The Four-Gated City: Politics of Despair

In every cry of every man
In every infant's cry of fear
In every voice, in every ban
The mind-forged manacles I hear—
William Blake
"London"

The Four-Gated City (1969) is a different kind of book. Besides an unusual “Appendix” affixed to its layered narrative, it has imbibed all those “mind-forged manacles” which can at best be described as an “unhealthy boon” of man’s evolutionary leap until the close of the twentieth century. Falling at the end of the novel-sequence, it marks not only a shift in time but in space too. The narrative opens in London in the year 1950 and includes a futuristic vision going up to the summer of 1997. As an exhaustive exploration of our century’s malaise, the fifth volume comes closest to spanning the entire spectrum of Lessing’s oeuvre—themes, images and motifs. The novel can certainly be read in terms of her prime concerns: fragmentation versus wholeness, order versus chaos, individual versus society and fiction versus reality. These themes, working through an intricate network of sub-texts, make tremendous demands on the reader, while lending it a form that Lessing has described as "shot to hell.” This, to a great extent, accounts for the enigmatic quality of the novel—the reason it
has attracted such differing descriptions as “a curious finale” to *Children of Violence*, “the more iconoclastic” than even *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), and “a monstrous sort of masterpiece.”

But that is not all. *The Four-Gated City* has another peculiarity: it provides a glimpse of a person—Doris Lessing—in the process of change. Structurally, the fifth volume has imbibed all the contextual pressures that the author’s life, political theories, past works, and the changing interests place on a work of art. Her fiction up to 1966 had come out of her life, but sometime before or during the writing of *The Four-Gated City* one of those critical, double-edged shifts occurred in terms of ideology as well as narrative strategies. Florence Howe outlines some of its aspects as an interest in Eastern thought, the strengthening of belief in the mind beyond material conditions, and most importantly a change in the political terms of the novel.

This shift is reflected through a number of diverse and complex concepts embedded in the otherwise straight and linear narrative. They are: clinical madness—Lynda Coldridge, willed madness—Martha; creation in destruction—the apocalypse, and hope in despair—the utopia. This elucidation of “the absurdity of the familiar” through an intermingling of the abstract and the concrete points to Lessing’s changed creative intention—an intention that Virginia Tiger has seen as “Lessing’s need to test fictive limits in her interrogation of fiction’s capacity to represent what she takes to be reality.”

*The Four-Gated City* brings into focal light the blemished contours of the European culture; its first half, particularly, conveys the precise emotions of despair and loss. These are given a special currency and validity that they seem to explain the entire generation to itself and the world. The novel, thus, is placed in that middle area from which the finest fiction comes, which Mark Schorer defines as “the intersection of the stream of social history and the stream of soul.” Its entire dialectical field and its generic tension are rooted in this “intersection.”
The socio-political conditions of the present have always perturbed Lessing. Voicing her anxiety during the Stony Brook interview (1968), she said: "We've been so damned corrupted. Humanity has got worse and worse, puts up with more, gets more and more bourgeois." The narrative accommodates this stance: every now and then it is punctuated with world events and their cross-effects, emphasizing that while the individual has been persistently diminished (FGC.220-25), the collectives that encompass him have simultaneously multiplied in number as well as in force.

Despair is pain unbounded and hopeless. In the twentieth century it is taken to be an inseparable part of the philosophical and literary baggage. Kierkegaard prognosticated that form of spiritual cul-de-sac which he called "despair"; Nietzsche politicised the term by redefining it as "nihilism." From then onwards the existentialists made it into an irrevocable fact of man's fate. In literature, however, the concept of despair goes back to the Greek tragedy; in fact, all tragic drama would lose in its meaning and intensity if the emotion of despair is withdrawn from it. Fiction, too, enshrines some equally remarkable examples of individual despair. One immediately thinks of Anna Karenina's mental turmoil as she walks towards the railway lines, or Maggie Tulliver's despair in her yearning for reconciliation with her estranged brother; or the numbing, mind-impairing despair of Raskolnikov. The circumstantial causes of despair in these instances may be variously interpreted, or they may equally be reduced to a single social content. But in all these cases despair has to do with the individual's personal guilt. The cause of despair in The Four-Gated City, in contrast, is the cultural guilt.

The theme of despair is a continuously running thread throughout the sequence; in The Four-Gated City it becomes the novel's organising principle. In the beginning of the sequence Martha views her confinement in the white dominated colony as "the nightmare in which she herself was caught"(MQ.39). As the pressures of role-expectations mount in A Proper Marriage, her desperation takes the form of "the old fear as if nets were
closing around her" (216). The sphere of despair expands when Martha gets involved with the revolutionary collective in opposition to the tradition-bound, reactionary social forces. It, however, turns into political despair with the realization that all idealistic gestures do not get translated into meaningful action (RFS, 203; 279). Despair as a symptom of so many psychological and political disillusionments that followed the Second World War gets sharply localized in Thomas Stern’s attitude. His anguish ridden notes do not merely reflect “the Jewish acquiescence in suffering,” but “it is everyone’s acquiescence in suffering” (LL, 337). As far as despair in terms of a cosmic fate is concerned, it is to Landlocked that The Four-Gated City clearly and directly looks back.

In all the previous four volumes, society remains a framework to define and investigate the individual’s social/political predilections. In the fifth volume, the ever-present social pole becomes the controlling factor, even of Martha’s decisions and perplexities, as it is of Myshkin’s in The Idiot. Society comes to acquire the force of “an independent organism, a character in itself,” to use Raymond Williams’ words.9

Starting from the London backwaters, the narrative meanders through different social sub-structures. The opening chapter provides a very vivid glimpse of the working-class London—its politics and general plight. With chapter four of part one, we move on to the upper classes, the section that keeps on wavering between the capitalist and leftist stance. It is to this class that Lessing directs her analytic gaze. As the novel proceeds, a pattern of events unfolds. These events range from lucid social vignettes to private moments of overwhelming emotional intensity. Among the “sane” adults and the nihilistic youth, there is the society of those labelled as “mad” (Lynda and her cronies). Unable to cope with the pressures of life and time, they are lost in the abysmal depths of their own consciousness. These situations are used as vantage-points to take into view the individual as well as collective efforts to fight against all-pervading discontent and despair. Last of all, there is an oblique reference to a utopian society and its
subsequent disintegration. Everything culminates in a sort of apocalypse; its survivors—seven children with ESP—herald the new society while Joseph Batts personifies the new man (FGC, 665).

This, to a great extent, substantiates Lynn Sukenick's argument that Lessing's "habit of mind is to see socially, not personally." The Four-Gated City views the entire subject of consciousness from this angle. In fact, the collective forms one of the three major poles which are in a triangular relationship: the individual and the collective occupying the base, the whole forming the apex as also their point of convergence. The tension among the three runs parallel with other themes which this tricky configuration and its concomitant factors engender. The intention in The Four-Gated City is to transcend the patterns of social conformity.

The novel takes Martha into deeper terrain. She is no longer seen grappling with various collectives once she has envisioned the whole spectrum of human experience. This becomes possible mainly by way of her interaction with different individuals of Mark's family—"every member of which held potentiality for disaster" (FGC, 168). In fact, it is much more mellowed and humanist Martha that has come to The Four-Gated City. For the mature Martha, her physical impressions of environment open up a whole landscape of inner consciousness. Rather, one may say, that it is at the level of consciousness that she is experiencing an intensity of existence, "an intensity of packed experience" as she refers to it (FGC, 557).

The attempt is to be less subjective, to accept and assimilate the "otherness" and to evolve a wholesome view of life. This is reflected in the altered narrative tone: the narrative voice is more impersonal than the previous four volumes—"an observing presence" (FGC, 48). That we are entering a different orbit, a different level of truth is obvious by the end of the first chapter of part one. The narrative details, throughout the novel, are placed simultaneously "inside the empty space, away from ordinary living; and inside ordinary living, when the space seem[s] a far country" (FGC, 50).
*Landlocked* describes the slow dwindling of a political faith: how the changed political imperatives bring a change in the public psyche. Individuals are "hemmed in" by this external reality as much as by their personal compulsions. In *The Four-Gated City*, the scope widens. The brittleness of various dimensions of reality becomes the defining feature, and the concept of fragmentation itself comes under scrutiny with focus on both the collective and the individual consciousness.

**A Fragmented Reality**

While *The Four-Gated City* is a continuation of its preceding four volumes, thematically it is closer to the key-motifs of *The Golden Notebook*. Lessing's growing point seems to be the observation that "everything is cracking up" (*GN*, 25). The effect of the outer chaos is the increasing inner chaos of the individual. This sense of disharmony is emphasized in Martha's bewilderment as she tries to absorb the economic and political realities of London: what she sees of the British life across the river and what she reads in the British newspapers is at complete variance. The reality of "this doomed city, all cracked and thinned and darkened by war" (*FGC*, 46) clashes with "the tone of editorializing of that time—it was unreal, afflicted her with a sense of dislocation" (*FGC*, 24).

Other modernists—such as Kafka, Beckett, Golding—have also analysed what R. D. Laing has termed "ontological insecurity"; but, unlike them, Lessing probes the material causes that afflict or contribute to the dislocations of mind and society, the foremost among them being "this business of having to divide off, make boundaries" (*FGC*, 44). The idea is reiterated at every possible juncture in the novel: its premise being—"there was something in the human mind that separated and divided"(*FGC*, 92).

The latter half of the twentieth century has also altered the very politics of the novel form. Anna says in *The Golden Notebook* that the novel
has been "claimed by the disintegration and collapse" (124). It is authentically recognised as a genre which is a product of our peculiar time, "of cessation of war without peace." The general atmosphere of *The Four-Gated City* is rooted in this awareness that the world around us is subject to perpetual change and that the quality of an individual's life will be interfered with at every juncture by historically significant events.

As the novel opens, war and its aftermath overshadow not only the landscape but the novel's overall semantic framework. Every character that Martha meets in this part—from the working-class Iris (*FGC*, 11) to the left-wing labour Phoebe (*FGC*, 93)—"still lived inside the shadows of their war" (*FGC*, 122). The fiercely political dockers, with whom she stays in her "footloose" state, can talk only "about the war and about the government—and about the war" (*FGC*, 22).

The insecurity that this traumatic experience can yield is epitomized in Jack, to whom the war has imparted "the jungle-psyche": "that you must take what you wanted and then fight for it" (*FGC*, 55). His development as a character coincides with his decline as a human being. Compartmentalized obsession with sex makes him the personification of its perverse form (*FGC*, 448-53). Partly, it is due to his mutilated thinking. Together with Jimmy Wood, an inventor and Mark's business partner, Jack represents the neurotic drive to rely on one aspect. The thesis that the book, at one level, seeks to project is that single-minded fragmented approach to life engenders despair. This dimension is the thematic basis in Mary Turner's case, who is unable to view things in their larger perspective: such as a native houseboy in terms of class and racial conflict (*The Grass is Singing*).

The selective principle at work in the choice of the physical space for reflecting a segment of reality completely corresponds to the tenet of verisimilitude: nowhere does imagination conspire against realism. Martha's initial impressions of London are rather similar to Lessing's own as recorded in *In Pursuit of the English*. The technique employed here is
an interplay of a variation on the multiple perspective and that of “montage.” The London of the 1950s is observed through “a double vision”: “One eye stating denying, warding off the total hideousness of the whole area, the other, with Iris, knowing it in love” (FGC,18). This double-vision, the outsider’s and the insider’s, undercuts the straight-forward narrative which is still loaded with factual details.

Doris Lessing’s London emerges as a sociological landmark of modern fiction, like Joyce’s Dublin or Faulkner’s deep south. In spirit it is closer to Angus Wilson’s vision of the city in The Old Man in the Zoo—“emblematic of a sick society seeking its own death,” as states Frederick McDowell.14 The crater and “the bomb site” become its identity marks (FGC,17; 86). Martha’s lonely inspection of the surface of a jagged wall reveals the scars suffered by the city and by the humanity at large. The thirteen layers of wall-paper that she is able to scrape off have a lot to tell. They point to the thirteen ways of looking at reality; they bespeak the collective consciousness of which an individual always remains a part, and they also tell the story of cultural and aesthetic deterioration over the years:

The two papers at the bottom were rather beautiful, judging from the inch or so she had to look at; they got progressively uglier as the decades slid by. The one at the top was hideous . . . (FGC,86).

Herself working as the archaeologist of the collective consciousness, Lessing asks: “If this were a ruined city, a poisoned city, what would the excavators a hundred years later deduce from what they saw there?” (FGC,86). The note of irony implicit in these lines cannot be missed. For Lessing, it was a “ruinscape” which provided a metaphor for broken lives and spirits—a “splintered, eaten, beaten, battered” humanity like the eroded baulk of timber that served as a lock for the bomb site (FGC,17). In some remoter and less defined sense, that worn out lump of trunk—which had been a tree some time—stood for the ruin of the Great Britain itself.

This image from the past blends into another, equally sordid one. The frantic activity integral to the mechanised way of life is captured in the
image of "an army of women at work with their vacuum cleaners" and the stream of office goers, hurrying in. Good morning, good morning, good morning, diverging into rooms where waste-paper baskets had been emptied. In they'd flow, to be flung out again by the sound of Big Ben striking five, as thousands of telephones went silent, at once (FGC,85).

The underlined idea is that excessive collectivization imparts herd-mentality which can be as dehumanising as the tendency to exclude or isolate. All these impressions later combine to form one composite picture in Martha's mental eye:

the past weeks changed their aspect and presented London to Martha as series containing dockland Stella, the café and Iris; Jack; Henry; and the people in the streets and pubs. Fragments. It was a country where people could not communicate across the dark that separated them (FGC,92).

At a deeper level, these observations relate the general despair with Martha's personal despair at "the inside of knowledge she now held of the nature of separation, of division" (FGC,92). They also refer to the complexity of Lessing's narrative design: "to provide a section map in depth"(FGC,18). Not in any sense a detachable background, it is indeed a sort of "six dimensional map" against which are charted out "the histories and lives and loves of people" (FGC,18).

But a consummate picture of its dwellers occurs in the second chapter of part four, when Martha ventures out while experimenting with "self" in Lynda's "country." Earlier she had observed the city as an exile, an alien (FGC,30;31); now she sees London as if from an extraterrestrial's eyrie: "Beneath, a crammed space of every kind of thing, object, artefact, and people, people, people" (FGC,530). The narrative texture picks up the thematic tension and the surface realism explodes into surrealistic imagery: She looked down again at an extraordinarily hideous creature who stood watching her, out of eyes that were like coloured lumps of gelatine that had fringes of hair about them and bands of hair above them, and which half protruded from a bumpy shape of pinkish putty, or doughlike substance (FGC,526).
It is in this section that Lessing's personal anxiety for mankind is voiced unflinchingly. Martha's brief experience of oneness with nature¹⁵ is shattered as soon as she observes the human specimens abounding the street and hears the small voice—"And only man is vile?" (FGC, 527). The question links with the germinal idea of the whole series. Lessing criticises the human propensity for violence and cunning when she describes them as "defectively evolved animals," or "near race of half, uncompleted creatures" (FGC, 527-29). The author conveys her personal unease to the protagonist who is overcome by a "shameful grief" at the sight of "them, us, the human race, as visitors from a spaceship might see them, if he dropped into London or any city to report" (FGC, 28)¹⁶

The outer chaos is embodied in society at large, and Lessing's contention is that since an individual exists with reference to the society, a flawed society can only produce defective specimens. This is felt with full force by Martha as she takes over the "holding operation" from Mark and gradually acclimatizes herself to "this atmosphere of threat, insecurity and illness" in his house (FGC, 121). For her it is like walking on to that stage

where two or three different types of plays are running together; for it did not seem possible that such discordant events could be sharing a texture of time or place except in a dream-like capacity (FGC, 127).

It was a time when newspapers trumpeted "the destruction of Britain by socialism (internal, the Labour Party) and by communism (external), as manifested by people like Colin Coldridge's colleague, working for Russia" (FGC, 127-28). Colin, Mark's physicist brother, is also under suspicion; the threat of political persecution is turning his Jewish wife, Sally/Sarah, into a near neurotic. Not to mention Mark's wife, Lynda, who is undergoing treatment for schizophrenia. Besides, there are the children, doomed to bypass their childhood due to the bitter realities of their particular situations. In them Lessing has taken up a microcosmic unit of society and
used it as a spy-hole into a wide network of social, cultural and political structures.

Lessing equates the business of living with "the stripping process" that an individual has to go through (FGC, 312; 471). In a very analytical passage, she likens society to "an organism" which can neither think nor diagnose its own condition: "It is like one of those sea creatures who have tentacles or arms with numbing poisons . . ." (FGC, 472). Those who feel its grip, its tightening noose, as Mark had to during his persecution and social ostracization, become "stripped . . . flayed," losing their "innocence, naivety" and taking refuge in "cynicism," as does Mark (FGC, 312), or in impermeable emotional climate, as does Sally/Sarah. The inhumanity of this stripping process is captured in an arresting image:

A stupid, ignorant, half-drunk cook, a solid ox of a woman, stands on two planted legs . . . . The woman throws turnips, carrots, parsnips on the table, and carelessly chops off the tops. A great boot cracks down on the fallen turnip . . . (FGC, 312).

Anything new or different puts society on guard. Lessing writes: "The creature [society], sullenly alerted, all fear, is concerned for only one thing, how to isolate it, how to remain unaffected" (FGC, 472). For, every kind of unacceptable behaviour is labelled as "anarchy, irresponsibility, decadence, selfishness" (FGC, 472). The complete horror of this senseless process wonderfully comes through in its effect on Mark during his "bad time." His loneliness is translated into a need to understand "what was really happening," which is, in turn, expressed through the maps marking military as well as ecological destruction all over the world. The point that Lessing wants to bring home is that the individual despair is always linked with the collective despair in an intricate cause-and-effect relationship.

The vision of humanity that emerges in the greater part of the novel, and in the series as a whole, indicates that each individual carries a consciousness of himself as a solitary being, a consciousness of which he cannot completely and permanently rid himself (FGC, 46). The panoptic eye of the narrative encapsulates the vicious circle in which everyone is
caught—the pattern of a snake biting its own tail. Martha cannot find a single face among the mass of humanity

that was not drugged with anxiety or day-dreaming, not destroyed by anger, or worry, or greed... each seemed locked in an invisible cage... shut in, enclosed inside their hideously defective bodies... inside a net of wants and needs that made it impossible for them to think of anything else (FGC, 529-30).

The text makes it sufficiently clear that despair is closely related to the obsession with self and selfish involvements. This tendency incapacitates the faculty of recognising the “otherness” and “experiencing their fellows' thoughts, or lives, or needs” (FGC,529).

Despair is not only embodied in the need to discover one’s real self, to situate oneself authentically in time and space; it is as much related to the fact that one is all the time being created by the surrounding fractured reality.18 This ambivalent manipulation of the individual through different forces—human, social, political, economic—gives a multidimensional proportion to the question of identity. During her meetings with Henry Matheson and Phoebe, persons representing the affluent section, Martha cannot help seeing the factor of “class” controlling an individual’s identity: “how human beings could be separated so absolutely by a slight difference in the texture of their living...” (FGC,92). Even more baffling is the fact that the dimensions of existence altered as much by a difference in the skin as it did by a difference in gender. For instance, “in Africa, as a white, she was so and so, and if she had been black, must be such and such” (FGC,92). Walking down a street where men prowled about, she was a “category”—young woman—“not Martha or 'Matty', only 'young woman'” (FGC,43).

A double identity involves double alienation and multiplex despair. Martha, as a drifter and a “watchful critic” (FGC,46) of the English disparities, and later as an exile in the Coldridge household reflects the author’s double alienation—spatial and temporal. Like Conrad, Joyce and Lawrence, Lessing is estranged from the establishment culture while being
spiritually apart from the actual world. In her case alienation also results from a nominal adherence to a literary tradition from which her personal circumstances distance her completely. Moreover, creative activity itself is alienating, because even when working on real happenings, one is dealing with non-reality.

What further complicates the matter is the relationship among the author, the reality and the text. The writer is simultaneously linked with and separated from his work—a point that is depicted in the reception of Mark’s books. The period’s ideology and myths in vogue seem to rewrite his work (FGC, 142-49). For instance, his first novel, which is built on the attitude that “war was bound to happen, that nothing could have prevented it, and that forms of war would erupt again,” is called “fatalistic,” “pessimistic” and “deterministic” (FGC, 141-42). The reason simply is that the temper of the times had changed; the atmosphere of the late forties was different from when it was written (1946). His *A City in Desert* is also, at first, criticized as “the ivory tower writing” (FGC, 196). Thus, once created, the book takes on its own life: it remains whereas a writer’s life moves on. These factors combine to create the effect that the writer’s despair and alienation is more intense and has to be suffered at multiple planes.

No doubt, the final volume of *Children of Violence* is a reassertion of Anna’s impassioned cry: “Art from the West . . . becomes more and more a shriek of torment recording pain. Pain is becoming our deepest reality” (GM, 344). But the totality of the narrative conveys that this pain can be mitigated by conquering the impulse towards “objectification,” by overcoming the “otherness” and striving towards “wholeness.” Through Martha, Lessing is hinting at the possibility of “another way to live”—where one doesn’t have to split oneself up or “put half of oneself into cold storage” (FGC, 50). The problem is of matching complementary dimensions to come to a proper perspective. The narrative progressively moves towards it as Martha delves deeper into her inner self.
The Political Morass

Politics—since it hardly allows any place for emotions—is in itself an expression of man's alienation. *The Four-Gated City* makes an effort to absorb the increasingly problematic nature of modern politics into fiction, its spirit of intrigue and threat, in sharp opposition to purposeful politics—politics in its constructive and revolutionary aspect when it engenders the spirit of reform. Its sprawling narrative is placed against the background of a gradual counterrevolution in which deeply antagonistic social forces are pitted against each other—forces that cannot be reduced to moral categories, though they are, of course, open to moral criticism.

The opening part of the novel establishes its main credo: its miasma of despair includes the general discontent against the government. Martha, who had brought with her from Zambesia the ideals of socialism and the dreams of a golden city, does not take long to realise the contradictory political realities of London: "Henry Matheson and what he stood for; and Iris and Stella and what they stood for" (*FGC*, 29). Her own political idealism dwindles to nothing when politics in its altogether different aspect—"in its defensive and bread-and-butter aspect" (*FGC*, 23)—surfaces as she interacts with the dockers who were "fiercely and bitterly working-class, class conscious and trade union" (*FGC*, 22).

The early chapters of the novel explore the ideology of "a country absorbed in myth" (*FGC*, 24)—contradictory myths of a society that claims to be classless and yet seems to be on the verge of revolution. Those close to the center of power believe in a different myth, that of Britain heading towards its ruin "in the grip of red-handed socialists" (*FGC*, 24); while those forming the poor quarters of London, which is initially Martha's area for "slumming," were yet to taste the fruits of the Labour Government (*FGC*, 22). This dualism which "made it impossible for any fact to be seen straight"
was enough to afflict anybody—not just Martha—with a sense of dislocation.

At the same time, it gives an idea of the temper of that period—"an inflammable time" (FGC,93), it prepares ground for the exposition of the hostile aspect of politics, and confronts Martha, once again, with politics as one of the alternatives of life (FGC,93-94). She, however, rejects becoming a labour activist for two reasons: it was to get out of "that atmosphere" that she had come to England (FGC,94); but more significantly, it is the sharp realization that "she was bound to be in a false position of one kind or another" (FGC,93) because of the wide gap between the reality as it was and as it was projected.

Lessing seems to be working against this distortion of reality as she goes on to expose the middle class snobbery in Henry Matheson and Phoebe, the persons who talk of "the working class' as if they were—people from the moon" (FGC,41). The narrative stress on the British upper class's antipathy towards socialism indicates that the key terms, whether "democracy" or "socialism," translate differently in different ideological and cultural landscapes.

The narrative has come a long way from the fervent activity of revolutionary politics in A Ripple from the Storm. In the fifth volume, it captures a phase when all passion seems to have been spent, when people either compromise their brand of ideology or try to follow a comparatively safe course. This dubious politics is evident in Henry's jaunty admission that he was more of a liberal, though he voted Tory (FGC,38). There is also Phoebe, the left-wing labour, "but not so left that she did not regard some well known left-wingers, her ex-husband for one, as extreme" (FGC,93). But the situation, in its entirety, is summed up by Martha: the term "hypocrite" was not enough to explain the politicalized Londoners; they were, rather, "drugged" and "hypnotized"—"the victims of a lot of slogans" (FGC,39). The way they judge everything from the standards of their vain Englishness fills
Martha with disgust and despair. She concludes: “They were savages, masters and servants both” (FGC, 40); and the words surely ring a bell.

In this divisiveness Lessing is exploring the phenomenon of hatred as a force, “a sort of wavelength you can tune into. After all it’s always there, hatred is simply part of the world like one of the colours of the rainbow” (FGC, 69). During her unusual self-exploration, Martha confronts this area of “hate” directly in order to resolve the conflicting polarities of her external and internal world. As one of the experiencers and experimenters for the entire humanity, she watches the emotion of hatred flowing and flooding through her:

emotions of hatred of black people for white people, and of white people for black; of Germans and of Jews, and of Arabs and of the English—etc. etc. Until her chattering mind and the ‘television set’ was like a hate programme arranged for the pleasure of some international lunatic (FGC, 561-62).

Speaking through Martha, Lessing redefines “hating” as “the underside of all this lovely liberalism” (FGC, 562). The end-point seems to be that being liberal did not essentially make one “reasonable” or “civilized.”

The pervasiveness of this phenomenon, and how irrational and inhuman can be its perpetrators, is first explored through Mark when his identification with Colin Coldridge makes him a target of political hatred. The visible projectiles are the journalists who personify the “churlish gracelessness that was the spirit of the time” (FGC, 164). They finally badger a tormented Mark into admitting that “he was a communist” (FGC, 181), which, in his case, is only a false position. Mark’s traumatic personal experience sparks off a chain reaction, and the world-wide ramifications of “hatred” gradually come to occupy the walls of his study:

the charts of the death factories, the poison factories, the factories that made instruments for the control of the mind; the maps of Hunger, Poverty, Riot and the rest; the atlases of poisoned air and poisoned earth and the places where bombs had been exploded under the sea... (FGC, 418).
In the novel, Mark is the central point of collective awareness. Through Martha’s consciousness events are observed and analysed, but Mark remains the main “experiencer” of the outside turmoil. It is through him that Lessing does all the weighing and balancing of the facts and takes them into account.

A lot of narrative space is given to what is termed as “the bad time” (1.4 to 2.3): “Life frayed into a series of little copings-with; dealings-with, details, details, journalists, newspapers; telephone calls; threatening letters . . .” (FGC, 164). It is the voyeuristic nature of modern politics and the terrifying aspect that media-politics nexus can acquire that get illustrated in this section. The texture of the narrative imbibes the texture of life—“all heaviness, nastiness, fear” (FGC, 190). The purpose is to reveal the interconnection between the unhealthy intrusion of politics and the unpredictable quality of life. A poetic image captures this morbid dimension: “One could not imagine lawn as anything but delightful, the river as fresh. But lawns can always admit toads, and river corpses” (FGC, 167). These eventualities, Lessing points out, may appear in the guise of “an announcement, a threat” (168), or “a double event” as had occurred in Mark’s household (Colin’s departure and Sally’s suicide).

It is in Mark’s person that the threat posed by the modern bureaucratic state to the autonomy of the individual is realised as the individual concept of personal liberty crumbles: “Mark was furious, ’I’m not being guarded by police in my own house, in my own country . . .’” (FGC, 175). The illogicality of these invisible powers clash with his rationalism, and he finds the whole system quite incomprehensible: “… but this in this country, it’s not . . . I mean, the Americans or the Russians or people like that, but not . . .” (FGC, 176). His bewilderment directly relates to the question that is debated over constantly. Most of the postmodern thinkers—Lyotard, Habermas—diagnose the present situation as “a mixture of serious dangers with some hope. The dangers came from the intrusion of ‘the system’ into ‘the lifeworld’.”

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In his life experience Mark is unable to reconcile the actual situation with his self-image. For once, reality had come to acquire the appearance of “the incredible, the impossible” (FGC,199). He, therefore, constantly oscillates between illusion and reality, retreating every now and then into his writer/thinker’s shell.

In selecting the well-connected Coldridge household and putting them through a situation of utter helplessness, Lessing’s unvoiced statement is that the prominent are likely to suffer most heavily due to the ruthlessness of politics and the tyranny of the collective. This opinion is indirectly reflected in the observation: “it was salutary to discover how very little the storms of political life affected ordinary people” (FGC,309). She means the people living away from the concentric circles of power.

The facelessness of the authoritarian collective gets manifested in Lessing’s parenthetical observation when referring to the forces accusing Mark for being a spy: “They (who?) thought Mark knew where his brother was” (FGC,192-93). These abstract forces work through proxy; the object is to bring the rebellious individual round to conformism, or to crush the very spirit of the person. The most terrifying dimension is that the collective remains totally unaware of, as well as indifferent to, the pain and loss that it causes. Along with Mark, many others—the children, Francis and Paul, and Martha—are made to suffer “trials of mind,” each in his/her own way. The text is consistently building up the thesis that when the collective works opposed to the individual, it causes immense damage. As far as Mark is concerned, the experience shakes his very faith in himself and humanity. Lessing writes: “In extreme cases such a man goes into a monastery, or suffers a sudden conversion to whatever is available” (FGC,193). As a reaction, Mark turns towards communism and goes to the other extreme to become its aggressive defender, “with a new viewpoint, new vocabulary and new friends” (FGC,195).

This aspect—the collective unwittingly conspiring and pushing a person in a particular direction—is also later demonstrated in Francis's
friend Nicky Anderson's situation. A totally apolitical person, he is sucked into political agitation through baseless accusation. This time the collective wears the horrible mask of the police (FGC, 398). After a brief retreat he goes back to active politics. Later, Francis tells in his letter: "It was a repetition of his first introduction to politics, as if he were saying: You say I'm an agitator! Very well, that's what I shall be!" (FGC, 629).

In sharp contrast to this is Jimmy Wood and his political ethics, which is at the opposite end to the humane conception. His scientific experiments are aimed at assisting the governments in their nefarious design to eliminate the "brains of people they felt to be dangerous" (FGC, 554). Fredrick Karl rightly points out that he represents "the bland forces of military, science and government which, with velvet glove, offer salvation while they are missing a human dimension." Politically, Jimmy stands for the conviction that a collective aim justifies all means, "that individual should in every way be subordinated and sacrificed to the community"—the same belief that motivates the likes of Ivanov in *Darkness at Noon*.21

Taking up the thread from *Landlocked*, *The Four-Gated City* continues to explore the fragmentation of ideology, but with an emphasis on dialectical deviations and reversals of opinion that afflicted communism during the years of the Cold War. An analysis taken up towards the end of the novel provides a perspective of its distortions and mutations:

In the seventies the word was as loaded as it had been in the fifties, but loaded vaguely. In the fifties it had meant, quite simply the Soviet Union, and had associations of treachery and espionage: twenty years later it meant anything that wasn't good—a kind of portmanteau word of unpleasant and frightening associations that were never defined (FGC, 625).

In its repercussions on Mark's family, Lessing's purpose is to convey "what politics can do" (FGC, 120) and how right principles can yield wrong results. It also provides another plane to illuminate the mechanics of "hatred."
How the hatred of an ideology is transferred on to individuals is exemplified through Colin Coldridge's plight, who is not even a committed communist. In his case, as also in Mark's, politics proves to be that force of the world which distracts men from their most decent instincts. Colin personifies another abstraction of ideology—a person who claims to be a communist just because he “admires a certain communist country, or a communist achievement or to annoy Aunt Authority” (FGC, 129). For him “communism meant internationalism, meant the sharing of science” (FGC, 120); but the timing being wrong, the government saw it as treason (FGC, 192). His scientist's enthusiasm and faith in right professional ethics turn out to be his major flaws. In the situation, his defection to Russia leaves behind a trail of tragic events. Lessing's novel, like most of Solzhenitsyn's works, illustrates J. Orr's argument that “political ideology portrays the revolutionary event as epic, fiction emphasises its tragic dimension.”

In the absence of an ideology that could generate the spirit of idealism, the greatest losers, Lessing feels, have been the young people. As the inheritors of future, they have a special place in the narrative scheme: the second half of the novel specifically views the downward drift of a culture through their responses and reactions. Their aversion to politics is evident throughout the text. The after-war generation, which is represented in Francis and Paul, displays just “no interest in politics” (FGC, 570:623). They have been absolutely demoralized and talk about the processes of government most irresponsibly. Francis, for example, declares he didn't care “whether the Reds or the Tories were in, they were alike” (FGC, 504). For them politics had, for ever, come to be associated with “the regimentation of human beings” (FGC, 622). Lessing says, “What life had dealt them was so off centre that there was no resting on normality as ordinary people, families could. (What ordinary families, people?)” (FGC, 375). The “interrogative statement” clearly makes them symbolic of a
whole damaged generation, a symptom of the sickness of the center of Empire.

Their total disillusionment with politics and the ensuing frustration often seek weird channels, such as violence and drugs (FGC,428; 570). The narrative offers different reasons for their erratic behaviour. The most obvious among them is that politics having turned a cesspool of pollution and corruption, they had chosen to stay away. The setting up of a house for all sorts of waifs and strays by Paul, and the collective migration of Francis and others to the farm in Wiltshire are barely different modes of exclusion. But the most profound reason is that they live in an ideological vacuum. Lessing rightly points out that the very need to demand “a perfect cause to identify oneself with” is absent.24

The search for a viable political cause has become a major point of concern in the context of the fate of humanity. The Aldermaston March, to which Lessing devotes a whole chapter (4.3), brings under her critical observation a peaceful political demonstration during the sixties. About the marchers, she remarks: “In imagination they were exploring worlds of extraordinary possibilities, change, discovery, revolution; meanwhile they chanted Ban the Bomb and Down With . . . and Hands off . . .”(FGC,436).

Social phenomena such as Aldermaston Marches raise questions of ideological character; “Why; how; where; when” (FGC,429). While bringing the mass psyche under her analytical view, they give Lessing an opportunity to study the collective consciousness in its near totality. They are the activities that acknowledge political and cultural despair at mass level:

There were very few people indeed, in, or near or associated with these columns of walking people whose lives did not have a great gulf in them into which all civilization had vanished, temporarily at least (FGC,435).

Once again it is the spirit of divisiveness that comes to the fore: “The fact was, the people on this March, united by the black and white banners, were extremely different from each other, had little in common except for the
leaven of organizers” (FGC,429). The narrative acquires a panoramic pace and displays Lessing’s sense of scene while highlighting her overriding humanitarian concerns, as noticed earlier at a smaller scale in the war documentary scene (LL,62-66).

But all along present is the note of doubt, the disturbing awareness of the futility of such enterprises. The banner “Caroline Says No” becomes the defining metaphor of the March even as Lessing grapples with the question whether the message reached where it really mattered—the Parliament, for instance, or those piling up their arsenals with nuclear warfare. The characteristic indifference of the governments belies hope, yet the Marchers continue “against all reason and probability” (FGC,429). Lukács’ observations about the effectiveness of collective enterprise merely serve to corroborate Lessing’s doubts:

Nobody can work effectively for peace unless he is firmly convinced that society is amenable to the processes of reason and that human effort—in terms of individual, as well as mass action—can influence historical war.25

Structurally, the Aldermaston March is one of the key events in the novel. It is here that the idea of the “mutants” is first clearly dropped as a possibility. A group of students are overheard discussing “the potions bubbling in the cauldrons of the laboratories of the world” that will turn them all into sprites or toads. Their children, they feel, might be “geniuses or idiots; they would almost certainly be mutants of some kind” (FGC,435). To further authenticate it, the idea is again thrown in by way of Jimmy Wood’s book about “a human mutant quite invisible to ordinary humanity” (FGC,436). This sufficiently indicates the direction that the narrative scheme is to take, and the idea of mutants is floated not only as a fictional probability but as a narrative possibility as well.

Moreover, the March is a sounding board for Martha’s political self. Though tested and tried externals of life no longer interest her, politics has chased her like an inexorable fate in the form of Mark’s persecution. Yet, all through his communist phase, she remains only a detached analyser. How
far she has come from the days of her passionate political involvement is brought into sharp focus during the Aldermaston March. Organized political action can no longer tempt her, for she is more absorbed in looking for ways to resolve her mental conflicts and social contradictions. Mona Knapp refers to this as her "aspiration to truer intellectual/sensual perceptivity," which "deprives her of the privilege of vehement emotions and convictions"\(^\text{26}\) In Martha’s case “the revolution had gone inwards, was in the structure of life’s substance.” (\textit{FGC},435).

The idea of revolution, its possibilities are never given up in the text: one obvious example is the Aldermaston March. But there are others, not so direct. The mythical city of Martha and Mark Coldridge’s fantasy is overrun by the poverty-stricken slum-dwellers, who form a ring of subdued power around most of the metropolises. It may well be interpreted as the proletariat gaining victory over the capitalist forces. The mythical city is, actually, invested with some involved symbolism. Initially it appears to be a utopian city, then a socialist city run on communist lines; then the distortion of communist ideals manifesting reversal that occurs with the degeneration in the purity of ideology.

This quest for “an ideal place” and “an ideal human being” is one of the essential narrative purposes of \textit{Children of Violence}. Lessing tries various approaches—ideological/political, psychoanalytical, mythical—to work towards this purpose. As social-political reality gets more and more depressing, Lessing reposes all her hope and confidence in the inner possibilities of the individual to cope with external pressures. This conception imparts a creative tension to \textit{The Four-Gated City} which further manifests itself in the interaction of politics and madness. Both concepts are used to probe the problematic reality and the inner consciousness of man, but only to arrive at opposed conclusions.
Politics of Madness

The narrative evolves vertically as well as horizontally as it progresses towards its ending in the final volume. From the world of mad politics it shifts to an internal individual world in which all resonances float within the human psyche. In this Lessing’s concern for the fate of mankind is paralleled with her greater involvement with “mystic spatiality”—the exploration of the microcosmic self. It is the same dimension which Foucault regards as “that constant verticality which confronts European culture with what it is not.”\(^27\) One is inclined to feel that the changes in focus are a matter of context than of Lessing’s premises. For right from the first book Lessing has been interested in the dialectical relationship between society and soul.

The themes of isolation and integration stretch to the maximum between two extreme pulls, lending a unique tautness to the narrative. One extreme is clinically mad Lynda, and the other is Martha—rational, analytical yet often fumbling and floundering in trying to keep a steady hold on reality. When experience is fragmented, the very center of orientation of the objective universe becomes diffused. The idea is summed up through Martha’s consciousness:

> The boy downstairs was mad. About time? Death. And Jack was mad. About women. Death. Joanna was mad—she proposed to spend her life with a man she didn’t much like because she was afraid of—poverty? And she, Martha...\(^{FGC,63}\).

In the whole of the series, one comes across various versions and shades of madness though none so starkly vivid as Lynda, or experimental as Martha.

In *Martha Quest* sporadic instances of colonial eccentricity are followed by the senselessly euphoric behaviour of the young, a reflection of the fear psychosis resulting from the threat of impending war. Moving through the obsessive drives of the communist politics (*A Ripple from the Storm*), the narrative heads towards a world gone “mad” due to the rebounding effects of its own violence (*Landlocked*). In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing handles this theme at a plane which is ideologically closer to the
theories of R. D. Laing, though Laing barely echoes what many others have felt. The very spirit of the time impels one to conclude that "civilization, in a general way, constitutes a milieu favourable to the development of madness." In a moment of despair at Lynda's repeated slides into madness, Mark says:

> Sometimes it's as if ... not that she is mad, but there is a madness. A kind of wavelength of madness ... I could hook into it just as easily. Or it could hook into me—it's in the air (FGC,419).

Through a number of characters—Lynda and her cronies (Mrs Mellendip, Dorothy etc.), Jack and Martha—Lessing explores the abstractions of elusive psychic phenomena while questioning the limits rather than the identity of a culture.

Between the margins outlined for Lynda and Martha, roam about other figures, just a shade away from madness. For instance, Phoebe—"a sadly rigid soul" (FGC,412)—is driven to pieces as much by her own neurotically obsessive behaviour towards her growing daughters as due to their phase of adolescent turbulence (FGC,410-11). The narrative voice clearly informs that though she continued disbelieving psychology, she was having "a breakdown nevertheless" (FGC,410). Mark's mother, Margaret Patten, is never very far from it, but in her case the phrase is never used. As Mark explains, "the upper classes have always accommodated a wide spectrum of eccentricity" (FGC,399).

This is integrally linked with Lessing's politics of madness, the summation of which consists in the premise that the organization of society has been such that it preferred to ignore truth "except as it comes out perverted through madness, then it is through madness and its variants it must be sought after" (FGC,394). The idea is stripped to its fundamentals in the "Appendix": "The sudden fits of silliness, of taking leave of oneself, of rioting and so on, were a way of saying, I can't manage, its too much, I can't be responsible" (FGC,632). Mental aberrations are reasoned out in terms of "a kind of despair" as much "because of the future" as due to the past. Reflecting on the human situation, Lessing writes:
Long ago he [the man] became filled with an enormous sorrow, he knows that somewhere he lost a birthright, he diverged from himself, he will forever be shut out from some sweet truth that once he sucked in like air through his pores (FGC, 632).

Lynda’s schizophrenia and her occasional attempts to resurface are symptomatic of a madness which, as E. Bertelsen says, “lurks just beneath the surface of our extolled civilized controls.” She is the victim of that very neurosis from which society as a whole suffers: whatever it is nervous about, it isolates after giving a label. Laing interprets the politics inherent in this tendency:

There is no such ‘condition’ as schizophrenia but the label is a social fact and the social fact a political event. This political event, occurring in the civic order of society, imposes definitions and consequences on the labelled person.

Lynda is denied the normal human existence because of her powers: the capacity to hear and see what people are thinking. Pathologically a successor of Bertha Rochester, she does not anywhere precipitate action, except perhaps by communicating her inner tumult to Martha. In fact, she is more of an idea, a human possibility. The narrative works towards the conclusion that if society had been different—more perceptive and accommodating towards those “who merely possessed certain faculties in embryo” (FGC, 546)—Lynda would never have been declared ill.

What Lessing is trying to project is “the seer’s vision” from the Biblical point of view, something which is thought to be improbable in European culture. Her intention is to show, as Mona Knapp observes, that “the mentally ill are not sickly refugees from a sane world. Rather, their exceptional powers are a ray of hope in a system bogged down by mediocrity and conformism.” The textual evidence lies in the fact that Lynda is among the first ones to have a premonition of the calamity hanging over the country (FGC, 642). During one of her “bad” times, she cries out—“England had been poisoned, it looked like poisoned mouse lying dead in a corner . . . some enemy was injecting England with a deathly glittering dew.”
This foreknowledge does help in warning at least some people of the impending danger. Also, after the holocaust Lynda and Martha use their telepathic powers to help organize the few survivors.

If Lynda's neurosis points to the mystical, Martha's breakdown represents an interiorisation of the atomic age. Martha's inwardness evolves slowly but consistently in the whole series. It, however, acquires a sharper focus in the fifth book. In the previous volumes she avoids confronting her deeper self. For instance, in part one of *Martha Quest*, the narrative provides a peep into her consciousness: "she must not analyse, she must not be conscious" (73). This mental inclination to dodge off self awareness is altogether absent in *The Four-Gated City*. On the contrary, when her role as a surrogate mother to the children in Mark's household becomes too demanding to leave time for herself, she consciously switches off her reflexes to probe her mind and memory. Instead of evading consciousness, she acknowledges it as a "receiver." First through her "holding on" operations in the Coldridge household, and then through her identification with Mark/Lynda, she becomes a channel for all the emotions seething around her, merging with and participating in the collective psyche much as a younger Martha had participated in the collective conscience of communism.

In her commitment to Mark's household, Martha is able to go through the process of individuation by becoming aware that her past experiences were not in any way different from those of others. Her interaction with the younger lot and her acceptance of middle age precipitate "a setting free into impersonality, a setting free, also, from her personal past" (*FGC, 407*). It is when Martha feels herself "a mass of fragments, or facets or bits of mirror reflecting qualities embodied in other people" (*FGC, 371*) that she journeys, as Jean Pickering argues, "not merely to greater "I"ness, but to greater "we"ness too." Her consciousness gradually moves towards acknowledging one's place in the collective as she envisions the "life-force" flowing through all. She reflects, "... being with young meant all the time reviving in oneself..."
that scene, that mood; that state of being, since they never said anything one hadn't said oneself, or been oneself" \((FGC,373)\). Simultaneously, surfaces another imperative: that the way towards wholeness of vision goes through the collectives and not around them.

The theme of "breakdown" as "a way of self-healing, of the inner self's dismissing false dichotomies and divisions" \((GN,\text{preface,8})\) is taken up and developed further in the character of Martha. Her experience of breakdown is a kind of conscious madness. It is in Martha that the stereotypical approach to madness is demolished; she explores the irrational without suspending her will and intelligence. In her person, Lessing embodies Laing's assumption that "madness need not all be breakdown. It may all be break-through." \(^{06}\) If Lynda's clinical madness amounts to enslavement and existential death, Martha's willed madness is potential liberation and renewal. In Martha's progression from the basement to the top floor of Paul's house, the text insists that crises of the spirit can be resolved through meditative modalities. Lynda's basement, like the one in "A Room"\(^{37}\) is an irreversible metaphor for physical, psychological, social and gendered entrapment. In contrast, the room at the top floor of Paul's collective dwelling signifies the evolution of consciousness, the liberation from paranoia. It becomes the locus for transpersonal metamorphosis because it is here that Martha's quest acquires a new dimension.

Martha's exploration of psychic frontiers through her absorption of Lynda's madness reveals fresh possibilities of human mind. Her immediate realization, as she steps in through this "door," is that she had let herself be sucked in: "she had become a liar and coward like the rest" \((FGC,515)\). Like the rest she had been "poisoned" and "hypnotized," and lived in an atmosphere of "fear" and "wariness." Even her physicality acquires a new aspect, as her interiorized gaze enhances her sense of perceptions. Now, it is a matter of "using her body as an engine to get her out of the small dim prison of everyday" to find "the way out, and forward," and to experience "this lightness and clarity" \((FGC,519)\). As this enables her to catch a glimpse
of the possibilities of the human future, she discovers what J. Pickering has explained as “a community of madness, greater and more satisfying than the community of Marxism where she had once looked for emotional brotherhood.”

In Martha’s attempts to cope with her own antagonist—“the self-hater”—Lessing not merely touches upon a general malaise but supplies its antidote as well. The narrative voice tells that this jeering disliking enemy was not personal to Martha but was possibly in everyone—“Everyone of this particular culture? One had to meet him, it, her, confront him; come to terms or outflank him?” (FGC,541). Martha’s experimentation through “the country of sound,” her direct confrontation with negative emotions, take her further ahead along the road to individuation. After her assimilation into a smaller collective, she battles for the survival of her humane self while trying to retain her sense of human responsibility. The categories “man” and “woman” are dissolved in an “impersonal current” (FGC,518), for the point of concern is human consciousness. The narrative voice reflects the authorial stance: “it is not a question of ‘Lynda’s mind’ or ‘Martha’s mind’; it is the human mind, or part of it” (FGC,520). During this process, when Martha indulges in a non-reasonable experience, she is able to overreach her female self and attain the stature of a representative human being.

The capacity to see pictures, hear the sound-lengths is not altogether unnatural, nor is it uncommon. A great many people have experienced it, Lessing maintains, “but being well-ordered, well-trained, docile, obedient people, they heard the doctors or the priests say—whatever the current dogma ordered, and that was that . . . “ (FGC,532). Lynda and Martha together inhabit that area of human knowledge which pointedly brings out the inadequacy of human race. Together they represent an aspiration for “a new sort of understanding” that might come by listening to “the spaces between words, sentences” (FGC,394).
Schematically, the narrative steadily builds on the notion that Lynda and Martha should not be taken to subscribe to some inherited baggage of stereotypes, rather they reflect peculiar facets of what David Craig has called "syndrome of perplexities, which is really there at the hub of present social experience." Parallel to Martha's journey through the stream of history, enroute her encounter with madness, is the author's own quest for those "constructs" which regulate the erratic working of the society—"the senselessness of the processes that govern us" (FGC, 471). Through the narrative which resounds the feverish note underlying these processes, Lessing raises the basic question: "what is madness" in a socio-political structure which prefers to put everything behind different labels. So viciously is the whole set-up caught in this naming process that it almost drives itself mad looking for a new label:

quick, quick, a new word, a new label, 'commitment', perhaps? 'mysticism'? Anything that will stop the process of thought for a time, anything to sterilize, or to make harmless: to partition off, to compartmentalize (FGC, 472).

This in itself is a comment on the modern culture's self-centredness and self-complacency, the alternative to which is sought in Martha and later in Francis and Paul's attempt at collective living.

Lessing mainly blames the inadequacy of imagination for the present affliction of our age: "Our culture has made an enemy of the unconscious." She, on the other hand, prefers looking at it as "a helpful force," concluding thereby that it is our intellectual apparatus, our rationalism, logic and deductions which are the main causal factors of the chaos. These aspects of our intelligence have detached us from the other "variety of intelligence"—emotion, perception and understanding. The cause of Lynda's madness is rooted in this conception; so is of many others. Her case, like that of Mary (GS) and Kate (SBD), exemplifies the role society plays in the perversion of sensibility and in the creation, thereby, of individual conflict, despair and madness. Tony Marston states in The Grass
is Singing: “What is madness, but a refuge, a retreating from the world?” (199). In The Four-Gated City, Lessing describes it as that “area of human mind where the machinery of ordinary life seemed more than absurd, seemed a frightening trap” (515).

The dependence on rationality at the expense of emotions is seen by Lessing as leading to the ultimate destruction of the human race unless checked. This attitude is not only represented in the impersonal observations of Charlie Slatter (GS), or the soulless scientific pursuits of Jimmy Wood (FGC), but is also epitomized in the communist party's view that "neurosis, mental trouble of any kind . . . was reactionary and bourgeois" (FGC, 199).

The lack of instinct and discernment on the part of those who, by definition, are supposed to be the most sensitive and talented individuals of the time makes Lessing wonder: "Extraordinary. But this thought does lead to the next . . . who, then is mad?" The possibility of a number of others, supposedly sane persons, being mad is considered, including the psychiatrists Dr. Lamb and Mrs. Johns, only to realize that this particular quest for definition doesn't get one far" (FGC, 492). Though the narrative drops the question by stating "being nuts from time to time is a part of everyone's life these days" (FGC, 491), it does reveal Lessing's strong distaste for reductive definitions which refute the openness of life and existence. The implied idea is that society has reached a point where it is unable to strike right balance between its rational powers and imaginative faculty. Given such a social organization, "truth can perhaps only be found in 'madness', in the margins", as notes Jeannette King."^45

In making the question of insanity and breakdown of prime significance in The Four-Gated City, Lessing's purpose is to analyse the "why" of this phenomenon due to which the lives of millions of people have "run out into dry sand" (FGC, 247). In Mark's study, a whole wall covers "the facts and figures about mental hospitals, asylums, patients, mad people, people incapacitated in the countries of the world" (FGC, 509).
Psychotherapy as a treatment and cure for ravaged souls is rejected. That the adjudications of Dr. Lamb's fraternity can do any good to mankind is cancelled out in the clear assertion that psychoanalysis reduces a person to “a nothing—but: you are "nothing-but Electra," or "nothing-but Cassandra," or "nothing-but a child" (FGC, 237-38). The compulsion to label and isolate is apparent here too. The idea of a doctor as a sort of spiritual healer, a shock-absorber, for a collective is pushed forward to the future and to an alien culture, the research for which is going on in Delhi, officially and unofficially (FGC, 637). It would be the harbinger of a time when the concept of schizophrenia will be submerged under ESP.

At a larger collective plane, the narrative line relates madness to irrational public behaviour, and seeks historical/political evidence to prove the point:

in times of public hysteria anything was possible. Whole nations went mad overnight. It had happened in Stalin's Russia. It had happened in Germany. It had happened in the England of the First World War. It was now happening in the States. The tiniest turn of the screw one way or the other, and anybody could be locked up, lose their job, be put into prison, interned. Or possibly, killed (FGC, 223).

The novel, thus, works up to the conclusion that “the human race had driven itself mad” (FGC, 631). Madness is viewed as the culminating point—a physical manifestation of the anguish and despair that is rooted in the degenerating values and decaying system of a whole culture, in the complete divide between the rational and the non-rational, and in the isolating tactics of society.

The politics of madness is neatly summed up in the altered responses to experience:

Once upon a time, it had been said of people, so-and so's unkind, or bad-tempered, or intolerant or a bully. Now, they were neurotic. Yet, between this climate, the ordinary air in which one had always lived, and that other, where people were under psychiatrists, had been an absolute separation (FGC, 240).
The appreciation and understanding which Lessing extends to insanity takes madness from the realm of the clinical into the realm of the cosmic. She views it as a new plane of perception, another alternative to grasp the truths of life. Lessing has used madness to the same effect which Foucault analyses as follows:

by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.46

In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing’s stress is on the recuperative power of madness as it is in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* where madness becomes not merely a source of new insights and strengths but a necessity for survival in a world ever more relentlessly bent on self-destruction.

The bomb or the nuclear weapons signify much more than the physical power to destroy; they reflect an attitude. And, as Dagmar Barnow has suggested, “it is the mental operations and manipulations sustaining it, a mental state of frenzied exclusion that has to be opposed by restructuring human relationships.”47 Lessing, like Dostoevsky, envisions no cure for man in his present social condition except in the possession by a higher spirit or “idea” rather than the forces that presently move him. The alternative to the sickness stemming from the lust for power, sex and money could only be a divine sickness.

The greater part of the text follows the neutral discourse of the realist mode, at times bordering upon documentary realism—for instance, the pages describing the political situation during the mid fifties (*FGC*, 307-11), vignettes describing social and cultural changes called “A Sign of Time,” and the Aldermaston marches. Nevertheless, the narrative surface ruptures when describing the operations of the libidinal, the anarchic. For instance, the text loses its surface coherence when describing Lynda and Martha in the basement, Dorothy’s diaries; or Mark in his study, the walls of which document world disasters past and future. This tendency of using eruptive narrative codes is a conscious device on Lessing’s part. Virginia Tiger refers
to it as "calculated strategy of disfiguring the world of the realist project so as to refigure its significance."48 This technique also makes apparent the thematic opposition between the intelligible and the irrational, the everyday and the aberrant. Thus, the surface conceals a less accessible narrative code through which Doris Lessing is exploring spiritual possibilities—mysteries on the other side of the representatively real.

**Apocalypse/Utopia—A Narrative Manoeuvre**

The questions that lie scattered throughout the main body of the narrative converge in the book’s final section. The “Appendix” is a “capsuled, speeded up” (FGC,623) version not only of the events spanning over three decades, but also of the themes and ideas which form the novel’s “terminus a quo.” The compacted events offer a cogent analysis of the increasing domination of individuals by politics and technology.

Structurally speaking, the “Appendix” discards all the tenets of realism, formal harmony and temporal continuity. Its futuristic temper—a hypothetical sketch of the years from 1970 until the end of the century—takes it into the realm of pure fantasy. This merely serves to corroborate the notion voiced by Lorna Sage that Lessing’s “writing sets out to erase some of the most stubborn boundaries of our mental maps.”49 Elaborating on this very aspect further, Joyce Carol Oates says that Lessing’s writing is “profoundly experimental—exploratory—in its efforts to alter our expectations about life and about the range of our own consciousness.”50

*The Four-Gated City* seeks to transform our consciousness not only of the impending ecological disaster, the self-annihilating madness, but also of the possibilities of the open form of the novel.

Writers invariably evolve different strategies to reproduce their experience and encapsulate their vision. For instance, Kafka goes into paradigmatic mode while Gunter Grass uses the archetypal figures of
German fairy tales to achieve what he calls "a richer truth than you can get by collecting the facts of this flat realism."\textsuperscript{51} In much the same vein, Lessing blends various stream-of-the-consciousness techniques and documentary realism with the straightforward narrative to probe the undercurrents of the subconscious. The end-result is another kind of reality—a reality which is "there" though not in a palpable form. The climactic ending imbibes the fear and hope between which the fate of humanity is constantly suspended. At the same time, its futuristic note sets the tone for Lessing's experiments with another genre that has been categorised as "Inner Space Fiction."

Fantasy signifies not just an extension of the self but the desire to cross the boundaries. The ending of Lessing's novel is an oblique projection of this very desire. The prophetic ending, culminating in a utopian fantasy, exposes the philosophic position that the narrative otherwise keeps latent. Lessing has explained the apocalyptic implications of the "Appendix" in terms of her disenchantment with the present. She admits being "a bit gloomy about the future," and goes on to state, "I don't see a big shooting war because they say they've too much to lose, but some kind of accident is inevitable . . . ."\textsuperscript{52} At another place she remarks, "One doesn't need to have a crystal ball to see that is what's going to happen."\textsuperscript{53} To stress her point she refers to the environmental scientists' increasingly mounting worry about the depletion of ozone layer or the destruction of stratosphere.

As far as the political implications of apocalypse are concerned, Lessing does not regard it only as a fictional possibility. In her own words, children, in millions, dying of malnutrition all over the world is an apocalypse. Thus the prophetic insight depicted in the "Appendix" is directly related to her humanism and humanitarian concerns.

Apocalyptic conclusion may appear unusual and contrary to the demands of credibility, but it is more than her personal vision. Laski sounds the same note, as have done many others: "A generation, in fact, like our own, whose feet lie so near to the abyss has no right to optimism about its future."\textsuperscript{54} Lessing, therefore, is merely voicing a fear that is the logical
outcome of the experience of the last decades—the tragic experience of the fragility of civilized habits. It is actually the dangers that surround us, their tangibility and immediacy, that writers like Orwell, Golding and Lessing are driven to experimentation and innovation.

The "Appendix" typifies the "crisis of reason" which the text refracts at various junctures. Lessing’s analysis of social/political scenario make it very clear that in this world of fast changing paradigms, we are beyond rationalism and rational definitions—of ends and means. That is how Francis Coldridge views their collective migration from the city to countryside—"When we did it, we did not have motives or reasons or rationalization, we did it because it seemed sensible" (FGC,619).

It, however, is not to suggest that she has lost hope about human potential. She says:

As a part of this vortex we’re in, it’s possible that we’re changing into people with greater capacities for imagination, and that we are going to be regarded as the ‘missing link,’ the transition people, and we’ll have much better people.

In the situation, this "hope" may best be described as what Emmanuel Mounier, a French writer, has termed "optimisme tragique."

Corresponding to the horrific propensities of the time, the Children of Violence sequence could have had only such an ending as is rooted in a kind of "optimism of the will" or "pessimism of the intellect." It is simply an acknowledgement of the irreconcilable edges of life, hinted at way back by Shakespeare—life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, and so on and so forth.

The entire argument is pithily summed up by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. His highly absorbing and perceptive article conveys: "The apocalypse is part of our ideological baggage... a metaphor for the collapse of capitalism." He goes on to point out:

It is ever present, but never 'actual': a second reality, an image that we construct for ourselves, an incessant production of our fantasy, the catastrophe in mind.
It is not at all hard to see that the utopian and apocalyptic mood of the "Appendix" corresponds to the political, social and economic situations of the time. "History has seized time in a brutal embrace. We dread the apocalypse," cries out Philip Rhav in "Trials of Mind.\textsuperscript{58} Lessing's book, however, seeks to mitigate this cultural anguish by displaying an impulse towards a reconstruction of the world by renewing confidence in man even though that would have to be a new kind of man—a "mutant."

The ground for the catastrophe—some vague nuclear gas leaks that had the British Isles transformed into Destroyed Area II (\textit{FGC},651)—is prepared in Mark's preoccupation with the happenings of the world, in his efforts "to see what was really happening—you know, really happening" (\textit{FGC},312-13). Maps on the walls of his study chart out the equipment of destruction:

\begin{quote}
With yellow flags, on this map, were marked areas of air, soil and water contaminated by bomb blasts, fall-out, the disposal of radioactive waste, concentration of chemicals used by spraying crops, and oil discharged from ships (\textit{FGC},313).
\end{quote}

Likewise, ESP is a possibility ever present within the narrative pattern (\textit{FGC},532-33;536-37). Lynda "sees" as well as "hears," while Martha can "hear". Besides, there are Jimmy Wood's inhuman experiments regarding the telepathic capacities of human brain. The novel's prophetic ending, however non-realist in the conventional sense, follows this inner logic of the text. From the point of view of the plot development, it is only one of those "easily foreseeable disasters" that mar the face of the world (\textit{FGC},662).

The idea of the apocalypse has accompanied utopian thought since its first beginnings, pursuing it like a shadow, like an obverse aspect. In \textit{The Four-Gated City} too the apocalyptic ending is integrally connected with the ideal city of Martha's earliest dreams—"noble city, set foursquare" whose "citizens moved, grave and beautiful, black and white and brown together": their "many-fathered" and many-coloured children mingled harmoniously
under the smiling patronage of the elders of "this fabulous and ancient city . . ." (MG.21). The first evocation of the noble utopian city coincides with the conclusion of The Four-Gated City and brings this dominant strand full circle.

Joseph Batts, the first of the "new children" is clearly of mixed race, possessing exceptional sensory powers and social sense. But, as we have already seen, Joseph Batts does not spring up suddenly; rather he is the final sequence of the creative vision which is encoded in the narrative throughout. He is that child of violence who negates violence, the inhabitant of that dream-city where a child displaying inclination towards aggression is seen as "a throw-back" from the pre-catastrophe violent era (FGC.658). The creation of Joseph Batts is a reaffirmation of Lessing's deep faith in the evolutionary possibilities of man.59 In that idea alone lies the hope for the future.

The utopia—the vision of a paradisiacal golden city—is an abiding image throughout Children of Violence, only slightly changing its form in A Ripple from The Storm where it transmutes itself into a socialist vision of the world. Though Lessing denies harbouring Marxist vision of classless society in offering a utopia as a possible ending, it is interesting to note that the concluding part of The Four-Gated City recasts Marx's views about the contemporary world. According to him:

The present generation resembles the Jews whom Moses led through the wilderness. It must not only conquer a new world, it must also perish in order to make room for people who will be equal to a new world.60

Moreover, the utopian ending recalls the need for another faith in order to replace the ones that Lessing has lost—political ideology and revolutionary politics. Her deflection into metaphysics and space fiction probably explains the inherited desire to trace substitutes for the lost faith in human society and civilized values.
The novel analyses alternative endings implicit in the narrative and the kinds of politics they stand for. Different possibilities and their political implications are viewed by Mark and Martha while deciding upon the conclusion of *A City in Desert* (*FGC*,151-153). Likewise, the possibility of a purely anti-political rejectionist ending is explored in Francis and his friends' retreat to an agrarian setting in Wiltshire. They represent those who were numbed by "a kind of despair because of the future" (*FGC*,631). For a short while they come closest to "a golden age" (*FGC*,634), but the laws of change overtake their idealistic dreams and their community crumbles away. Here, the self-destructive potentialities of a utopia are considered as sufficient ground for rejecting it as an alternative ending. The implied argument is that utopian option will remain an illusion as long as the mindset does not change.

In this aborted utopian enterprise, the distrust of all ideology, politics and government machinery is further stressed. The narrative rejects them as a source for imparting values to human existence. It was a society without "ideology, plan, constitution, or philosophy" (*FGC*,620). What bound them together was not any religious, political, or theoretical basis, but "a shadow of fore-knowledge," (*FGC*,621) and the limits it imposed on itself in not subscribing to the mores of establishment. Paradoxically, this made their decision to exclude, to occupy the fringe, a political stand. And, as Enzensberger explains, the crisis of all utopias consists in this fact that "when we act politically, we never manage to achieve what we had in mind."61

Still, Francis and his friends, on the one hand and Mark-Lynda-Martha, on the other, are the characters who in spite of their loss of communication with their contemporaries are the harbingers of a new faith in the individual’s right to develop all his faculties harmoniously. Simultaneously, the text pushes forth the conditional nature of individual happiness, which could be made possible, or impossible, by the larger collectives. The utopian ending, as a narrative manipulation, seeks to
counteract this “everlasting nay” which lies like a thick layer of smoke over
the text during its cultural expositions.

At the background, however, is the dream that the modern era has
nurtured, which visualises unity and everlasting peace for our divided
humanity. Martha’s dream is realized in a kind of regressive utopia—
topping the time-frame, it takes the world to its beginning. Mark’s dream,
on the other hand, remains unrealised. It is through him that Lessing says,
“I cannot help dreaming of that perfect city, a small exquisite city of
gardens and fountains that one might build somewhere . . .” (FGC,662). As
a stepping stone to this ideal state, nationalism is rejected so as to provide
space to universalism. Mark says—“Loving a country is like loving a person,
it’s all moonshine and anguish . . .” (FGC,662). And it is Mark who
experiences the unification of mankind: “We have no enemy. The human
race is united at last” (FGC,663). But here, too, a criticism is implied: only
in the possibility of a common calamity can the mankind come together.
Only then this habit of looking for differences will be replaced by a quest for
sharedness.

An alternative view of the ending can be traced in the mystical
interpretation of this “prophetic” shift, the “Appendix”. Lessing’s mental tilt
towards Sufism is a widely discussed aspect. Her concept of human
evolution—telepathic powers and ESP—does not seek inspiration from sci-
fiction but from the transcendental deductions of the Sufi thought. The
direct narrative evidence lies in the lavish introductory quotes given to part
duc. Lessing alludes to Idries Shah to authenticate her climactic and
unusual conclusion:

Sufis believe that . . . humanity is evolving a certain destiny. We are
all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result
of a need for specific organs . . . In this age of transcending of time
and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the
transcending of time and space (FGC,467).

The belief expressed here is culminated in the creation of Joseph Batts. It is
not without reason that Hardin sees the ending as exclusively Sufistic, and
J. King discovers in Sufism a kind of answer to that splitting of self which is central to Doris Lessing's presentation of her major characters.63

Moreover, a novel that describes a time of universal uncertainty can have recourse to only such a "minimal affirmation,"64 to use John Hollaway's expression. The ending of The Four-Gated City corresponds to the ironic realistic mode. It implies culmination of action without the satisfaction of catharsis.

In social/political novel the possibilities of reconciliation for an affirmative mode of writing are drastically limited by the theme the writer is undertaking. The writer cannot have recourse to personal contentment or metaphysical harmony by way of remembrance of myth as one finds in Austen and G. Eliot, Joyce and Proust. Rather, the head on confrontation with society as an entity—as in Zola, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Solzhenitsyn—permits no such reconciliation. Arguing this point J. Orr remarks, "in the social novel reconciliation is possible in spite of politics: in the political novel, politics denies reconciliation."65 Yet the ending of the fifth volume resonates a sense of life continuing beyond the fictive limits it sets.

One of the tendencies of modern literature is to dwell on the contemporary human condition in which modern man has a sense not of renewal, but of being at an end. Sometimes it seems that it is not possible to do more than reflect the decay around and within us. Lessing, like Virginia Woolf, has attempted to salvage the inner life of man from this decay by exploring what Gabriel Marcel calls "the morbid effects" of man's loss of awareness of "the sense of the ontological."66 Laing's observations throw further light on this aspect:

From the point of view of a man alienated from its source, creation arises from despair and ends in failure. But such a man has not trodden the path to the end of time, the end of space, the end of darkness, and the end of light. He does not know that where it all ends, there it all begins.67

It is down this "path" that Lessing attempts to go, and this inclination is absorbed in the narrative course of The Four-Gated City.
She holds the opinion that artists being traditional interpreters of dreams and nightmares, it would be going back on their chosen responsibilities if they "refused to share in the deep anxieties, terrors and hopes of human beings everywhere." The choice, according to her, is not only of preventing an evil but of strengthening a vision of good which may defeat the evil. It is this spirit of humanism and compassion that is reinstated in Mark and Francis Coldridge’s efforts to save the survivors of the cataclysm (FGC,662). A gesture, no matter how small, such as “saving handfuls of the homeless and starving,” in the face of utter despair, is what makes the existence meaningful (FGC,664).

The novel is, therefore, not allowed to end in a philosophic fatalism. Martha discovers a hope for the future on a remote Scottish island (Faris), where a group of mutant children has had its mental powers enhanced, and its social vision reintegrated, by the effects of radiation. The idea of mutants is symbolic of a better improved species if this planet is to become a worth living place.

The tone and style of the “Appendix” explore an entirely different fictional mode; the content establishes Lessing’s humanist stance as central to her work. Joseph Batts is later fully realised in Ben, the rejected mutant, in *The Fifth Child* (1988). Through Ben’s character Lessing is able to play with the whole idea of “humanity.” In these fantastical creations, two incompatible purposes are brought together: while apprehending the world, analyzing it, Lessing has also engaged in an enchanting game of fantasy.

The quest for knowledge of reality which shapes all Doris Lessing’s novels takes her beyond the surface reality in *The Four-Gated City* to the spirit of the age. The plausibility barrier is partially broken in order to apprehend the real world better. Implicit in it is Lessing’s wish to return to an art that is not just a cry of pain but full of responsibility for her fellow human beings.
NOTES


12. Jack starts as a life-force that can send out currents of heightened perception, but he ends up as one who broke in girls using techniques “which were identical with those used in torture . . .” (FGC, 453).


15. See *The four-Gated City* 526; *Martha Quest* 74.


17. The “man alone” seeking authenticity within the collective is one of Lessing’s significant themes. Martha, as a representative figure, experiences loneliness as an essential human fate:

   “This was loneliness? Yes, she supposed so. But, if so, what else had she ever known? . . . people said "loneliness" speaking of an ultimate dread . . . since she had been in London, she had been alone, and had learned she had never been anything else in life (*FGC*, 46).

18. Martha reflects: “People filled in for you, out of what they wanted, needed, from—not you, not you at all, but from their own needs” (*FGC*), 26).


22. Colin’s communism was “a kind of eccentricity, but tolerated because it was his, a Coldridge’s — as if he stammered, or bred pythons.” (*FGC*, 119).


31. See *The Four-Gated City* 520: 545-46.

32. Doris Lessing, "Learning to Put the Questions Differently," Ingersoll 27.


34. M-L. Von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," *Man and Symbols*, ed. Carl Jung (London: Picador, 1964). Von Franz's analysis is instructive. It not only further illuminates Lessing's idea of madness but also explains the erratic note that the narrative sometimes seems to acquire. He says,

> in order to bring the individuation process into reality, one must surrender consciously to the power of unconscious . . . one must simply listen in order to learn what the inner totality—the self wants to do here and now in a particular situation (165-66).


36. Laing 110.


38. Pickering 27.


40. This particular aspect has been touched upon in the previous section—The Fragmented Reality—of this chapter.
41. Lessing, Ingersoll 15. (Also see "Learing to Put the Questions Differently." Ingersoll 21; 27.)
42. Lessing, Ingersoll 15.
44. The idea gets fuller exposition in Phoebe’s visit to a psychologist, Mrs Johns: “Both were professionals, and managing and dogmatic by nature.” Their pre-conceived notions left no scope for understanding and identification (*FGC*, 412).
46. Foucault 288.
53. Lessing, Ingersoll 42-43.
56. Lessing, Ingersoll 30.


59. It is not just a fictional vision but a genuine hope: Lessing tells E. Bertelsen, “It seems to me that human beings are in evolution . . . . I think we’re likely to become more intelligent and more intuitive and so on.” Interview, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 16.1 (1986): 161.


61. Enzensberger 79.


63. King 28.


65. Orr 45.


67. Laing 38.