Chapter – 3
Female Logos in Patriarchal World

Most forms of feminism characterize “patriarchy” as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Many feminist writers have considered patriarchy to be the basis on which most modern societies have been formed. They argue that it is necessary and desirable to get away from this form in order to achieve gender equality in the society. For instance, Macmillan’s Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender says that,

Patriarchy is an andocentric social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property. Historically, the principle of patriarchy has been central to the social, legal, political, and economic organization of Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese cultures, and has had a deep influence on modern civilization. (www.enotes.com/doris-lessing-criticism/lessing-doris/137956/golden-notebook.).

To observe in detail based on the writers’ argument, the study attempts to investigate how Lessing portrays the patriarchal background of her heroines in the three novels which have been taken for analysis. The intention of the effort is to examine about her endeavor to lift the traditional and patriarchal norms that render the woman subordinate to her male counterpart rendering her almost mentally broken. She has placed
the woman at the forefront to improve on her status and her society as a whole. She has
gone further to represent the woman as an assertive being seeking recognition and
visibility in her society. The major theme to Labovitz, in the female Bildungsroman is the
marriage plot. She states in *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the
Twentieth Century* in this respect, “Lessing is faithful to her society and times, as she has
her protagonist marry young.” (178)

Lessing portrays the central character, Mary in *The Grass is Singing* in many
ways like an immature, emotionally malnourished, who decides to get married in her
young stage. Her resentment towards marriage life and fearful rages at the black people
around her is, essentially, a mask to cover up her deep-rooted insecurity and inability to
face her feelings. These two weaknesses are the particular sources of her ultimate mental
and emotional collapse, especially in her marriage life.

Mary was forced to take another look at her priorities in life; when she was
literally forced into thinking of marriage. Her first attempt to settle down with a middle-
aged gentleman of fifty-five ended up in a fiasco. Sometimes later, a luckless farmer,
Dick Turner, was charmed by her. Both of them seemed desperate to get married without
trying to understand each other. At first she met Dick casually at the cinema. He very
rarely came into town from his farm, except when he had to buy goods which he could
not get at his local store, and that happened perhaps once or twice a year.

Dick was a man who first appeared to her like a kind of hero or rescuer who could
take her from the life she had liked, and to consider inferior, and into a life of freedom
and emotional fulfillment. As she came to discover, to intense dismay and increasing
anger, Dick was as emotionally under-developed as she was. His goal, his dream, and his
ambition were to live a life of quiet productivity on the farm-land. Ultimately, both his and Mary’s dreams came to naught because Dick was ineffectual, inefficient, disorganized, and completely deluded about his abilities. Like him, his psyche was too fragile to incorporate that which did not fit into his self-sustaining belief system. When evidence mounted that his visions [about his farm and about the potential for happiness in his marriage] were in fact delusions. When it came to the point at the end of the novel, The Grass is Singing he could no longer sustain his image in any way; he had a complete emotional and mental breakdown. Lessing portrays him as, “He was a spare, sun burnt, slow-voiced, deep-eyed young man who had come into her life like an accident.”

(GS, 49)

After they were married by a special licence, Dick drove Mary to his farm hundred miles away, and that was all could say about him. Mary was half asleep when they reached there. She liked the idea of being “close to nature” but this was not what she had in mind. In the past, getting close to nature, meant going on a picnic out of town with her friends, to sit all day on hot rocks in the shade, listening to a portable gramophone playing dance music from America. Anyway Mary consoled herself with the thought that “she would be own mistress” at the farm. This was what in the final analysis, marriage means to Mary.

She was going to be happy. she had no idea of the life she had to lead, poverty, which Dick had her of with a scrupulous humility, was another abstraction, nothing to do with her pinched childhood. She saw it as a rather exhilarating fight against odds. (GS, 52)
Lessing had pointed out that even the first experience of Mary in her husband’s farm was somewhat frightened by the endless sky, the rows of squat, the shadowy trees, and the strange sounds of night animals. She became even more uncomfortable when she entered into the house and saw how crudely made and furnished. She felt that, “In the dim yellow light the room seemed tiny, tiny; and very low; the roof was the corrugated iron she had seen from outside; there was a strong musty smell, almost animal-like.” (GS, 53)

Consequently Mary’s first and last impression of Dick’s house was that of utter distaste. It was a shabby place in the wilderness remaining her of her own “pinched” childhood. It was a thatch with iron sheets for a roof but no ceiling. The floor was covered with animal skins; the walls were bare except for two pictures put up there with thumbtacks, sack cloth served as a curtain for separating the living room from the bedroom which was equally bare. But Dick launched into a detailed account of how each and every article had been brought by him with his great effort and he was happy for bringing Mary there. His timid adoration, self – abasement and feeling of guilt made Mary to feel that after all, it was not such a bad marriage. She gave herself grudgingly and passively to Dick and even for that he was grateful. She had a woman’s instinctive and extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship with her husband and to immunize herself against it. It was easier for her to do so because Dick was not the creature of her imagination. In bed, he approached Mary with the timid adoration which was the only touch she could have borne. And soon it was over.

It was not so bad, she thought, when it was all over; not as bad as that. It meant nothing to her, nothing at all. Except outrage and imposition, she
was relieved to find she felt nothing. She was able maternally to bestow the gift of herself on this humble stranger, and remain untouched. (GS, 55)

This timid adoration revealed the fact that Turner was struggling in life but his adoring and self-abasing attitude was very much appealed to Mary, while Turner was certain that Mary would soon adapt herself to life on his farm. The only saving grace for Mary in the marriage was that there was no honeymoon simply because Dick could not afford it, and she was glad to escape the ordeal. “There was no honeymoon. He explained he was too poor really to afford one, though if she insisted he would do what he could. She did not insist. She was relieved to escape a honey moon.” (GS, 50)

In the first flush of energy and determination, Mary really enjoyed her new life. She liked the new leisure and Dick’s approval of the changes she had brought running the households. She then began working on the dress materials which she had brought for herself. Mary then took to whitewashing and painting the walls as she looked about for something to do. This took her two weeks. Thus Mary had made her new home more comfortable, sewing and white-washing all the walls. She started engaging herself in Dick’s house like,

[…] and embroidered everything that could possibly be embroidered. There she sat all day, sewing and stitching, hour after hour, as if fine embroidery would save her life. She was a good needle-woman, and the results were admirable. (GS, 62)

Dick was alarmed at her energy and efficiency and undermined his own self-assurance because this was the main quality he lacked. She unpacked her bookcase she had brought with her and started reading the books she had read many times over. Dick
was pleased with her new pre-occupation and it flattered him to think he had married a woman who read books. He picked up one of her books but found it shallow and fluffy. He left her alone to her own devices. He treated her “like a brother” and waited for the time when she turned to him of her own accord. Mary was relieved and Dick was convinced that it would come right in the end. Soon she had nothing more to do. She started feeling restless as there was nothing more for her to do. She would sit for hours at a time as if she was in a state of unconsciousness. It seemed that something had finally snapped inside of her, and she would gradually fade and sink into darkness. Thus her experience was similar to Lessing's own frantic efforts at adapting to her first marriage as she recounted in her works.

Mary’s initial fear of sexuality banned her from entering into a relationship, and when her acceptance of a proposal was rewarded with a kiss a violent revulsion overcame her and she ran away. Understandably, when she experienced love-making for the first time with her new husband Dick, she was unable to meet him sexually. Having experienced sex, however, she did not want children. She thought that maternity would mean a deeper, more personal confrontation with her sexuality which she refused to acknowledge. When she passed a group of African women, Mary realized that,

She hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boils. Their babies hanging on to them like leeches. (www.bookrags.com/The Grass is Singing)

Hence she said to herself shivering, for she thought with horror of suckling a child. The idea of a child's lips on her breasts made her feel quite sick; at the thought of it she would
involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them from a violation.

Mary's horror of sexuality was inextricably linked with an inescapable past. Although she had banished the thoughts of her childhood from her consciousness, her fear of her father became manifest in her dream life. Thus dreams revealed her need to become reconciled with her past in order to live a whole and balanced life in the present.

In one unpleasant dream,

There was her father, the little man with the plump juicy stomach, beer-smelling and jocular, whom she hated, holding her mother in his arms. ...

Her mother was struggling in mock protest, playfully expostulating. Her father bent over her mother, and at the sight, Mary ran away. (GS, 162)

In another dream in which Mary played hide-and-seek,

Her father caught her head and held it in his lap with his small hairy hands, to cover up her eyes, laughing and joking loudly about her mother hiding. She smelt the sickly odour of beer, and through it she smelt too-her head held down in the thick stuff of his trousers-the unwashed masculine smell she always associated with him. She struggled to get her head free, for she was half-suffocating, and her father held it down, laughing at her panic. (GS, 163)

This last dream had an autobiographical significance, as Lessing repeated it in The Memoirs of a Survivor, which she called her "attempt at an autobiography," and again in her actual autobiography Under My Skin. It exemplified Lessing's use of self-representational writing to confront, examine, and get rid of frightening aspects of her past, something which Mary never did. Mary did not learn from her past, and it came to
haunt her marriage to Dick. The union was a mistake, since she married in order to prove she was like her conventional friends, who settled, happily, it seemed, into marriage and family life. Mary could not become like them because she was neither willing to remember her childhood nor to learn from it. Because of this failure, she did not mature emotionally or physic. Mary’s sexual repression was derived from her intention to protect her self from some traumatic experiences. That was, she denied her sexuality for the purpose of forgetting something unpleasant. Tracing back to Mary’s childhood, one could suggest that her denial of sexuality and her despite of sexual intimacy with men was closely related to the poor economic condition of her family and her father’s sexual abuse. She believed that it was this “tyranny of the family” made Mary so sexually repressed. In other words, poverty was a nightmare haunting Mary from her childhood acted as a major reason for her sexual repression.

The association between her father and other men, including her husband, foreshadowed the inevitable failure of Mary’s marriage and sexual life. Especially when she met Dick, a man without the center, she could not help recalling her useless father. For example, when Mary first got to the farm and listened to Dick talking about the history of each thing in the shabby house, she felt that she came back to her childhood, sitting with her mother and watching her endlessly contrive and mend. The shabby farmhouse meant to her a misery as if her father had come out of his grave to make her live as miserable as her mother. Later, when she argued with Dick about building a ceiling that he could not afford, she almost spoke in a new intolerable voice, which derived from her mother while she had made scenes over money with her husband.
Without determination and daydreaming all the time, Dick was destined to be in debt, just like her weak and useless father. He reminded her the miserable childhood during which she witnessed her mother leading a desperate life for her father’s inability to support his family. These economic failures of the two men in her life made Mary more sexually repressed. Her despair towards her husband, who also could not be sufficient for putting the farm on a sound financial basis, inevitably led to her broken marriage and sexual repression. Mary was fearful of sexual intimacy and she tried to repress her sexual relationship drove from her childhood. What she wanted to forget i.e. the sexual scenes she saw when she was too young to bear. And this painful experience repeatedly appeared in her life too. Lessing says that, throughout her life:

Mary liked other people’s children but shuddered at the thought of having any of her own. She felt sentimental at weddings, but she had a profound distaste for sex; there had been little privacy in her home and there were things she did not care to remember she had taken care to forget them years ago. (GS, 39)

Therefore the trauma caused by the sexual abuse in her childhood was rooted in her mind, making her eager to repress her sexual desires. At first, she tried to date with “a widower of fifty-five”, selecting a man much elder than her manifest as her intention was to avoid physical intimacy. Dating with a man at her father’s age to ignore his sexuality, she believed safer and more comfortable. However, when the man wanted to touch her, she could not help screaming and running out of the house like a scared little girl. Without overcoming the terrible memory of her childhood, she could not deal with men or any sexual relations. Later, out of desperate need for a husband, she quit her job and soon married Dick Turner.
After marrying Dick, the situation did not become better. Dick’s sensitive and submissive nature provided Mary a sufficient excuse to treat him maternally instead of having sexual relationship with him. As Dick started treating her like a brother, waiting for her to turn to him of her own accord, Mary felt more relieved and rejected her womanhood more seriously. On her wedding night she approached sex in a detached manner as usual, separating marriage from sexuality.

Consequently, this marriage took Mary back to her past, which she had suppressed for a long time. Each day, her unconsciousness came to the surface with the poverty she had to live with in the village. The struggle against the economic situations and the failure of Dick as a farmer forced Mary to face with her latent fear, which was to lead a life like her mother. Besides, the Kaffir shop where Dick insisted on working forced the hidden feelings to burst in the dark halls of her mind. She resisted against the idea of working there, however, she could not explain the reason to Dick due to the fact that she thought that he would not be able to understand her. It was like a nightmare for her from which she could not escape. Therefore, in spite of fighting against her fate, Mary was trapped in her loneliness and depression. Her unsuccessful marriage reminded her of the unhappy experiences in her childhood which were suppressed deep in her subconscious. Mary’s weakness lay in her failure of facing these repressed feelings and in her fear of having a similar life as her mother’s. It seemed as if she was in the hands of an inescapable destiny.

Mary was unable to comprehend the works of Dick and his servants in his farm as well as in his house. She was especially at a loss to understand, Samson, the house boy employed by Dick, who had so far been appropriating the daily provisions of the
household of his own. Mary had not tackled “the native problem” so far but it had been ingrained into her that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her, if she was not careful. Her first priority therefore was to make Samson, to understand her but she herself miserably failed to understand the working of the native mind as she failed to empathize with her husband Dick. In contrast to her views, he had a thought that the savages had cooked for him better than his wife and had run his house by giving him a comfortable existence. He described his situation to his wife when she was quite stupefied with rage against the natives. He said curtly,

Listen to me, I work hard enough, don’t I? All day I am down on the lands with these lazy black savages, fighting them to get some work out of them. You know that. I won’t come back home to this damned fight, fight, fight in the house. Do you understand? I will not have it. And you should learn sense. If you want to get work out of them you have to know how to manage them. You shouldn’t expect too much. They are nothing but savages after all. (GS, 78)

Mary felt unbearable when it was getting increasingly hot with each passing day. She was drained of all strength as sweat poured off her all day; the heat seemed to be beating from the iron over her head. She could feel the sweat running down her ribs and thighs under her dress, “as if ants were crawling over her” (GS 66) and she took to wear a hat even in the house. She felt like: “And then, suddenly, the heat became intolerable. Outside in the bush the cicadas shrilled incessantly, and her head ached; her limbs were heavy and tense.” (GS 66). The tension between Dick and Mary continued to build and finally erupted when Dick discovered Mary had been having water brought from the well
to cool herself during the high heat of the day. He called it a waste but she called it a necessity and they argued bitterly without resolving the situation, each carrying resentment of the other into the days and weeks that followed when he suggested that she filled the bath tub with water once a week and used it just to lie into cool herself off. But she lost her temper by saying that the bath tub was filthy. “It’s dirt, I will never get into the bath again until it is really clean. How you can allow your things to be so filthy I cannot understand.” (GS, 73). The next day she asked the house boy to scrub the bath tub and kept him at it all day but to no effect. That night Dick told her the bath tub was made of zinc and would look like because of oxidation.

Hence, the protagonist Mary suffered not only from psychological pains but from some physical disturbances as well. The world she lived in gave her only pain and distress. She suffered from extreme heat and she felt suffocated. The infertility of her marriage was reflected in the physical world as well and therefore, she used to complain about the lack of water. Besides, she felt like sleeping all the time, which revealed the fact that she was psychologically deteriorating. She became like a ghost aimlessly wandering in the house. Moreover, her speech became broken day by day as her health deteriorated. The narrator explained the thoughts of Tony Marston, a young Englishman about Mary as:

What sort of woman had Mary Turner been, before she came to this farm and had been driven slowly off balance by heat and loneliness and poverty? And Dick Turner himself- what had he been? And the native- but here his thoughts were stopped by lack of knowledge. (GS, 28)
In addition to this a visit from Charlie Slatter and his wife deepened the mutual resentment vigorously between Mary and Dick. She reacted badly to what she perceived as patronizing kindness from Mrs. Slatter and to the insensitive obsession with which Slatter and Dick talked about farming. Mary listened to the male conversation with wonder. It was the first time she had heard men talk about farming. It showed that Dick was “hungry” for it but Mary felt “a little mean” and she was relieved when the conversation got over. At last the visit came to an end with the regret on Dick’s side, but relief from Mary. He said that, “I am glad they came. It must be lonely for you” (GS 77), but she replied that she was lonely. Thus she thought that loneliness was craving for other people’s company. But she did not know that it could be an unnoticed cramping of the spirit for lack of companionship. In her state of restlessness, Mary took out her frustration on the naive houseboys, proving to be a hard taskmaster. When they started leaving one after another, Dick blamed her for not being considerate to them, as he was facing enough trouble at the farm with native labor and he did not want Mary to his woes. So he let the matters be where they were because he could not do much to set things right, both at the farm and in the house.

The attempts of Mary in the beginning of her marriage life proved that she had taken efforts to make her home and life pretty and comfortable. She even dug into her own savings and set about the task of refurbishing the house and made it look presentable. Thus Mary attempted to improve her lot by diversifying in several areas. For instance she had a chance to have a pamphlet on bee-keeping at the counter of the store one day. She also got an idea to rectify her husband’s problems through this source. But he had shown less interest and told that his luck had changed with the good rains and he
hoped to do well in the next season. On hearing this Mary was not even contempt but got more amusement and this contradictory views of Mary was explained as,

Her own attitude towards him was fundamentally one of contempt, but only as a man; as a man she paid no attention to him, she left him out of account altogether: As a farmer she respected him. She respected his ruthless driving of himself, his absorption in his work. She believed that he was going through a necessary period of struggle before achieving the moderate affluence enjoyed by most farmers. In her feeling for him, in relation to his work, was admiration, even affection. (GS, 84-85)

Thus she was intrigued more by the note of amusement than contempt and wondered for his failure both as a man and as a farmer. But this attitude was changed when he ignored her warning and words of caution against buying some pigs from Charlie and built pigsties up behind the house among the rocks to save expense on the bricks. As a result the piglets born to these pigs soon died and the venture ended. But Dick blamed it on his luck which turned Mary bitter. She felt that,

The women who marry men like Dick learn sooner or later that there are two things they can do: they can drive themselves to pieces in storms of futile anger and rebellion; or they can hold themselves tight and go bitter. Mary, with the memory of her own mother recurring more and more frequently, like an older, sardonic double of herself walking beside her, followed the course her upbringing made inevitable. (GS, 90)

This incident induced Mary to have a vision of herself as her poor mother, and she considered Dick as a failure psyche even as a farmer. Without noticing Mary’s feelings,
he took many new vocations like, breeding turkeys, chickens and rabbits in quick succession but ill-luck stayed with him at every step by justifying the nickname Jonah that the other white settlers had given him. Undeterred, he also opened a Kaffir store on his farm to cater to the natives’ needs which had folded up soon even Mary was forced to look after it. This took her back to her poverty-stricken childhood days and she was disgusted.

Mary chose the passive course and seemed to die from within as she observed Dick's many unprofitable attempts to save the farm from bankruptcy. When Dick, having failed at his schemes to turn his farm to profit with bees, pigs, turkeys and rabbits, opens a "kaffir" store on their property, the similarities between Mary's past and present appear completed. It seemed to Mary as a terrible thing, like an omen and a warning, that the store, the ugly menacing store of her childhood, should follow her here, even to her home. Like Susan Rawlings in Lessing's To Room Nineteen, Mary could not talk to Dick honestly about her feelings, for the good reason that he was now associated in her mind with the grayness and misery of her childhood, and it would have been like arguing with destiny itself. For Mary, an individual could not change her or his self through an act of will. Her inability to develop positively her own sense of self proved fatal.

However, Mary could not help being attracted by Moses, the black servant’s manly body which Dick lacked. She felt “uneasy at his presence” and yet she used to sit quite still, watching him working with the powerful, broad-built body which fascinated her. She felt a growing sexual attraction towards Moses day by day, and her fear of his physical power and sexual attraction combined with her frustration at Dick's failure in his job. She had vague feelings towards Moses, which even she herself could not understand. Her
feelings fluctuated between superiority and humiliation. On the one hand there was the collective idea that she had to keep herself away from the black servant and be his master, and on the other hand, her instincts forced her to form a close relationship with Moses. Thus she was trapped between her superego and identification in her relationship with Moses.

At the end Mary, however had slowly started disintegrating inside. She had never thought much of her husband as a man all along, and admiration and respect for him as a farmer went down. She started sharing the other white settlers’ amused contempt for Dick as a farmer. She had never bargained for the life she had been made to live for six years since she married Dick. So she had decided to leave her husband and searched for a job that had been advertised in her old office. She accepted her fate with a stoic indifference and merely went through the routine of her existence at the farm. Something inside her had cracked up and she would have disintegrated but for Dick’s serious illness six months after she returned home with him. Her vengeance was only delayed and she had been reduced to the state of a zombie and this could not go on for very long. Her world lay shattered around her and she lacked the will to pick up pieces to go on with life. Because of Mary's inability to act satisfactorily within patriarchal and social boundaries the marriage was doomed to failure.

Thus Mary's marriage to Dick forced her to enter into an adult life for which she was not ready, and to abandon her life as a popular companion in the town for a life of solitude and isolation. Lessing points out the differences between Dick, who although had no success as a farmer, and Mary, who could not adjust to the harshness of her new life. For Mary, "it was impossible to fit together what she wanted for herself, and what she
was offered" (GS, 44). Through Mary's slow descent into lethargy, Lessing reveals to the reader just such an inability to forge a personal sense of self independently of Dick or the expectations of others. Before her marriage, Mary decided to have an ideal life for herself, but her marriage to Dick had been a sheer mistake, which was doomed to go into a catastrophe in the end on the grounds that the couple had diverse expectations from marriage. While Mary thought how nice it would be to get close to the nature, Dick expected a farm wife, worker and a mother.

At first, Mary was happy in the village though she felt disappointed when she got into the farm house which had the tiny stuffy room, the bare brick floor and the greasy lamp. She tried to busy herself with daily activities such as doing housework and creating an environment for herself. In fact, in all these activities, she tried to divert her attention from her childhood, which was shaped with the same poverty. However, day by day, their marriage got worse and Mary found herself living in a desert where she was suffering from extreme hot weather, which almost suffocated her, and this physical pain symbolized her struggle against her repressed memories which tried to get out of her unconscious. Her biggest fear had been to become like her mother and ironically day by day she became so. The moment she got into the farm house, she smelt the odour of the room and went back to her unhappy childhood. What she escaped actually haunted her. After some time, she heard the voice of her mother in her talking and shouting. During an argument, Mary noticed that,

She was speaking in a new voice for her, a voice she had never used before in her life. It was taken direct from her mother when she had had those scenes over money with her father. It was not the voice of Mary, the
individual, but the voice of the suffering female, who wanted to show her husband she just would not be treated like that. In a moment she would begin to cry, as her mother had cried on these occasions, in a kind of dignified, martyred rage. (www.bookrags.com/The Grass is Singing)

Throughout the novel, one can see Mary’s denial of her sexual drives indeed produced severe psychological conflicts which led to violent destruction. Due to her repression, she developed distaste for men, natives and nature. But her efforts were meant to fail. Her friends criticized her lack of sexuality and their judgment seriously destroyed her self-image.

Through experiencing “the repetition compulsion”, Mary got into deeper depression and she realized that her marriage had been an enormous mistake. She left her husband and returned back to the town again where she thought that she was happy to bring all those past years back; yet, when she was there, all her illusions were broken since she was not the same young, single woman anymore to be accepted in the girls’ club. After being rejected by her old boss, she had to yield to her fate, and returned to the village. Thus the Turner's life heading towards disaster which made her marriage life ended in vain.

It is noted that throughout her life, Mary has turned for external help to save her from her inner conflicts. Her alienation from her inner self finds its clearest expression in her relationships with men. Instead of taking responsibility for her own life, she expects them to save her from her turmoil. As early as her life at the club, she is entirely dependent upon men. She then turns to Dick because it has seemed to her that she would be saved from herself through marrying him. Her relationship with Moses is also
characterized by her complete dependence on him. Finally, she seizes on the image of young Tony Marston whom she feels might be able to save her from puzzled situation with Moses. Like Anna in The Golden Notebook, she too experiences one disappointment after another, since these relationships can only intensify self estrangement. In its tragic conclusion, when Moses murdered Mary, the book laid bare the illusion of marital happiness and it is as clear as anything that Mary welcomes this release from bondage.

Lessing’s The Golden Notebook, a novel with rich complexity in theme and design also deals with the same tribulations of woman in their patriarchal background. The novel is entirely an attempt to expose the emotions of women like Anna, Ella, Molly, Marion and Muriel, who preferred to be “free” in their marriage life. It is considered as a pioneer work by the feminist movement which proclaims the 20th century view of the male-female relationship. Lessing tries to emerge with the idea of whether women are better off while married or single in the beginning of the novel itself. Even the ironic title “Free Women” obviously referred to Anna Wulf and Molly Jacobs’s lack of husbands. The first one is the alter ego of Lessing and she is the author of a very successful novel, named Free Women.

Anna like Lessing was twice divorced and had a daughter, Janet, who was twelve year old. Both Anna and Molly were in the forties and mothers and also they were the prey to the patriarchal system and struggled to define their identities. The men with whom they interacted expected only a passive submission to their demands. Molly was portrayed as being older and more assertive than Anna. She married Richard, who was portrayed as an angry man with a grudge against women, when she was eighteen and
stayed with him only a little more than one year. She worked as an actress and like Anna, was raising her son as a single mother. Unlike Anna’s situation where there appeared to be no father in the picture, Molly’s former husband kept tabs on Tommy, her son. He used to call or visit Molly to argue that she was not raising their son correctly. While Richard would prefer Tommy to get a job in Richard’s office, Molly was contented to let Tommy to make up his own mind about his future.

In the first part of *Free Women* Molly had come back from the continent who hated the fact of being back to England. The continent had given her a feeling of freedom i.e. a release from the dull fettering conventionality of her normal environment in England. She told Anna that,

All the time I was away everything came naturally, the men treat you like women, you feel good, I never remembered my age, I never thought about sex. I had a couple of nice gay affairs, nothing tormented everything easy.

But as soon as you set foot here, you have to tighten your belt, and remember. Now be careful, these men are Englishmen. (GN, 61)

Critics find fault with the fact that these two women, Molly and Anna who want to get married, remain single and be viewed as “fair prey” by all men they met. Both are divorced as well as single mothers and have several affairs with married men, but are unable to bring themselves to settle down to marital bliss with any one man. The only man Anna really wants to marry is Michael and unfortunately he runs away from her to Nigeria, because he does not want to desert his wife. As Lessing herself says that both Molly and Anna invite advances from all kinds of men because of their way of life.
Marion became Richard’s wife after his divorce from Molly. She tolerated Richard’s three children whom she did not seem to care about once she decided to leave him, but she had taken up the habit of drinking heavily in their married life. So she eventually got up the nerve to leave Richard and moved into Julia’s flat with Tommy. His disinterestedness towards his wife Marion ended until she found another man. At this point, Richard became jealous and got Marion back for himself. As soon as she was away from her other lover, Richard began to neglect her again. In fact he had no care for Marion as he wanted to marry his secretary. Hence Lessing reveals the domineering nature of men through the character of Richard, and stresses that her protagonists are forced to acknowledge that depression and insecurity resulted in their way of life. For example, Marion, wife of Molly’s former husband, Richard, was neglected and forsaken by him which induced her to become a heavy drinker.

Lessing also suggests the importance of sexuality, the body and fantasy in explaining women’s oppression under patriarchy and capitalism. While the men in the novel share a very mechanistic understanding of sexual pleasure, the women have got more sense both physically and emotionally. The novel’s women characters are portrayed as figures who have internalized the male perception of women as well as the gender hierarchy that these perceptions sustain. They trust neither their emotions nor their analysis of their relationships with men end with gratification. Their oppression is revealed by their inability to break free from the men who have circumscribed their scope for living. For instance, Ella, the heroine of Anna’s novel Free Women was passive in her relationship with Paul. She was willing to be dependent on him. As their affair developed, she slowly subsided into a dream world out with noticing that her personality
was sapped and her autonomy was destroyed. But she was complacent with this disempowerment. She considered that “real men” should somehow encompass women, and thus her passivity was inseparable from her readiness to adopt a subordinate position.

In the yellow notebook, Anna depicted Ella, as a journalist for the woman’s magazine with the striking similarity between herself, the protagonist of Free Women and Ella, the protagonist of The Shadow of the Third. Ella like Anna was a writer, a divorcee with a child [Anna had a daughter, Janet and Ella, a son Michael], who had a lover who forgot to visit her which made her suffered from a sense of confusion and alienation. She was actually Anna’s alter ego. Anna’s relation with Michael doubled Ella’s relation with Paul. Hence like Anna, Ella had suffered the loss of a serious relationship with a married man and also like Anna; she experienced a fragmentation of herself. It is noteworthy that these fictional characters reflected the life of a creator Lessing, who herself a writer, a divorcee with a son, and a political activist. Even though Lessing denied the elements of autobiography in the novel, the striking parallelism among them was too strong with autobiographical elements.

The Shadow of the Third obviously suggests the presence of a third person Paul, a doctor in the life of Ella. Ella met him at a party and they fell in love with each other. But years later their intimacy was disturbed by Paul’s reference of his wife, Muriel, to whom Paul preferred to return. For instance, as he talked with her when they were alone at night, he told her that he liked to spend the next night with his children which made her to realize that he had more affection only on his family. So she began to think of her as a rival to Paul’s affection. Without realizing, a feeling of jealousy began to dominate her. At first Ella did not think about her. Then she had to make conscious effort not to think
about her. When Ella became conscious of his emotion, she was so appalled and ashamed that she buried it fast. She thought a great deal about the invisible woman to whom Paul returned, and it was now not out of triumph, but out of envy. Yet *The Shadow of the Third* grew again, and it became impossible for Ella not to think. By constantly thinking of her, Ella built up a picture of the woman, which had nothing to do with the real woman. It slowly became the shadow of Ella her alter self and she tried to identify herself with Muriel.

As years rolled by, Mary realized that Paul had completely left her for Muriel. Yet she waited for him day after day, dressed for him, cooked for him hoping that one-day he would drop in. She realized that her frustrations were due to the absence of a real man in her life. Ten years of her frustrating experience with Paul, made her think of the position of a free woman in the world.

She [Mary] thinks nothing has occurred which has not happened all her life. Married men, temporarily wifeless, trying to have an affair with her—etc, etc, ten years ago she would not have even noticed or remarked on it. All this was taken by her as part of the hazards and chances of being a ‘free woman’. But ten years ago, she realized, she had been feeling something that she had not then recognized. An emotion of satisfaction, of victory over the wives; because she, Ella, the free woman, was so much more exciting than the dull tied woman. Looking back and acknowledging this emotion she is ashamed. (GN, 399)

The last section of the yellow notebook contains a series [eighteen in number] of short stories of women who long for the right man. But every attempt ends in vain
miserably leaving her desperate and emotionally barren. She wishes to be married and lead a conventional life but inwardly she is disgusted by the need to attend parties in order to find a suitable life partner. Thus in the yellow notebook, Lessing is very explicit in dealing with male-female relationship, particularly, how it affected Ella both physically and emotionally. She is a persona through which Lessing makes a statement about sex that is considered shocking in her times as,

Sex. The difficulty of writing about sex, for women, is that sex is best when not thought about, not analyzed. Women deliberately choose not to think about technical sex. They get irritable when men talk technically; it’s out of self-preservation: they want to preserve the spontaneous emotion that is essential for their satisfaction. (GN, 199)

Mary finalized that women believed sex as the best mode to settle in their life conventionally. For instance Ella saw sex in terms of emotion and marriage but Paul, on the other hand, saw sex as the reason for marriage. Thus through the yellow notebook, Lessing is very explicit about Ella’s feelings for Paul during and after their relationship. She portrays Ella’s frustration as,

Ella found herself in the grip of a sensation which, when she examined it, turned out to loneliness. It was as if, between her and the groups of people, were a space of cold air, an emotional vacuum. The sensation was of physical cold, of physical isolation. (GN, 284)

The relationship which Ella had with Paul was in fact revealed the truth that she was incapable of living an authentic life, since she believed that male-female relationships were inherently unequal and consequently not apt to be transformed. Ella was constantly
traveling around to suppress the rebellious nature inside her, saying to herself that she had to accept. She was presented with a choice between either choosing a man on her own terms, or, on the other hand, demanded to be accepted on his own terms. But it had to be noted that every time she chose to coincide with the Paul's needs and thoughts and refrained from claiming her own rights, dismissing them as ridiculous. She did not, for example, wanted to confront the fact that Paul had a dark side in him.

Thus, Anna and Ella make the readers realize that a single woman in the city with normal sexual appetites becomes apparently an easy prey to any man. It also discovers that the travails of a “single mother” who has to somehow provide herself and her child. When Ella left Julia’s house to live on her own, she found out how emphatically different her plight was from that of a man’s especially since Ella, Julia, Anna and Molly wanted to live like “free women”, unwilling to be tied down by social mores and conventional morality in sexual matters. Through the cover of Ella, Anna was able to relive and experience her break with Michael. She was also able to relive the good times she shared with Michael. Lessing claims that madness is a reaction to the pressures women suffered from, rather than a sheer individual response. It repeatedly demonstrates that although the women in this novel are so-called free, they are not truly liberated. As a woman, Anna still had certain domestic obligations which she resentfully referred to as the housewife’s disease. Irritated, Anna ruminated:

The tension in me, so that peace has already gone away from me, is because the current has been switched on: I must-dress-Janet- get-her-breakfast- send her-off-to-school-get-Michael’s-breakfast-don’t-forget-I’m-out-of-tea-etc.-etc. With this useless but apparently unavoidable tension
resentment is also switched on. ... The resentment focuses itself on Michael; although I know with my intelligence that it has nothing to do with Michael. And yet I do resent him, because he will spend his day, served by secretaries, nurses, women in all kinds of capacities, who will take this weight off him.

(www.bookrags.com/The Golden Notebook)

Lessing succeeds in accurately portraying the relational problems between men and women, and how she entrenches those problems of existence in her of that time through her female characters. Her protagonists [Anna, Molly, Ella, Marion, and Julia] were free women who come to life themselves in leading an independent life and obtain the same liberties as men enjoy.

Five lonely women going mad all quietly by themselves, in spite of husband and children or rather because of them. The quality they all had: self-doubt. A guilt because they were not happy. The phrase they all used: 'There must be something wrong with me'.

(www.bookrags.com/The Golden Notebook)

To add flavor to this perception, Lessing in her Martha Quest, again wrestles with the tensions which emerge from the marriage life through the character of Martha. Martha feels entrapped in her conventional middle-class role as a wife like Mary in The Grass is Singing and Anna in The Golden Notebook. Early in Martha Quest Martha’s feelings towards a marriage are negative indeed: “Marry young? Me? I’d die first. Tie myself down to babies and housekeeping...” (MQ, 17), she says satirically in response to her friend Marnie’s question. Hence Martha obviously feels that to marry young is the
last thing that she would do. She has a predominantly negative attitude towards marriage, probably because her primary model is her parents’ relationship which could be characterized as based on mutual dependence and pity: “…she…became fearful for her own future, which she was determined would never include a marriage whose only basis was that ironic mutual pity” (MQ, 78). Martha has a fear that she would end up like her parents in an unloving marriage. But it is interesting to note, however, that this opinion changes when she moves to the city. Later when she is moved towards marriage, she says that,

She was feeling the last three months as a bewildering chaos of emotion, through which she had been pulled, will-less, like a fish at the end of a string, with a sense of being used by something impersonal and irresistible (MQ, 79-80)

Martha decided to marry Douglas Knowell, a young civil servant, because he seemed to be different from the men, Martha had met before. He was “a man, at least, and not a silly little boy. And so intelligent too!” (MQ, 284). Therefore she decided not to listen to the critical voice inside her head which found fault in Douglas’s appearance:

as for hands, they were large and clumsy, rather red, heavily freckled and covered with hair… she did not see them; she did not see his forehead, with those unaccountably unpleasant lines, like the lines of worry on an elderly face. (MQ, 78)

But Martha judged Douglas not by his looks, his unappealing hands and forehead, but by his inner qualities. She decided to see him as a person like:
She [Martha] saw his eyes, the approving and warm blue eyes. She has never known this easy warm friendliness with anyone before; she could say what she liked; she felt altogether approved, and she expanded in it delightedly, and her manner lost its half-timid aggressiveness. (MQ, 78)

This unconditional acceptance of another human being is considered to be the new experience for Martha. She slept that night deeply and dreamlessly, for the first time in weeks, but she did not say that she was in love. Very soon Martha discovered that she did not fully understand him, but again she was bound to love him, that claim had been laid on her. The contradiction between her dreams and her actions is clear from the beginning of her relationship to Douglas. As Lorna Sage, the literary critic in women’s writing, points out in Doris Lessing, “Martha used self deception when she made Douglas over into a soul-mate in order to marry him. In reality their view of life and dreams did not coincide with each other.” (33)

Martha’s attitude towards marrying Douglas must be described as wavering. The young couple decided to get married after they had been meeting each only a couple of weeks and been intimate with each other twice. Yet, in the next morning she woke up in a panic mood and told herself that she was mad. She had become quite sensible and thus she changed her mind. She said that, “she did not want to marry Douglas, she did not want to marry at all” (MQ, 291-292). With a cold pained eye, she looked at the image of Douglas and shuddered. She told herself that she would ring him from the office and told him that they had both made a terrible mistake. In a calm descended mood, she went to the office but unexpectedly received a warm greeting from everyone. Hence the encouraging opinion of her colleagues persuaded Martha to change her mind again.
Indeed she perceived her marriage as an escape route to begin a new life, which she longed for. It seemed as if Martha had a confusion altogether to get married with Douglas. On the one hand she hesitated to marry him, as it would mean a loss of freedom, but on the other hand, it appeared as if an outside force was pushing her towards marriage. So at last she convinced herself that it would be alright once they were married. And she felt that marriage would provide a new beginning to her life.

According to Knapp, the literary critic, in *Doris Lessing*, Martha’s confidence and actions are again strikingly varied. For instance, her conventional marriage is exactly what she has intended to avoid, but yet she decides to get married with Douglas. It gives the impression that Martha does not know what she wishes from Douglas or men in general. It is also obvious that she does not know what she wishes for herself. In a sudden whim she decides to marry Douglas, and the next moment she regards herself to be mad. The fluctuation between the feelings of desperation and exhilaration are very common in Martha at this phase of her life.

Holmquist in *From Society to Nature; A Study of Doris Lessing’s Children of Violence*, describes that Martha tries to form an identity in a society, mainly as a wife and as a mother, by realizing her social potential. Further, he argues that even though Martha does not search for marriage, she accepts it as the social form in which love can be realized. This notion can be argued since it seems that she is not very much in love with Douglas and she is clearly aware that her feelings have nothing to do with the desire to marry. However, it is the overall social attitude which affects her decisions because as soon as the word gets out that she and Douglas are planning a wedding, people who Martha hardly even know congratulate her and they shook her hand, smiling in altogether
with new emphasis, like those welcoming a new member. She understood, however, that she had done well for herself.

Martha was shown to be very doubtful of getting married to Douglas as her wedding plan was strongly affected by Mrs. Quest. This was yet another example of how Mrs. Quest influences her daughter’s actions. It was as if Mrs. Quest’s involvement caused Martha to act in a totally opposite way she herself had intended. This phenomenon is referred by Rich, the feminist, in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, when she discusses the fact that,

a daughter may underline the negative image of her mother by acting in a totally opposite way than what would be characteristic of her mother: in order to become individuated and free the daughter must separate from her mother, and as she strived to differentiate from her mother, she may actually end up making decisions that were discordant with her original intentions. (21)

Discussing the marriage plot, Sprague and Tiger in Critical Essays on Doris Lessing, opine that, “questing heroines begin with a dream of freedom; Martha Quest does journey to a city…but the novel painfully and paradoxically concludes with Martha’s ‘proper’ marriage” (www.dorislessing.org/martha). Thus the critics suggest that Martha’s hope of freedom was crushed when she entered into a holy matrimony. She, however, moves in a different direction. She leaves her parental home for an independent life in the city, and only thereafter does she get married and lives with her husband.

Sexuality rises to surface again in her marriage life. Martha and Douglas went to visit her parents, and when they made love in her parents’ house, she was not sexually
satisfied with Douglas, but making love to him made her often tender towards him. She saw sex as a means of rebellion but at the same time she did not realize that sex was something compulsory for her. She did not get physical or psychological satisfaction in her relationship with Douglas. This is something that Labovitz in The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century pays attention when she argues that, sexuality is one of the crucial themes in female development. In her opinion actual freedom could be gained only if other elements of growth are also present. Such an element is, for example, being satisfied with oneself and one’s achievements in life. Martha was not satisfied in her relationship with Douglas, and thus she was not able to fully develop as a person. Thus Lessing treats sexual freedom seems more like a burden than a freedom. The message comes forth in Martha Quest that sexuality is a complicated issue. Martha chose a Jewish man, Adolph King, her first lover, to have her first sexual experience with a man with a purpose of rebelling against wrongly held attitudes. She realized that idealized image of sex act, acquired from relevant literature, was at odds with real experience:

For if the act fell short of her demand, that ideal, the thing-in-itself, that mirage, remained untouched, quivering exquisitely in front of her. Martha, final heir to the long romantic tradition of love, demanded nothing less than the quintessence of all experience, all love, all beauty, should explode suddenly in a drenching, saturating moment of illumination. And since this was what she demanded, the man himself seemed positively irrelevant—this was at the bottom of her attitude, though she did not know it. For this reason, then, it was easy for her to say she was not disappointed, that
everything still awaited her; and afterwards she lay coiled meekly beside him like a woman in love, for her mind had swallowed the moment of disappointment whole, like a python, so that he, the man, and the mirage were able once again to fuse together, in the future. (MQ, 237)

However, Martha’s romantic view induced her to disregard the disappointment she felt with Adolph and to look forward to the “perfect moment” with another man. It turned out Adolph was a jealous man who spied on Martha, and their relationship ended dramatically. As a result of her affair with Adolph, Martha was fallen from grace; she was no longer the popular girl; “she was being greeted by the people she knew, but in a muted, wrathful way which reminded her again that she was on trial” (MQ, 265). It could be argued that Martha, like the typical sexually rebellious female heroine, was socially punished for her sexual debut; however, not because of the affair but because she chose the Jewish man.

Martha Quest thus deviates from the typical pattern of the female Bildungsroman in that Martha is not disliked because of her sexual initiation, which she has in common with the male hero, whereas he is expected to defy the norms of society in his sexual initiation. The female heroine will be punished where she has to rebel against the female role she has been assigned. She thus challenges the norms of her society by using her sexuality.

To Martha, both sexuality and marriage were flags of independence, which she could wave in the faces of her parents. She seemed to become even more determined when her parents assumed that the reason for her to get married was that she was pregnant. She wanted to show her independence by boasting that getting married was her
own will, not an act of necessity. Still, at the time, she knew that she did not actually want to marry Douglas; but she could not help it; she was being dragged towards it, whether she liked it or not. This attitude of a victim was a bit surprising, since Martha’s goal was to become different from her parents. By acting the way she did, she actually came closer to her mother and general attitudes in society. This was, once more, in compliance with Rich’s notion that daughters hate their mothers because the daughters’ main fear was that they were being pulled towards their mothers. However, at the same time daughters actually may act in a way that conformed to their mothers’ attitudes as well as to general attitudes in society.

Martha was nineteen when she married Douglas and their marriage life lasted for fours years. She carefully examined her identity, and it seemed to her that there was a point when men seemed to press a button, as it were, and one was expected to turn into something else for their amusement. She had expected that marriage would introduce her to something new and exciting, but she felt disappointed when she realized that this was not the case. However, when their daughter, Caroline, was born, they moved into a house of their own, and Martha was able to give her mind fully to the new task of managing a large house with four servants, Caroline and a husband. She found herself less troubled because she had adapted herself so well to this life. Some action was repeatedly caused, for instance Mrs. Quest, who visited Martha regularly, clearly brought out her opinion that she ruined her servants, squandered money, and neglected Caroline.

These encounters led to have conflicts between Martha and her mother. One more example of this view was when Douglas would like to have another child and Martha found out that he had stopped by Mrs. Quest. Martha herself did not want to have more
children and she felt cheated because Douglas had talked about this behind her back. Finally she agreed to go and see a doctor who would talk to her for her own good. This episode revealed the fact that how Martha tried to balance between her own will and the expectations of other people around her.

Martha immediately began chiding herself for her utter dishonesty. The instinct to comply, to please, seemed to her more and more unpleasant and false yet she had to reassure Douglas and kiss him before he left if she was not to feel guilty and lacking as a woman.

(www.dorislessing.org/martha.)

After this episode Martha started to feel that some kind of crisis had been shifted. When Douglas traveled to another town to work for some time, Martha became involved in a local communist party, and fell for a young Air force corporal, William. Finally Martha wanted to get a divorce from Douglas which was something Douglas could not cope with. They had a quarrel, and Douglas became furious that Martha was sure he would attack her. Here a very crucial scene had emerged because Martha suddenly decided that she would go to her mother, and stayed there until morning when she would come back and get her things. This decision seemed to be a sudden, natural reaction which expressed Martha’s need for self protection. She was almost like a cub going to its mother for protection. But the scene was not over: Douglas followed Martha, and was just about to physically attack her when she reached the veranda of her mother’s house. Mrs. Quest stood calmly behind the window and said, “Go back to him, It serves you right.” (www.dorislessing.org/aproper). This incident proved that their relationship had never been a close one, and Martha had a vague picture of her Mother as a person who
would stand by her if she urged her to do so. Her mother’s unwillingness had strengthened Martha’s belief that she must resist her in every possible way. The scene on the Veranda was a kick of reality for Martha, which really set her on the path of independence.

Martha’s relationship to William did not last for long as he was sent away to another air force camp. Martha saw herself as an independent woman, but at the same time she mourned for the temporarily extinct person and she could only be with a man she loved; who brought her “self” to life. Martha was again deceiving herself when she drifted into marriage with Anton Hesse, a German refugee who acted as a leader in the Communist group almost immediately after William. She regarded her marriage to Anton to be a totally different institution from the one she had with Douglas. She married Anton only to legitimate his status as a foreigner and to save him from internment. From the beginning of their marriage Martha thought that they were unsuitable for each other both intellectually and physically. She tried to reassure herself not to bother by thinking that the marriage was simply a formality for both of them but she did not succeed. She started to feel estranged from Anton when she noticed that he was becoming more and more dependent on her. Her image of a strong, masculine political figure turned out the full of pits falls, and she felt that she had been cheated by life again.

Mrs. Quest did not play a vital role in the marriage of Martha and Anton. After Martha divorced Douglas, she announced her by a registered letter that she was no longer her daughter, and Martha let it be. Very soon Mrs. Quest came back to Martha’s life as if nothing had happened. This again illustrated that how dramatic incidents could occur in Martha’s and Mrs. Quest’s relationship, and both the daughter and the mother returned to
each other so that they could start the battle of power all over again. Martha had given up all her rights as a mother, whereas Mrs. Quest was closely involved in Caroline’s life in the role of a grandmother. “The battle field” of Martha and her mother was basically concentrated around Caroline, and not Anton.

Marriage to Anton was a way for Martha to personify her ideology about equality, and it was a slap against her mother’s face, which had strong prejudiced opinions about people. Finally, Martha came to realize that her marriage to Anton illustrated the pervasiveness of patriarchal and bourgeois family patterns; exactly those same features she had loathed in her parents’ marriage and repudiated in her marriage with Douglas. To put it in short and pithy, Martha’s marriage to both Douglas and Anton detached her from herself. Martha’s situation at this point referred to one where identity formation had failed and she had suffered from identity diffusion.

Martha’s premarital life was determined by her role as a lover, but in married life the roles as wife and mother become central. These roles also required a psychological attitude which was totally new for Martha; it was strongly maternal. In Mrs. Quest’s generation most of the women were dominated by their motherly function, and this was also the case in Martha’s generation. However, Martha did not want to enter the stereotyped role where a woman was first and foremost a mother, it was her intention not to have any children. This intention backfired because she was already pregnant when she married Douglas. She herself did not realize it for quite some time, and when she finally allowed herself to suspect that she was pregnant, her first reaction was close to a feeling of disgust. She drank a bottle of neat gin, took bath in a burning hot water and climbed repeatedly on to a table and jumped off. In other words, she did everything to get rid of
fetus. When she did not succeed, she decided to get an abortion, which was of course illegal. As Holmquist argues in From Society to Nature: A Study of Doris Lessing’s *Children of Violence*, Martha’s opinion on children were obstacles to her own freedom, and she saw them as the ultimate link in the cycle of repetition which bound her to her family history.

In *A Proper Marriage*, Lessing deals with a woman's misery when she gives in to societal expectations, married and had a child. The novel anticipates her later works because of its constant attention to women's biology. Although *The Golden Notebook* and *Under My Skin* discuss women's private experiences in detail, it is only *A Proper Marriage* which so painfully records the tension a woman feels between her requirements and the dictates of a body which seems to rebel against her intellect and better judgment. For instance, when Martha realized that her friend Alice was pregnant, she felt towards the pregnant woman, the abstraction, a strong repulsion which caused various images all unpleasant.

During her pregnancy Martha’s relationship to her own mother was again a complicated one, but there were moments when Martha clearly tried to connect with her mother, or at least to understand her. Martha saw similarities between her and her mother; as she knew that Mrs. Quest did not want to have Martha in the first place. Martha faced her mother like “an animal defending her cubs” (PM, 126), and exclaimed that the baby was going to be her baby, not Mrs. Quest’s. So, here the daughter and the mother were again struggling for power which was going to affect the child’s life most. Martha was afraid that she would become to resemble her own mother in her motherly role towards her child.
Before the child was born, Martha had made clear to herself that what kind of things she and Douglas must avoid in his/her upbringing. They were not allowed to suggest that the child might be one sex rather than another, and they must never try to form its mind in any way whatsoever. The child would also be sent to a progressive school at an early age because Martha thought that a child without any parents at all clearly had a greater chance of survival as a whole personality. She did not believe in her mother’s view that she should sacrifice herself to her children just as her mother had done.

To Martha the labor seemed to be a complete failure because she was not able to stay strong enough and resist the pain. She cried out for God and her mother, and it made her feel helpless with rage. As pointed out in A Proper Marriage Martha felt that her own separate individuality was destroyed because she moaned after her mother while giving birth to Caroline. She felt that she could not forgive herself because she had not been strong enough to resist the existence of her mother. This feeling of guilt colored Martha’s relationship to Caroline because in a way she was a constant reminder to Martha that she had not been able to totally resist her mother’s influence.

Douglas was away at war, and at the age of twenty-one Martha started to feel her life was slipping away from her. She felt that before two years she was free as air, and she could have done anything. She found new meaning into her life when she joined the local communist group, and she slowly grew away from Douglas and Caroline. When the second baby became an issue between Douglas and Martha, she began to break repetition by the choice of non-pregnancy at the end of A Proper Marriage. Finally she separated from Douglas, leaving Caroline to Douglas who a little bit later married again.
Martha was glad to be relieved from the motherly role. By the end of the second volume of the *Children of Violence*, she had eliminated from both motherhood and bourgeois marriage life. Her fear of repeating her mother’s mistakes was also a central factor which influences her decision to take final departing from Caroline. Just before she left Caroline and Douglas, she met Mrs. Quest, who was shocked because of Martha’s intentions. According to Mrs. Quest a woman’s role was to sacrifice herself, as she had done for the sake of her children, and her main concern was what people would say of Martha. However, Caroline continued to stay a part of Martha’s life, and this was due to Mrs. Quest’s involvement in Caroline’s life. Caroline often stayed with her grandmother, and Mrs. Quest remembered to tell Martha about her. In her eyes Martha had betrayed her role as a woman, wife and mother, and by forcing Martha to face Caroline, Mrs. Quest tried and reminded her utmost.

Much later, after Martha had moved to London, she admitted herself that she might have made a mistake when she thought that by leaving Caroline she would set Caroline and herself free. There were moments when she missed Caroline, and imagined what their relationship could have been like. However, these thoughts and feelings were results of a long quest which Martha went through, and not before experiencing all the necessary stages of outer and inner search for identity Martha was able to fully examine her actions.

*Martha Quest*, and *A Proper Marriage*, are all transitional works in which Lessing deals with her recurring themes of the collective pressures upon an individual, "madness" and the exploration of "Self." Although all of the same themes are present in her first novel *The Grass is Singing*, and in her master piece *The Golden Notebook*, it is different
since her protagonist does not even begin to fight collective pressures. Thus Lessing
realistically depicts the dreadful tensions which many women experience with their
husbands and their need to cherish and protect their freedom in their married life.