. The way in which such literature selects first the personal and then the metaphoric or mythic as privileged orders, thus layering the text in contradictory 'moments', is to be discerned within the language of the text itself, as the author proceeds to ‘project the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination’. 

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Because this short paper necessarily treats of only one aspect of this particular strategy — viz. the tendency of the fiction spatially to displace meaning within its creation of distinct discourses, it might be useful to suggest here very briefly how Lessing’s characteristic mode of proceeding enacts such a change locally, in particular passages of text. In my application I stress the cumulative effect of innumerable similar passages to create the ‘metaphoric’ or symbolic note which is so characteristic of Lessing’s prose fiction. It will be observed that most of the stretches of text referred to under (b) and (c) below proceed in this way.


And then the bush avenged itself . . . The trees advanced in a rush like beasts, and the thunder was the noise of their coming.
As the brain at last gave way, collapsing in a ruin of horror . . .
the lightning leapt out from the dark, and darted down the plunging steel . . . It was beginning to rain . . .

It remains now for us to superimpose these two models for the purposes of our application. What we hope to establish is the way in which Lessing, working according to the habitual procedures of an essentially Romantic11 literary tradition, displaces an initial ‘factual’ or metonymic depiction of Rhodesia through a series of ‘poetic’ strategies into timeless myth.

III Application

Lessing has always been concerned to emphasise the metaphoric or universal aspect of her fiction:

*The Grass is Singing* focused upon white people in Southern Rhodesia,
but it could have been about white people anywhere south of the Zambesi . . . . (1963)

[GIS and African Stories] were described by reviewers as about the colour problem . . . which is not how I see, or saw them . . . While the cruelties of the white man towards the black man are among the heaviest counts in the indictment against humanity, colour prejudice is not our original fault, but only one aspect of the atrophy of the imagination that prevents us from seeing ourselves in every creature that breathes under the sun. (1964)

. . . I get so impatient with this thing about "autobiographical" . . . the way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity" . . . is to see oneself as a microcosm, and this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience into something larger . . . one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares. (1974)

. . . all these different faiths, or sets of ideas, were talking about the same processes, the same psychological truths . . . . All of it had the same message, or central statements, using different styles, sets of words, terms, historical associations. . . . (1979)

The examples I could adduce are endless. The point I want to make here is that she seems to be rehearsing the procedures which we have outlined above, and is committed to the generalisation of immediate historical experience. Firstly, by rendering it "typical" (the self as "microcosm"), so that the effects of determinate conditions (racism, colonial attitudes, exploitation) come to represent a more general "atrophy of the imagination". Historically engendered thoughts and associations, finally, are translated into supra-historical wisdom, timeless in its features, reduced to a "sameness" rather than seen in their historical character.

The basic discourses in a Lessing text may be typed as (a) the historical discourse, (b) the bildung and (c) the myth. As I now briefly sketch the contours of each of these discourses in the texts under discussion, it should be understood that what each discourse represents is not a discrete "story", but rather an identifiable "moment" of the text, i.e. I am trying to plot in a spatial way a phenomenon that is best described stylistically: a series of effects which record changes of register or tone within the text. Here I merely enumerate the main features of these discourses, supplying parenthetical references to some stretches of Lessing's fiction where each surfaces most clearly.

a) Historical

Lessing's documentation of Rhodesia from 1925 to 1950 covers two main
areas: the rural farming situation 1925-40 and the life and politics of Salisbury 1940-50.

Propaganda from Rhodesia House in London attracts immigrants to the Colony as farmers in 1925 (MQ 20). The character and extent of these farms is precisely described, the topography, flora and fauna, the sense of 'space' and 'emptiness'; the allocation of 54% of the 'good, dark, rich soil' to 5% of the population (whites). As the boom of the mid-20's collapses, agricultural methods deteriorate (AS 19; GIS 85) and many farmers try their hand at poultry, trading, prospecting (GIS 91-101; AS 287-341, 'Eldorado'), often living in economic straits (MQ 20-1; GIS passim). The coercion of native labour creates problematic race relations, the 'Native Problem' (GIS 109-133), and whites blame both the idleness and savagery of the natives and the Government (GIS 146 and passim), often physically assaulting their labourers (GIS 14) or docking wages for minor offences (GIS 149). In Lessing's account economic issues are seen to shape both race relations and the white society itself, which coheres on the basis of its economic needs.

In the domestic sphere the female employer-male servant relation is foregrounded. The strict codes of conduct here are explored, especially the dangers of undue familiarity with or spoiling of one's servants (AS 240 ff., 'A Home for the Highland Cattle', 102 ff., 'Little Tembi'; GIS 109 ff.; PM 284-5). Miscegenation between white men and black women is described (AS 178 ff., 'Leopard George', 355 ff., 'The Antheap'), as is its guilty shadow, the perennial fear of black men raping white women (MQ 46, 64; PM 197). A full account of all these codes appears in the relationship of Mary with Moses (GIS 109-33, 134-end), or in the anticipation of a 'kaffir rising' (LL 247), the murder of white by black indexing racial fear in its most extreme form.

As the locus of Lessing's stories moves to Salisbury in 1940 these codes re-appear in their urban inflection. Density of population requires that segregationist practices be entrenched in law, e.g. the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 (MQ 67). The spacious white suburbs lined with flowering trees are contrasted with the overcrowded and squalid black locations (PM 353 ff.; AS 231, 'A Home for the Highland Cattle'). Meanwhile McGrath's ballroom and the Club provide the social focus for white townsfolk (MQ 118, 145 ff.) and a bogus proof of their 'classlessness' (MQ 154). At the Club tensions between the various white groups are explored: Jews and gentiles, civil service and bourgeoisie, etc. (MQ 76). A schematic analysis of this community is supplied in MQ 53-6.

As Martha eschews suburban domesticity and takes up politics, Lessing provides an extensive account of the Rhodesian Labour Party and its various
associated groupings during the War years. She renames the R.L.P. the 'Social Democratic Party' (RFS and LL passim, especially the disastrous Gwelo Conference of December 1945 which results in the black-white split in the R.L.P.). In these texts Lessing also portrays the paternalistic activities of African welfare societies and the reforms proposed by progressive capitalists, e.g. Mr Player (PM 62-74). The ‘Group’ to which Martha initially belongs (MQ 131, 222; and PM, RFS, LL passim) is identified by Steele as the Current Affairs Group of the Left Book Club; Lessing’s ‘Sympathisers of Russia’ is the Rhodesian Friends of the Soviet Union, active in Salisbury in 1942-3. From these groupings in the fiction emerges a Left Club, Lessing’s ‘Progressive Club’, organised on a more disciplined Party basis. Sympathy for Russia after Stalingrad crystallised also in the Medical Aid for Russia organisation, Lessing’s ‘Help for our Allies’ (PM 306-11). In her Children of Violence novels Lessing concentrates on the small ‘Red’ grouping, largely an exotic phenomenon involving Air Force men (‘Jackie Bolton’) and alien refugees (Anton Hesse, based on Gottfried Lessing, her second husband). This group is largely a study group, and so allows Lessing to present the current Marxist debate. The one controversial public incident in which the ‘Reds’ become involved is the meeting in Harare Hall (RFS 197-203) in February 1944 which led to a virulent newspaper campaign against the S.R.L.P. As this radical interlude fades (end of LL), Lessing has her ‘Reds’ at best contributing to the 50’s reformism of racial partnership or at worst simply being absorbed back into the settler environment (see also Going Home). Lessing’s historical discourse accurately sketches the contours of white Rhodesian society and politics during the period 1925-50. Against a basic background of parochialism and self-interest which she casts as moral hypocrisy, she sets its sub-cultures: The Sports Club set, domesticity in the Avenues, and the limited ‘liberation’ offered Martha by the Group of young intellectual left-wingers. The overall picture is one of a conservative, conformist society, anti-intellectual, combining the exploitation of black labour with deep racial suspicions, and at best a few moderate reformist gestures. In all this the blacks and their lot provide a permanent shadow — they are heavily discussed, but appear on stage only incidentally as servants, waiters, manacled prisoners or token members of political groups.

This scenario with its elaboration of settings, incidents, attitudes and characters constitutes Lessing’s documentary on Southern Rhodesia.

b) Bildungsroman

Upon this historical base Lessing builds her discourse of individual experience, employing a variety of personae, usually women or adolescent
girls, whose personal life experience is made to absorb the shocks of history, giving us what Raymond Williams calls literature's rendition of history's 'felt effect'. In this layer of the fiction we typically read the adventures of a sensitive and intelligent girl who must struggle with the codes and conventions of her society, making a series of efforts to break free and assert an autonomous identity.

GIS
In the novel *The Grass is Singing* Mary is doubly trapped: by the racism of her society and the repressed emotions of her childhood background (32-6). She takes an office job in town (36-46), marries farmer Dick Turner, and proceeds to an intolerable existence on his run-down farm (46 ff.). Via a series of futile attempts to salvage an identity — housekeeping (Ch.5), running away (Ch.6), taking over the running of the farm herself (Ch.7), and coercing her husband (Ch.8) — she slowly collapses (141 ff.). As she withdraws into madness (Chs.9 and 10), she lets go of her prescribed social roles and allows her black servant, Moses, to gain complete mastery of her (Ch.11). She is finally murdered by Moses (206 ff.), and Lessing seems to claim for her at the last a degree of both knowledge and release.16

AS
In the *African Stories* a number of characters are first encountered complacently acting out a pre-ordained social destiny (parochial mores, racism, domesticity). Each in turn is challenged by a critical event. Certain characters embrace the new vision offered by this crisis, and hence achieve an independent selfhood; others, by rejecting the challenge, sink back into conventionality and colonial stupor. The title story 'Chief Mshlanga' is a paradigm case. Here an adolescent girl, conditioned by her European culture (literature, fairytales), can comprehend neither the veld nor the black man. An accidental meeting with the local chief leads her to seek out his kraal, beyond the confines of the white farm. The journey is exposing, and gives her a wholly fresh view of the African, her indigenous environment and herself. The story's ending demonstrates her new insights regarding both the black man's prior rights to the land and the unsuspected depths of her own nature.17

COV
The five novels of the *Children of Violence* sequence provide Lessing's fullest version of the discourse of personal development in the character of Martha Quest, and conform closely to the literary genre of *bildung*.

*Martha Quest:* Martha grows up on her parents' farm, alternately resisting or succumbing to the attitudes of her family and the roles prescribed for
her (Part I). Her personality veers between lassitude and keen insight. Her two sources of challenge are her literary and political reading and intense moments of epiphany on the veld. She moves to a job in the city (‘an extraordinary, magnificent, altogether new life was beginning’, 92). She is initiated into its social life, its cinemas (116), ballrooms (118), and behaviours (161 ff.). She becomes one of the Club set, moving to its fixed sexual roles (167-9) and continuous round of drinking and dancing (145 ff.), in spite of her deep contempt for such a lifestyle. Lessing makes the Club a microcosm of Rhodesian society. Though Martha makes dismissive observations about its members (the Maynards, Talbots, etc.) she participates in its racism (202), masturbatory sex (173-6; 236), war euphoria (223), and marriage rites (240-9). She marries a civil servant, Douglas Knowell, in a deliberate mood of self-deceit (239), and the novel ends with Martha’s deterministic resignation to her social fate. In MQ the contradictory double pattern of Martha’s life and personality is established: she has a critical and independent spirit, but easily lapses into pessimism and inertia. These two moods and their two Martha’s are counterpointed throughout the rest of the series, and become the chief organising principle of the bildung tale.

A Proper Marriage: The second novel opens with a classic set of stereotypes: the men spoiling for war and the women drifting resentfully into pregnancy. Martha is immersed in suburban domestic life. From the start she is inclined to see her marriage as a ‘trap’ or ‘web’ (59; 109) and her pregnancy as a ‘cage’ (118). Her resistance now begins to consolidate around this claustrophobia. In two vivid acts of self-assertion the pregnant Martha bather sensually in a mud-filled pothole (154), and obsessionally rides a ferris wheel (107; 113). Although her experience of childbirth is positive (162), she finds she has no instinct for mothering (197). When Douglas follows the ‘herd’ off to war, she confronts her entrapment (286), and leaves her husband and child. Society masses behind Douglas (340), but for Martha the act is ‘like a rebirth’ (315). Once again she is ‘going to live differently’ (353). She is already involved with a new group, this time the ‘Communists’.

The personal tale that emerges from PM, as its sardonic title promises, is an account of a paralysing suburban marriage and its collapse. Lessing maintains the ambiguous characterisation of Martha, though as this second novel proceeds, her critical capacity moves into the ascendant: her apathy seems to have created its antithesis, and she is compelled into a life of thought and political action. (cf. Joss Cohen’s challenge in MQ 52: ‘So what are you going to do about it?’).
**A Ripple from the Storm:** The reader is hardly surprised when the third novel opens with Martha’s ambiguous insertion into the radical ‘Group’. Although she experiences a reprise of her girlhood euphoria in moments of socialist idealism (34; 62), the narrative ruthlessly scrutinises political activity, exposing the disunity and sexual confusions of the Group, and its isolation from any real base in the black population. Martha admires the communist Anton Hesse for his acute analysis and sense of purpose (62), but seems to intuit from the start that he is frigid, an efficient machine (44). He pours scorn on ‘personal acts of sympathy’, demanding only ‘discipline, punctuality, analysis’ (89-91). Even as Martha exhibits new self-awareness, ‘I must try and keep myself free and open, and try to think more, try not to drift into things’ (186), she drifts into marriage with Anton, this time marrying a utopian ideal in a man who repels her. As the Group disintegrates and the Labour Party splits over African membership (280 ff.), Martha reaches a new nadir of cynicism about both herself and her society. No one is spared, not even the stalwart Mrs Van (245). In spite of visionary moments still embedded in the text at regular intervals and promising eventual resolution, Martha ends this phase of her life in another personal cul-de-sac. She is in a state of sexual and emotional deadness.

**Landlocked:** The world of *Landlocked* is a limbo, as Martha waits for Anton’s naturalisation to come through so that they can divorce and she can leave for England. She is aware of a desperate need to ‘preserve wholeness through a time of dryness and disintegration’ (20). She no longer expects understanding, and now numbs herself against experience for the sake of mere survival. She carries on with her fundraising activities, but without enthusiasm. She sees in both her married friends and socialist comrades the same principle at work: ‘Repetition’ (140). It seems that after the disillusion with politics in *RFS*, although Martha appears to be living routinely, she has detached her ‘essential self’ from her environment, and now seeks a more esoteric route to salvation. The book’s only positive aspect is a healing affair that Martha has with Thomas Stern, a European Jewish settler. This time she will trust her ‘honest body’ (67).

In Thomas’s market garden setting they make love amidst growing plants, trees and rain (102-3). He helps her to reopen various ‘shut doors’ of her past (see *MQ* 92), and reconstruct her self-image (105 ff.). By achieving for the first time in her life a ‘physical surrender’ (222) Martha begins to unify herself. But soon Thomas leaves to fight in Israel, later dying in a deranged state in the bush. Mr Quest dies too, and again the book ends on a sombre note: Marjorie, Jasmine and Martha, three survivors of the original ‘Communist Group’ of eight years before, attend a meeting with a depressing
sense of déjà vu — 'the dramatis personae were the same . . . the plot was also' (282). Jasmine waves Martha off to London with a (for Martha heavily ironic) call of 'Barricades!' (288).

The Four-Gated City: The action of FGC takes place in London. Although this strictly falls outside our African theme, it is important to follow the sequence to its conclusion. It might also be noted at this point that while Lessing wrote the first two books of this series, MQ (1952) and PM (1954) shortly after her Rhodesian experience, RFS was written in 1958, after Hungary and Lessing’s break with the Communist Party in Britain, and LL only in 1965 after her most revolutionary product, The Golden Notebook (1962). In GN Lessing deconstructs the whole process of writing a novel, and as a result, when she comes back to complete the writing of her last two obligatory volumes of Children of Violence, LL (1965) and FGC (1969), she produces a form, especially in FGC, that is on her own admission 'shot to hell'. In FGC the personal story is difficult to disentangle from the deliberate didacticism and symbolism of the book.

What we have in terms of plot is Martha’s eventual arrival in London. Her impatient romantic longing for a ‘different’ vision now appears to overtake her. All of the earlier ‘moments of illumination’ in MQ, PM, RFS, and LL are self-consciously drawn together as Martha is propelled by the author towards a position of mysticism and transcendence. The locus for most of the book is the Coldridge house in London. Here the intellectual husband Mark sits upstairs in his study, his walls covered with charts of world politics — famine, pollution, nuclear weapon sites, while his schizophrenic wife Lynda lurks in the basement, developing her occult powers. Martha mediates between them, and in doing so rapidly makes her way through every struggle of the liberal intelligentsia of the 50’s and 60’s: organised politics, the Cold War, disillusionment with the socialist dream, permissiveness, treatment of social deviants, especially the mentally ill (303 and passim). As a result of this odyssey she rejects all ‘labels’ as futile (465-6). After ‘official’ politics and education have been systematically discarded, Martha concentrates on mapping her ‘inner space’. She goes through an unsuccessful bout of psychoanalysis, and then starts reading all the literature her culture has ‘suppressed’ — astrology, witchcraft, Buddhism, Sufi (528). Several critics have noted that while Lessing in FGC seems to be defiantly disowning her commitments of the past twenty years, she is involving herself, via her surrogate Martha, in yet another fashionable system of ideas — a combination of R.D. Laing’s anti-psychiatry and the new mysticism. At any rate, Martha becomes inseparable from the mad Lynda, who slowly helps her to realise her long-
suppressed psychic self, e.g. her capacity for telepathy (513-5). In some passages Martha dismisses the mass of humanity as ‘slugs . . . half-drugged or half-asleep . . . as if hypnotised and poisoned’. As Martha appropriates ‘everything rejected by official culture and scholarship’ the book moves into a science-fiction mode (528). The Apocalypse does indeed occur, and the book’s epilogue gives us Martha in the future: she is living in an Edenic setting on a post-nuclear island with a race of mutant children who are psychically gifted.

(I have mentioned that a number of Lessing commentators take pains to reconstitute the five novels of the Children of Violence sequence into one coherent and organic text — the continuous bildung of Martha Quest. It seems to me obvious that when the Marxist Lessing wrote Martha Quest in 1952 she was probably projecting a very different series of novels from that which we have finally received. While this paper is not concerned with biographical evidence per se, it does seem worth noting that the various changes of direction in the novels — disillusion with marriage (PM 1954) and with politics (RFS 1958 and LL 1965) do correspond closely with the author’s own positions at the time of composition — i.e. Lessing is writing with post-1956 hindsight about Rhodesian politics of the 1940’s. And in FGC (1969) she is describing Martha’s arrival in London in about 1950 with 20 years of London life and politics behind her. In other words, Lessing has already done a major job on trying to inter-connect the various texts, so different in their contexts of production, interweaving images and experiences which will cohere to body forth a continuous story of Martha’s social and psychic evolution. It seems to me that an ‘organic’ reading, following on this, only serves to compliment Lessing on her good first-aid, and to conceal a few of the remaining lacunae.)

c) Symbolic (Myth)

My sketch of the ‘personal’ discourse must now serve as the basis for a schematic summary of some of the ‘symbolic’ aspects of Lessing’s African texts. I have asserted above that throughout Lessing’s work there is a continuous accretion of layers of metaphorical meaning — mainly achieved through the repetition of key words and motifs, but often too the product of rhythmic parallelism (Jakobson’s poetic logic — the principle of selection or equivalence). The effect is constantly to suggest a more general or universal meaning for discrete historical events and experiences, no matter how specific and realistic their initial signification in the discourse. In this tendency to symbolisation then, we see the full effect of ‘the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination’ (see p.20 above).
The iconography of *The Grass is Singing* is highly Romantic. Mary’s life is ‘poisoned from the start’ (40); she lives in a trance and metaphors of numbness and paralysis cluster about her life. The marriage of ‘opposites’ (40-46) perpetuates the need for continued repression on her part. From the time she arrives on the farm, images of nature as ‘hostile’ and ‘dangerous’ (164), ‘strange’ and ‘savage’ (54-5), are repetitively deployed. Trees, the weather, the sun, the wildlife, the Africans alike earn these epithets (120-1; 169). Black and white, darkness and light antitheses abound, and the inimical, hostile and threatening bush, a ‘darkness’ in itself, constantly menaces Mary with its primeval chaos. As the narrative proceeds, these external threats are repetitively identified with Mary’s own repressed sexuality, her inner ‘darkness’ (157; 160), and also with the black servant, Moses. The book’s climax orchestrates the full repertoire of hostility-darkness-violence imagery. First Moses gains ascendancy over Mary through his prior ‘natural’ authority. Finally an apocalyptic thunderstorm precipitates the black avenger as violent *deus-ex-machina*: ‘the bush avenged itself’ (201-218).

A repeated symbolic pattern in the *African Stories* is that of a moment of vision, usually in a natural setting, which brings about a change in the personality. The literary tropes here are epiphany and metamorphosis, and Lessing uses these to achieve development or transition in the strongly deterministic universe of her fiction. I refer again to the story ‘Chief Mshlanga’ as a typical case. It is structured symbolically as follows: A young white girl (sleeping princess) is held in thrall by her European fairytales — she quotes Tennyson’s ‘Lady of Shallot’, the moment of her rebellion when ‘the mirror crack’d from side to side’* (13). She is numb to the African veld, its flora and fauna and the common humanity of its natives. A chance meeting on a footpath with Chief Mshlanga (is he a type of the Devil?) jerks her out of her dream, casting a new spell upon her, from an anterior source. She compulsively travels, sans customary ‘gun and dog’, to Mshlanga’s kraal. The landscape is Edenic, replete with groves, vines and exotic animals. As in *GIS*, the qualities of ‘old and evil’, ‘big and dark and angry’, and ‘fearful’ predominate (18 ff.), but with more positive connotations here. It is made clear that the ‘terror and panic’, the sense of ‘meaninglessness’ she experiences *en route* are challenging and constructive emotions, and they do indeed serve to structure a new vision via a version of

*(of course this happens directly after the Lady has accidentally seen Sir Lancelot of the ‘coal black curls’ passing by her cursed tower!)*
the Fortunate Fall. She partakes of knowledge (Good and Evil), and the closing incidents of the tale demonstrate her new ability to understand her parents, the African and herself: she is left wondering at 'the unsuspected vein of richness [she has] struck' (24).

COV

As the novels of the Children of Violence sequence unfold, it becomes increasingly clear that here too Lessing is concerned to counterpoint her realistic version of 'growing up in Rhodesia' with older patterns which derive from fairytale and myth. Several critics have remarked on the significance of Martha's surname, and I am indebted to the leads that they provide. One could constellate the archetypal symbols of COV in a number of ways. I confine myself here to profiling the myth of the 'Quest', a paradigm case which seems to absorb the rich patterning of 'trees', 'rooms' and 'houses' noted by earlier commentators. The trajectory of the 'Quest' myth will also be seen to accommodate a number of inflections of the 'bildung' or evolutionary idea. I have already remarked on certain discontinuities within the sequence, on the implications Lessing's changing attitudes during the period 1950-70 have for the separate novels of COV.

It seems to me that it is at the a-historical or mythic level of the work that she manages to be most consistent; it is at this level of the discourse that she most successfully 'presents [her] ideological contradictions in the form of their resolution' (Macherey). Imagery that has been established in MQ on a fairly intuitive basis (premissed, I have suggested, on a Marxist view of society and its determination of individual consciousness) is in subsequent books taken up and elaborated with self-conscious care. The symbolic discourse is manipulated by the author as a means of harmonising otherwise disruptive elements.

Landscape: In all five novels the Rhodesian landscape and its weather are used as both index and icon — a measure of the condition of society and a symbol for the heroine's imaginative development. Dryness is a central motif. The 'terrible month' of Rhodesian October replaces Eliot's 'cruellest month' of April at critical points in the texts to signify cynicism, frustration and paralysis. October is Martha's 'birth month' (MQ 217), and its omen is here fully spelt out: a parched land lies waiting for rain. Martha's claustrophobia as a child (MQ 217), as a wife and mother (PM 277; 282; 297), reaches snapping point during this season. Aridity is paramount when the political Group collapses (RFS 320), Martha makes love with Anton Hesse under a dry electric storm (RFS 239; 247; LL 20), and after Thomas Stern leaves her (LL 201) 'the tense, fighting smell of October [is] like...
cordite’. Her father’s devastated farm and the physical and psychic illness of her parents is of course the initiating image. In RFS, with ‘dry dust in her nostrils’, she admits ‘I don’t know anything yet. I must try to keep myself free and open . . .’ (186).

Against multiple images of dryness are set a series of metaphors of rain, wetness and mud. These are often associated with thunderstorms, and usually mark a major rite of passage in Martha’s life. The first of these is the Van Rensburg’s dance (MQ 89-96) where Martha splashes in the mud in her sacramental white dress. The next is her first Club dance (MQ 161-6): the same white dress, revamped by the ministering Donovan, and mud again. When Martha is pregnant she swims erotically in a mud-filled pothole (PM 153). The redemptive love-making scenes with Thomas Stern are all associated with wetness, often loaded with erotic suggestion (‘long, slow, repeated liquid phrases’; ‘rods of strong wet drove and stung’ LL 108). In all of these books the natural characteristics of the seasons are rarely mentioned without being promptly metaphorised and aligned with the human drama.

A development of the ‘wetness’ image is that of the sea, an image which becomes obsessonal as the story proceeds. Martha dreams continually of the English sea as a girl (MQ 7; 82); the Van Rensburg’s house is to her always ‘a beacon’ in the sea of the veld (PM 31); Salisbury’s blocks of flats are ‘cliffs’ rising out of the sea (PM 145); Martha’s mind is ‘a lighthouse’ which keeps her sane during the agonies of maternity (PM 303-4). At the end of the life of the Group Martha sinks into sleep ‘like a diver weighted with lead’, and she dreams endlessly in LL of ‘getting off the altitude’ to her dream sea (LL 205-6). At LL’s start she has realised that she must ‘preserve wholeness in a time of dryness and disintegration’ (LL 44), and this sets the tone for that whole book. When Martha finally reaches London (FGC), she discovers not her ideal sea but the filthy Thames (FGC 24 ff.), ‘polluted waters . . . refuse . . . garbage and excrement . . . smelling so evilly’. But in Lynda’s basement flat, ‘underwater . . . in a deafening impersonal ocean’ (FGC 505; 511), she begins to restore her intuitive selfhood. In the final book’s epilogue the landscape of the Quest comes full circle, and Martha is on an island in the sea with the mystic children of the future. This cycle of images traces Martha’s progress from the original Waste Land of the colonial farm, through its false City (Salisbury, with its life-destroying rituals), and finally to London, which in spite of its decadent horrors, finally vouchsafes an inner serenity. Throughout, images of aridity and wetness and seasonal stasis and change index critical phases of the narrative.
The houses which grow out of this landscape repeat its archetypal features. The transitory farmhouse, an intruder on the land, eventually melts back into its mud; Martha’s matrimonial home on the Avenues is stifling in its conformity; the Clubhouse is a bogus temple (parody of Martha’s ideal dream city); Thomas Stern’s loft is an ‘upper room’, a place of revelation and spiritual succour; the three-layered house in London is clearly based on the proposal Mark-superego, Martha-ego, Lynda-libido from study to cellar; and the final Faris Island Eden transcends all these images of enclosure, reflecting back to Martha’s original utopian dream.

The symbol of Martha’s Ideal City which threads its way through all the books has been amply dealt with by the critics. Another feature of the symbolic discourse is the cycle of rituals or rites of passage carefully established in the texts. These dovetail with metaphors of season, landscape and images of enclosure to establish symbolic modes of stasis or transition. Martha is initiated into her society via a job, the cinema, the ballroom (MQ 116 ff.), until she reaches its ‘holy of holies’, the Club. Eltis notes in this connection a series of dances: at the Van Rensburg’s, the Club, at McGrath’s ballroom during the War, at each of which Martha is initiated into a new phase of her development — here, adulthood, colonial society, marriage and her own aloneness respectively. In each case a ‘fairy-tale’ mode is operative: she moves from paralysis and enthrallment to new awareness. In each case reference is deliberately made to those older dances — the tribal African dance, Afrikaner or Jewish or Greek ethnic dances, and much is made of the war dances of the black tribes ‘upon whose bones the present buildings have been erected’ (MQ 84-5; LL 141 ff., etc.). In London Martha asks in despair ‘Mother, must I go on dancing?’. And a number of images connoting the mad inner dance of the self culminate in the sequence’s final musical image — the pure notes of a flute on Faris Island (FGC 658).

The last point I wish to make in this short paper is regarding the corrupted version of the Quest story which operates in Lessing’s narrative, namely the ‘Sleeping Beauty’ story. This pattern is employed as part of Lessing’s process of ‘Repetition’, and organises that alternation of paralysis and intense willed activity which we have seen in Martha’s career. While Lessing seems to propose at the social-realist level of her discourse that Martha’s lethargy is the product of the politics of the family, here, in the myth, her paralysed father and neurotic mother with their ‘twin litanies of pain’ are presented respectively as impotent king and evil enchantress. Mrs Quest is invariably cast as a force of darkness, subverting her daughter’s energies and invoking sleep (MQ 102-4 etc.). She bewitches Martha’s
clothing, and casts a spell on her room in town (MQ 23-6; 102-4). By letters she acts as proxy (MQ 229-34). Through surrogates (Douglas MQ 257-9; Donovan MQ 161 ff. et al.) she retains control of Martha at a distance. She usurps the role of bride (MQ 269), mother (PM 123), and housewife (PM 284), invariably intercepting her daughter’s rites of passage. When she appears in London she paralyses Martha all over again (FGC 225 ff. ‘She was calm. But she could not get out of bed.’). The initial image here is found at the opening of MQ (32):

Her face fell in patient and sorrowful lines, the eternal mother, holding sleep and death in her twin hands like a secret and poisonous cloud of forgetfulness. . . . a baneful figure in the nightmare in which she herself was caught.

The mythic discourse of COV presents us then, with a version of the Quest story, sometimes in its corrupt fairy-tale inflection, with Martha typed either as the active Quester or as the enthralled Princess. This search is pursued from Martha’s first intimations of wholeness on the veld, through a series of rituals cast as false starts and dead ends (marriage, sex, politics, psychoanalysis),* until under the tutelage of the mad Lynda (Cassandra?), she restores her true ‘selfhood’. In Martha’s case this turns out to be strangely impersonal — a oneness with the cosmos discovered via madness, anti-psychiatry and Sufi mysticism.

IV Conclusion

I appear to have spent most of my space here merely asserting the existence of a number of competing discourses in Lessing and providing an elementary ‘map’ of at least three distinct layers of writing. In so doing I have left myself little space for the second and third phases of the argument which would involve the how (a detailed analysis of the language to show the way in which each discourse is stylistically established) and the why (an investigation of the text’s political and cultural determinations — the ‘ideology’ of the text). If it can be accepted that this paper mainly serves as a modest assertion of the what, namely ‘what have we to do with in a typical Lessing text?’, then maybe I will be permitted to conflate the second and third phases in some suggestive concluding comments.

To justify the polemics of my Introduction I must link the scenarios I have resumed above with my claim that the clue to the full ‘meaning’ of a literary text is to be found in its articulation of discourses, its structuring

*Each presided over by its evil demon: Binkie, Mr Maynard, Douglas, Anton Hesse (and through them all, Mrs Quest) — or its friendly spirit: the Cohens, Mrs Van, Maisie, Thomas Stern, Lynda.
raison d’être. I shall do this schematically, since it seems to me that I have perhaps already overstated my case.

Here the reader must refer back to my summary of some of the ways in which literary form effects discursive displacement, above. What I hope I have provided in this paper is some evidence for an understanding of Lessing’s literary version of ‘Africa’.

GIS:
Lessing’s central problem here is that she is torn between a political (social-realist) discourse which explains Mary’s problems rationally in terms of the family, heredity, her personal psychology and the colonial social structure — and a metaphoric (mythic) discourse which views these problems as irremediable, they are projected as timeless issues of Nature and human nature, ‘the way things are’. In GIS one sees these discourses virtually polarised. The most extreme form of deterministic explanation derived from Freud is offered for Mary’s state (‘one can’t really blame her either. She can’t help being what she is’ — 32; ‘Mary followed the course her upbringing made inevitable’ — 126). The behaviour of the white group is also seen deterministically, via an inflection of Marx, totalised and acting to powerful social rules, ‘instinctively’ (25 and passim). These two deterministic explanations operating in the social-realist discourse (resumed under a and b above) cohere insofar as they both draw on a rational European tradition of development: the Marxist proposal of ‘modes of production’ with its corollary that ‘social being determines consciousness’ and Freud’s proposal ‘id-ego-superego’ permit a transference from the Marxist political-economic model in the social story (appropriation and oppression) to the psychological model in the personal one (repression of the libido). The political solution to the impasse (reinstatement of the land’s rightful heirs in government) mirrors the individual solution offered (incorporation of the dark side of the personality into the conscious life of the ego). In a similar way the social scenario: racial antagonism — injustice — resentment — violence parallels the personal: repression — neurosis — nervous breakdown. In Lessing’s fictional strategy Mary as protagonist must absorb the essentials of both models and validate this transference.

The first two discourses generate the mythic story in the manner indicated above, i.e. the discourse accumulates a number of key words and atmospheres which accrete into metaphor, transferring the timeless principle into the discourse of historical combination. These equivalences pivot on the antithesis of ‘unspoilt nature’ and social-psychological oppression: primitive vs. complex states, light vs. darkness, artificial order vs. primeval chaos. The African context, and Moses as its personification,
are characterised as implacably hostile and savage. When in her last moments Mary acknowledges her own 'savage self' it is the bush in the person of its black avenger Moses which performs its final 'triumph of darkness'.

To return to my earlier point — the final 'meaning' of the book cannot be reduced to the effect of any single one of these discourses. It is in Lessing's attempts to reconcile these elements that the full 'ideological' impact of the novel resides, specifically in the displacements effected from a) an indictment of colonial narrowness to b) the story of one woman's madness to c) a symbolic enactment of the proposal 'Society versus Nature'. The meaning of G/S, and hence Lessing's literary reading of Africa is to be found within the fictional strategy itself: in the procedures by which it seeks to reconcile a number of contending cultural explanations and their innate contradictions.

AS:
The mode of epiphany organises most of the African Stories, the opportunity for a larger vision being sometimes embraced ('Chief Mshlanga', 'Sunrise on the Veld', 'No Witchcraft for Sale', 'The Antheap'), and sometimes denied ('Little Tembi', 'Leopard George', 'Winter in July', 'A Home for the Highland Cattle'). In each case the impressive material detail of an historical story becomes the vehicle for a personal tale on the atrophy or expansion of the imagination. And in each case the story's theme is established through a network of symbols.

COV:
The modes of displacement in this series of novels support my hypothesis admirably. A full account of the chronological contexts of the separate books would pinpoint the precise inflection of meaning in each phase (e.g. the 'Ideal City' is at first a symbol of utopian socialism, later a personal wish projection and finally a mandala of mystic harmony). Suffice it to say here that any picture of historical Rhodesia that exists in the text is intricately elaborated through bildung and myth. The objective, systemic conditions of Rhodesian society are first of all rendered in the form of their immediate appearance (Martha Quest's personal experience). This effectively strips social contradictions of their objective character and makes them resolvable by acts of individual will, creating a discourse which Eagleton would call 'phenomenological'. The effect of this discourse is to totalise society and present it as per se destructive to the individual. In the second phase of metaphoric displacement (myth) the contradictions of history, and the personal experience of it, seem, while tacitly acknowledged, to be frozen in a natural order and thereby ratified. The Quest myth’s
supra-historical account, through its symbols of Nature and human nature, suggests by allegory that this is simply ‘the way things are’.

We have noted that the literary tropes of epiphany and metamorphosis serve, in combination with metaphor, to permit transition and escape within Lessing’s otherwise highly deterministic universe. The twin poles of Lessing’s discourse can probably be defined as determinism and Romance. What we have tried to trace here is the strategy by which her fiction effects an ideological reconciliation between the two.

V Coda

In her ‘Preface’ to The Golden Notebook (1971) Lessing says

My aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped . . . The book is alive and potent and fructifying . . . only when its plan and shape and intention are not understood, because that moment of seeing the shape and plan and intention is also the moment when there isn’t anything more to be got out of it.

And when the book’s pattern and the shape of its inner life is as plain to the reader as it is to the author — then perhaps it is time to throw the book aside, as having had its day, and start again on something new.

(my emphasis)

This sentiment is, of course, based on Lessing’s didactic intentions as an author and explains her lifelong antipathy to criticism and the whole scholarly enterprise. Certainly a book works its unconscious and somatic (ideological) effect most strongly ‘when it is not (intellectually) understood’. But there is another way altogether of seeing the issue — one that stresses the cognitive capacity of literature, its capacity to increase knowledge. I have argued that it is only when we grasp the text’s principle of composition that we begin to understand its relation to reality. Far from ‘throwing the book aside’ at that moment, it could be argued that it is only at that moment that we begin, in the fullest sense, to ‘read’. The text does indeed talk to us most articulately ‘through the way it is shaped’. And there is much more ‘to be got out of it’ than is dreamed of by its author!

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Editions of Lessing novels referred to in the text:
The Grass is Singing, Penguin, Middlesex (1961) GIS
Children of Violence All in Panther Books:
I Martha Quest (1966) MQ
II A Proper Marriage (1966) PM
III A Ripple from the Storm (1966) RFS
IV Landlocked (1967) LL
V The Four-Gated City (1972) FGC
These are the most readily available editions of the fiction. Dates of first publication are given in my Introduction.

My references to the African Stories are all to Volume I: *This was the Old Chief’s Country.*

1. Lessing’s major fictional works with an African content in order of publication:
   - *This was the Old Chief’s Country*, Michael Joseph, London (1951)
   - *Martha Quest*, Michael Joseph, London (1952)

   Also:
   - *Mr Dolinger*, Unpublished play


   Two important recent books on Lessing avoid the pitfalls I outline here and admirably confront the interface between history and fiction. These are:


   Claire Sprague, ‘Without Contraries is No Progression’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 26 (Spring 1980).


8. Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory, London (1978), esp. 'The critic is not, of course, a therapist of the text: his task is not to cure or complete it, but to explain why it is as it is', p.92. See whole of Ch.2, 'Towards a Science of the Text'.


15. The studies listed under 4 above all focus on 'bildung'.


17. Betsy Draine, op.cit., Ch.1: 'The Grass is Singing: Pressures of Form and Ideology'.

18. A play on the name of Lessing's first husband, Frank Wisdom.


21. My theory is that Lessing derives much of her interest in archetypes at this stage at second hand from T.S. Eliot, and, via *The Waste Land*, from Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The number of direct derivations from Eliot are astonishing, both in GIS, which takes its title and epigraph from Eliot's *Waste Land* and in COV, which is premised on the 'quester' myth. I am surprised that there is no Ph.D. yet on this!


On 'myth' see also:


Several critics discuss the symbol of Lessing's 'City' (Thorpe, Stern, Sprague, Draine et al, cited above), but as far as I know none attempts to plot the important changes within the continuity of the symbol from *MQ* to *FGC*. Its final inflection at the end of the series on Faris looks very much like some of the older Romantic dreams — e.g. Coleridge and D.H. Lawrence projecting a 'new society' of kindred souls, a remnant elite who will restore the world from its own (here, literal) ashes. A far cry from Martha's earliest dreams in the veld which are surely of a classless society.
