

# Psychoanalytical Dimensions Of Martha's Self In Lessing's The Four Gated City

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## **Abstract:**

This paper demonstrates how the “outward” search and the “inward” search depicted by Lessing in the previous four novels of The Children of Violence series are essentially one: the outer and inner worlds are not separate from each other but aspects of a unity. This analysis is carried out taking insights from psychoanalytic theories of C.G. Jung and R.D. Laing. Lessing deconstructs the old essentialist assumptions and discourses in order to recast a fresh discourse on Martha's growth of selfhood, which is a necessary step towards reintegration at more complex levels of being. Through the total descent into self, Martha, here, more clearly understands not only herself but her relationship to the collective. Consequently she feels herself to be whole rather than fragmented.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, wholeness, growth, schizophrenia, being, madness.

## **Introduction**

In the Golden Notebook section of The Golden Notebook Anna Wulf records her experience during the period in which she is in “a new state of being”- “I knew I was moving down into a new dimension, further away from sanity than I had ever known” (613) This “new state of being” in the context of the Children of Violence series is discussed within the framework of Jungian and Laingian psychoanalysis. Lessing's conception of her protagonists' identity formation is in keeping with the Jungian model of psychic growth through the accommodation of opposing conscious and unconscious drives. Jung calls this construction of selfhood “individuation.” This term defines the process whereby unconscious impulses are assumed and integrated into the conscious life so that the self ultimately grows into full organic awareness. Jung defines individuation in his book Two Essays on Analytical Psychology as “becoming an ‘in-dividual,’ insofar as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost and incomparable uniqueness; it also implies becoming one's own self.” Individuation can be translated as

‘coming to selfhood’ or ‘self-realization.’” (173). In an essay called “The small personal voice” Lessing describes her aim in the Children of Violence novels as “a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective.” (SPV 196)

As the Children of Violence series unfolds, we find an explicit change in Lessing's aesthetic vision. Irrational moments, explicit forms of visions, violent psychic states, cosmic energies and extra-sensory powers replace the general realistic narrative of the series to finally culminate in the final part of the series, The Four-Gated City (1969). The whole series spans a period of approximately fifty years. During this period Martha, the protagonist becomes the locus of three overlapping worlds: the external world of political activism and wars, her immediate social circle and the inner world of her evolving consciousness. Lessing shows that these three worlds affect and cut across one another. We find a change in the dimensions of Martha's search for wholeness and unity. As we have noticed in the previous two chapters that at the initial stage of her search Martha seeks wholeness and integration through various

means as different as political activism, marriage or by defining herself in a reactionary manner against her mother's conventional way of life in particular and the overall inauthentic attitude of the society in general. This change in Lessing's aesthetic vision also accounts for her adherence to Sufism in the later phase of her life. But these alternatives ultimately prove to be inadequate and therefore fail to satisfy Martha's quest for wholeness. Martha comes to realize the fragile nature of loyalties to different ideologies and political movements.

The last book of the series *The Four Gated City*, however, encapsulates the breakthrough achieved by Martha's inner consciousness, rekindled by mystical moments. It reveals the emotional involvement of the characters, the absorption of the female identity into an increasing comprehensive state of mind that leaves individual personas behind as mere fictions. The protagonist of the *Children of Violence* series finds her path to true selfhood through psychological (including paranormal) dialogues that are comprehensive enough to include the excluding Martha. Her spiritual healing, akin to that of Sufi and mystical experiences, lies in an attitude of openness and attunement to a greater universal mind, in which she surrenders her personal ego and embracing a universal whole. Martha finally shows a kind of self-maturation through her experience of living with others in a collective unity. This quest for wholeness on which Lessing launches her protagonist parallels, to a degree, the typical quest in myths.

Joseph Campbell suggests that there are three stages of the ritual quest: introspection and the desire to unify the divided aspects of the self; a battle with the monsters of illusion and self-destruction; and finally, rebirth into society with a vision of the oneness of human experience. Martha Quest in the *Children of Violence* undertakes a similar quest.

In *The Four-Gated City*, the fifth and final novel of the *Children of Violence* series,

Martha Quest Hesse describes the kind of life she wishes to experience : "I want," said Martha, "to live in such a way that I don't just turn into a hypnotised animal." (98) In other words, Martha expresses a wish not to drift through life as a half-awakened child, willing to surrender her will to anyone who speaks with a threatening or sweet voice or to anything that diminishes or deadens her ability to enjoy an authentic, purposeful, and rewarding life. Hence, Martha finally emerges in this novel as one who tries to affirm, despite the voids and vicissitudes of her age, a more humane sense of life, for especially does she wish to avoid becoming a lifeless adult, one who may be viewed as a machine rather than a human being. A statement by R.D. Laing describes the existence Martha seeks to escape:

As adults, we have forgotten most of our childhood, not only its content but its flavor; as men of the world, we hardly know of the existence of the inner world: we barely remember our dreams, and make little sense of them when we do; as for our bodies, we retain just sufficient proprioceptive sensation to coordinate our movements and to insure minimal requirements for biosocial survival—to register fatigue, signals for food, sex, defecation, sleep; beyond that, little or nothing. Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self interest and inconformity with common sense, is pitifully limited: our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of unlearning is necessary for 'anyone' before

one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth, and love (POE 26).

In this final novel of the series, Lessing depicts Martha's actions as Martha searches for and seems to find a balance between regard for her personal feelings and respect for the desires and feelings of others. Thus, Lessing suggests through Martha that an integrated life or wholeness must encompass the ability to connect, to relate to others while maintaining one's own individuality. Additionally, she implies that genuine concern for others is one possible satisfactory answer to the problem of existence. She further implies that before one can successfully show concern for others, he or she must first love himself or herself. Lessing sees life, then, in terms of the individual and his immediate relation to self and to others human beings.

The facet of the wholeness motif which Lessing further develops in *The Four-Gated City* finds its clearest illustration in the actions of Martha. As the novel begins, the middle-aged Martha, now in London, is a boarder in an upstairs room she rents from Iris and Jimmy, Proprietors of the restaurant below. Martha, depressed and tired, finds herself still haunted by a sense of fragmentation:

But since she had taken the room upstairs... she had made a discovery : 'Matty' was reborn ... 'Matty' gained freedom from whatever other people must conform to not so much by ignoring it, but when the points was reached when conformity might be expected, by gaining exemption in an act of deliberate clumsiness... Somewhere early in her childhood, 'Matty' had been created as an act of survival ... For some days now Martha had been shut inside this person, it

was 'Martha' who intruded, walked into 'Matty'... (4-5)

Martha seems to suffer from what we call a split personality wherein one part of her personality alternates with the other with now one and then another of the combatant elements in her psyche appearing on top. Martha is and has been aware of her diverse selves: the inept clown, Matty, whom the efficient Martha despises and the egoistic Martha, the part of herself that seeks her own consciousness. In essence the egoistic Martha is often hounded by a shadow self, a conventional self. As a result she seeks release from the conventional or shadow self and in the meantime, the egoistical self lives unfulfilled. In its striving, Martha's egoistical self believes that fulfillment will be possible if it achieves wholeness by freeing itself from the restraints of her mother's influence over her life as well as the unnecessary, threatening restraints of the cultural fabric surrounding her. In effect, the division of self that Martha describes resembles a condition described by R. D. Laing as a form of ontological insecurity:

In particular, I describe that form of self- division which involves a split of the person's being... With this loss of unity, the person perceives a sense of having an 'inner' 'true' self which is, however, unrealized, whereas the 'outer', 'real,' or 'actual' self is false. We tried to reveal this position as a desperate attempt to come to terms with one form of 'ontological insecurity'. (Laing SO 50)

Furthermore, Martha's fragmentation in the novel is directly associated with her vision of the discrepancy between the way she sees life is and the way she perceived life could be. As a sensitive individual, Martha has always dreamed of a utopian city in which humans live in brotherhood. Her dream prompts her,

knowingly or unknowingly, to seek a more satisfying life, one free of masks, role-playing, racial hatred, deceit, and hypocrisy:

There arose, glimmering whitely... a noble city, set foursquare and colonnaded along its falling, flower bordered terraces. There were splashing fountains, and the sound of flutes; and its citizens moved, grave and beautiful, black and brown together; and these groups of elders paused and smiled with pleasure at the sight of the children -- the blue-eyed, fair-skinned children of the North playing hand in hand with the bronze-skinned, dark-eyed children of the south... She could have drawn a plan of that city from the central market place to the four gates (MQ 11).

Martha's childhood dream remains with her, in *The Four Gated City*, the adult Martha finds herself years later discussing such a city with Mark Coldridge. In the conversation, Martha responds to Mark's question of "well, how do you want to live then?" by saying, "I don't want to split myself up...yes, any sort of life I've been offered in London-- I'd have had to put half of myself into cold storage. Pretend part of me didn't exist". It is then that Mark describes for Martha the city which appears in her dreams:

Do you know what it is you are wanting, Martha? And he proceeded to tell her. She was seeking...the mythical city, the one which appeared in legends and in fables and fairy stories...He proceeded to describe it, as clearly as if he had lived there...Great roads approached the city, from

north and south, east and west. When they had fairly entered it, they divided it into arcs, making a circling street, inside which were smaller ones: a web of arcs intersected by streets running through it to a centre. All these streets were wide...the center was planted with trees and had buildings in the trees. These were schools and libraries and marketplaces, but their functions were not overly defined... (FGC 139-40).

Essentially, Lessing's utilization of Martha's dream about a mythical four-gated city with a circle at its center seems to symbolically allude to Martha's quest for wholeness. For the symbol of the circle--whether appearing in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or in dreams, in the mandalas drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plans of cities, or in the spherical concepts of astronomers--always points to the single most vital aspects of life -- its ultimate wholeness. In Jungian psychology also, the circle is associated with the totality of the psyche--the self. Indeed, a key concept in Jung's psychology is "individuation": the idea that it is possible for one to become an "individual" not in the sense of someone who wishes to be different and separate from others but in the sense of someone who is "in-divisible", that is whole. The whole person would possess an integrated personality and would utilize the four functions of thinking, feelings, sensing, and intuiting to the fullest extent. Then, too, in Jung's theory of "the shadow", emphasis is placed on the need for the individual to integrate the "shadow" aspect of his or her nature with the egoistical self. Hence, the shadow self merges with the egoistical self and reaches out to others in a more heightened and genuine experience, an experience which might not limit itself to an individual human but may encompass humanity at large. In so doing, the unified self recognizes

its kinship with mankind and achieves a greater consciousness and maturity. Whatever the case, Lessing's use of Martha's dream of a four-gated city with a circle at its center, as well as her selection of the novel's title, *The Four-Gated City*, both seem to point to her illumination of Martha's search for self and wholeness.

In charting Martha's quest in the novel, Lessing depicts the experiences Martha encounters in room or houses, especially those of Iris and Jimmy, Jack, Mark and Paul. Earlier, in *Landlocked* Martha mentions the difficulty she has of moving "whole" from one room to the other: "She had complained that her life had consisted of a dozen rooms, each self-contained, that she was wearing herself to a frazzle of shrill nerves in the effort of carrying herself, each time a 'whole', from room to room." (98) Here, in *The Four-Gated City*, Martha's disconnection and her subsequent integration seem related to her opening and/or closing doors to room or houses which play a significant role in her finding a sense of self.

Martha spends a portion of her time in introspection, trying to connect the fragments of her life. In this regard, Mark's house becomes a haven in which Martha can sort out the significant experiences in her life through the use of her memory. Thus, as mentioned previously, it is in Mark's house that Martha seems to arrive at a solution to the problem of her mother. It is here, too, that she comes to grips with her inability to connect, for it is in Mark's house that Martha establishes fulfilling relations with others, Mark, Lynda, Paul, and Francis. When Martha first visits Mark's house seeking a job, Martha states a belief that "Anything here, in this house... would be the absolute opposite of everything she had hoped for". (91) While there for her interview, Martha experiences a feeling of love and pain for Mark's son Francis, whose mother, Lynda, is in a mental institution and because of this feeling Martha thinks of not accepting the job: "Martha felt as if she were being swept fast over an edge by her emotions;

for the first time since she came to London, she was unfree. She wanted to run out of the house-anywhere." (93)

It is during Martha's interaction with Lynda that Martha seems to come to grips with the division that plagues her life. Lynda Coldridge, who has been in and out of mental institutions almost all of her life, informs Martha that Martha should not reveal to the psychiatrist the existence of the two parts of herself lest he should certainly label her schizophrenic. Hence, as Martha and Lynda become better acquainted, Martha becomes more aware of the nature of the division that affects her own life. Thus, Lynda becomes a kind of mirror in which Martha learns to see herself, a kind of guide who indicates the path which Martha must take to explore her inner self and to reconcile the two aspects of her personality, that of the inept clown, "Matty", and that of the egoistical Martha. While assisting Lynda during one of her experiences of "insanity", Martha begins to join in some of Lynda's activities. Later, Martha observes:

Yes, she had indeed gone a long way inside Lynda's country. Yet, she was -- sane? In control, certainly. And not afraid. She was curious and angry with herself that she had not done this before -- good God, this door (like so many others, she must suppose) had been standard here, ready for her to walk in any time she wished. And she had not, she had not. (493)

After this revelation, Martha proceeds to explore aspects of her inner self. Her ability to exercise control over her actions attests to her achieving autonomy over herself. However, she must still reconcile the two opposing personalities, and she proceeds with her initial experience into "madness". During this experience, Martha remembers certain occurrences that have helped to shape her life. She initially recalls one experience she has had as a young girl:

Suddenly Martha was in a room she had forgotten,

looking at enormous people, giants, engage in...yes, she had been a child, she had felt this as a tiny child, looking up at grown people, as they sat around a table dressed in clothes that made them seem like dolls, talking and smiling to each other with put-on false smiles and looks. For they didn't mean what they said. They were afraid of each other, or at least placate each other: the small child had called this activity "lies." She had watched and judged these giants as cowards and liars, engaged-incredibly-in meaningless activities and rituals of dressing and undressing and eating and talking, and their fear of each other, their weariness, was so great that two of them could not meet without going stiffly on guard and stretching their mouths and making moments which said: I won't hurt you if you won't hurt me; look, I'm so nice and kind, don't hurt me. Martha had seen all this, understood it, had even said to herself in an anguish of fear that she would be swallowed up: don't let yourself be sucked in, remember, "remember"—but she had not remembered, she had been sucked in, she had become a liar and coward like the rest. (493-94)

Martha's recalling of this experience seems to dramatize how significant resisting hypocrisy, conformity, and a life of automation has been in her life. For clearly it is a life of hypocrisy and conformity that Martha has devoted a major portion of her life to avoiding, even though she has not always been

successful. Following Martha's initial inner search, she ventures into the streets of London where she views the mass of humanity who seem characterized by the kind of life she has tried to avoid :

As she passed pair after pair of eyes, they all looked half drugged, or half asleep, dull, as if the creatures had been hypnotized or poisoned, for these people walked in their fouled disgusting streets as if they were not conscious of their existence here, were somewhere else, for only one in a hundred of these semi-animals could have said, "I am here, now, and conscious, that I am here now noticing what is around me..."(506)

Yet even though Martha feels partially awakened as a result of her initial soul-searching experience, her experience with Lynda does not provide for her the key to her problem. So Martha decides that she must go off by herself in order to search for it.

It is in Paul's house that Martha discovers the secret to her divided nature. Paul, Mark's nephew, has a big house with a room where Martha can stay without undue interference from any of the other inhabitants. Martha is thus free for a three-month period during which she hopes to unlock doors within herself. While alone in her room at Paul's house, Martha eats and sleeps as little as possible so that she might reach an area in herself that seemed most revealing. Martha notes :

And she did not really know how to do it except that she knew from the past that if she did not eat, slept very little, kept alert, she sharpened and fined down...As she entered the country of sound she

encountered head on and violently the self-hater...yes of course she had half expected it, was even hoping to; but oh, how powerful an enemy he was, how dreadfully compelling, how hard to fight. (545)

Hence, Martha encounters the "self-hater" within herself and comes to perceive her capacity to hate others. For just as Martha has hated or despised the "Matty" aspect of her personality, she has often rejected others whose views or life styles have conflicted with her own sense of the way life could be. As Martha risks engaging in this dangerous and terrifying experience of venturing into her inner mind, much in the same way a person might when under the effect of a hallucinatory and, perhaps, dangerous drug, she admonishes herself to remember this experience in which she probes her inner mind or she will forget.

Interestingly, both Martha and Lynda would be considered mentally ill if judge by society's standards. However, Lessing has asserted that "Madness can be a form of rebellion." And, in *The Four-Gated City* she notes:

Soon, probably in the next decade, the truth would have to be admitted. It would be admitted with bad grace, be glossed over, softened. And just as we say 'they burned and drowned witches for a couple of centuries out of primitive and ignorant terror,' soon we will be saying, 'when they stopped torturing and killing witches, they locked people with certain capacities into lunatic asylum and told them they were freaks and forced them into conformity by varieties of torture which included electric shocks,

solitary confinement, ice bath and forcible feeding. They used every kind of degradation, moral and physical. As the methods of society for control and manipulation became more refined, it was discovered that the extremities of physical violence were less effective than drugs, which deprived the victim of their moral stamina and ability to fight back; and more effective than the drugs were the techniques of persuasion and brainwashing. By these means the members of the population with capacities above normal (these people now considered to be in the main line of evolution) were systematically destroyed either by fear, so that their development was inhibited from the start (the majority) or by classing them with the congenitally defective...(524-25)

Hence, Lessing, like Foucault suggests that mental illness is perhaps a myth, and that many persons who seem insane may be persons of extra sensitivity and perception who are handicapped in a society that favour those who conform. And, thus, she portrays both Martha and Lynda as example of such individuals. Lynda's life, however, has been ruined by drugs and doctors while Martha's life has been more fortunate. Perhaps, it is Martha's self-appointed quest for wholeness that saves her.

As we have already noticed that Lessing was inspired by R. D. Laing's anti-psychiatric, unconventional and radical ideas of sanity, madness and schizophrenia. It will be argued that rather than being recognized as a mental disorder schizophrenia is *The Four Gated City* is shown to be a creative force, opening up

deeper dimensions of the human psyche. Schizophrenia is also taken to be an indicator of existential identity crisis in *The Four Gated City* and *The Golden Notebook*.

R. D Laing's anti-psychiatry ideas were part of a wider international countercultural movement in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially of the sixties. This movement included Philosophers such as Michael Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari in France and Erving Goffman in the United States. These thinkers were dissatisfied with the fundamental claims and practices of traditional mainstream psychiatry which defines madness as a dysfunction of the psychic mechanism and argued against the use of physical forms of treatment such as brain surgery and drugs. Lessing found these insights of a great importance. In an interview with Joyce Carol Oates published in the *Southern Review* in 1973 she confessed that she was influenced with their interpretation of the mechanism of the human psyche. On asking whether she had some similarity with R. D. Laing she replied in this manner:

Yes. We were both exploring the phenomenon of the unclassifiable experience, the psychological 'breaking-through' that the conventional world judges as mad. I think Laing must have been very courageous, to question the basic assumptions of his profession from the inside... In America, the psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, in *The Manufacture of Madness*, has made similar claims. He has taken a very revolutionary position. (284)

Marion Vlastos in her essay "Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy," emphasized on the necessity of studying Lessing and Laing alongside each other because of their similar approach to schizophrenia and madness. She observes that Lessing's ideas are similar to those of Laing as "an unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician" (246).

It is important to note that Freudian approach to schizophrenia and madness is psychological

whereas Laing's understanding of it is existential. Freud explains schizophrenia as a taxonomy in which the patient "regresses" to a state of "primary narcissism in which the distinction between between the id, the ego and the superego disappears." (Malcom FF363) R. D. Laing had a quite new and radical approach to this phenomenon. In his book *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (1960), he analysed the state of psychosis, particularly schizophrenia, from an ontological perspective. His understanding and allegiance to the phenomenological and existential tradition of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty account to a large extent for his understanding and interpretation of schizophrenia. According to Laing the psychotic breakdown is not a sign of some genetic, biological abnormality and neurological disorder, but an existential crisis. This he understood as a natural reaction to a persecutory and inescapable and social order. He, as a result, no longer sees schizophrenia and madness as pathological phenomena. It was for him an existential state which is the result of an ontological insecurity. He observes:

I have given a glimpse of a revolution that is going on in relation to sanity and madness, both inside and outside psychiatry. Modern psychiatry came into being when the demonological point of view gave way 300 years ago to a clinical viewpoint. The clinical point of view is now giving way before another point of view that is both existential and social. The shift, I believe, is of no less radical significance. (288)

Laing was among the very first psychiatrists who stressed the need for a phenomenological interpretation of madness and schizophrenia, whose signs were to be understood in terms of an indefensible existential experience of an



inescapable social reality. His position is that when an individual's existence is forced to split into fragments, he/she experiences a kind of defense mechanism- a schizoid world where symbolic relations are weakened and the real emerges as if peeled off from his/her self. "Psychosis" from Laing's perspective is thus viewed as the natural outcome of an inconsistency between the self and others. Viewed in this light a schizophrenic person suffers from a strange duality between his "desire to reveal himself ([herself]) and his/[her] desire to conceal himself/[herself]." (Laing DS 38) When the schizophrenic person claims the "truth" of his "existential position He/she is not accepted by the society and has to pay the price of "being mad." (290)

Therefore in order to understand a schizophrenic person, the therapist must adjust himself to the reality of the patient and to try and understand his world from within his own space. According to Vlastos Lessing uses this interpretation of schizophrenia as "an intensification of the divisions within the normal self" (247) in depicting the schizophrenic experience of Martha Quest and Anna Wulf. This idea is useful in understanding their divided selves or "false-self-systems." Lessing sees schizophrenia as a creative force capable of healing the individual crushed by the false demands of the society.

In the cosmopolitan city of London Martha experiences a sense of homelessness. She has left her home in the veld back in Africa seeking a new home but finally ends up as a homeless. This situation of being homeless denies her the ontological security which she strives in her quest for wholeness. This part of the chapter will try to account for Martha's schizophrenic experience, its causes and results. The analysis is carried out from the existential and phenomenological perspective of R. D. Laing.

The first part of *The Four Gated City* is characterized by Martha's feeling of dejection and her existential crisis which results in her experiencing schizophrenia. Initially Martha is

not able to integrate herself in the new social setting of London. She experiences an "ontological insecurity" and a fear of "engulfment". (44)

In the beginning of the novel Martha is staying in the apartment of Iris and Jimmy. Martha here feels confined and isolated. Martha becomes anxious about her situation, Lessing comments: "She had been careful of saying too much of what she had watched around London on this tide or that" (FGC 20).

From the Laingian perspective, Martha is under the fear of "engulfment". This notion of engulfment refers to the kind of threat felt by an individual when he/she is in a relationship with another individual who threatens his/her identity. Indeed, Martha finds herself unable to express herself genuinely: "To whom in the world could she say what she had found in London? ...she opened her mouth to say: I am thinking a good deal about class [...] but shut it again" (FGC 92).

This uneasiness of Martha also arouses feelings of otherness: "Down in Stella's territory, or with Iris, or walking through streets she did not know, she was skinned, scaled, vulnerable, an alien, always fighting in herself that inner shrinking, which was the result of surroundings that did not know her..." (FGC 58).

According to Anthony Giddens ontological security is basically characterized by "continuity" and "routine" Martha's life on the other hand is marked by fragmentation and discontinuity. She feels the loss of anchoring points in her life. This situation makes Martha anxious and a sense of ontological

Insecurity overpowers her. While she was familiar to "the splendid golden explosiveness of Africa... hideousness of the English climate" makes her feel estranged." (FGC 13) she now feels herself to be an alien in the new urban environment and "rootless" soil of London. Her existential malaise is caused by the loss of anchoring points of her life. Her realization of

how the city of London is entirely different from what she had expected caused a feeling of dislocation in her (FGC 24). R. D. Laing in his book *The Divided Self* defines the “ontologically insecure” person as an individual who “cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy and identity of himself and others for granted” and who consequently contrives strategies to avoid “losing his[/her] self” (42-43).

Martha’s feeling of ontological security is endangered by the vast cosmopolitan and gigantic space of London. She finds herself in a kind of existential crisis:

In a street full of strangers, on top of a bus in a part of London all barren little houses and smoking chimneys—who was she? Martha? Certainly not ‘Matty’. She became lightheaded, empty, sometimes dizzy [...]. Today, she could see herself... a tiny entity among swarms: then down, back inside herself, to stand, arms on damp concrete: this was what she was, a taste or flavor of existence without a name. (FGC 25)

In a state of such an existential malaise Martha starts questioning her whole existence: she feels as if she is nothing but “a tiny entity among swarms” or “a flavour of existence without a name.” Lessing suggests that Martha has been lost in a mass society of London where the feeling of alienation automatically gets intensified. Martha’s existential plight at this point is very much similar to what R. D. Laing terms as the existential state of “implosion,” which he defines in *The Divided Self* in the following words:

...full terror of the experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity as a gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum. The individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But this emptiness is him. Although in other ways he longs for the emptiness to be

filled, he dreads the possibility of this happening because he has come to feel that all he can be is the awful nothingness of just this very vacuum. (299)

This existential state of “implosion” makes Martha’s reality implosive. It threatens to obliterate her identity:

‘Matty’ was an intolerably tedious personage she could think of only with exhausted nausea and fear that she might ever again be afflicted by her. Martha— well, ordinary Martha too had moved away, could be looked at: she did well enough, was not important. As for ‘Hesse,’ it was a name acquired like a bracelet from a man who had it in his possession to be given to a woman in front of lawyers at the time of signing the marriage contract. But who then was she behind the banalities of the day? A young woman? No, nothing but a soft dark receptive intelligence, that was all. (FGC 47)

In this way Martha loses her sense of wholeness and experience a deep sense of fragmentation. Lessing writes that Martha has “to fight paranoia,” a condition similar to that of the many other “aliens” whom she has met in “the pubs.” She has to “break rules invisible to those who lived by them” (FGC 31).

Fearing this anxiety of engulfment, Martha seeks escape from the threatening world around her and retreats back to the world of her imagination, where she is able to experience freedom from the tyrannical social order. Lessing suggests that when Martha couldn’t relate herself to real world around her, she only relates to the “Martha of the past,” which is an object of her active imagination. Seen from a Laingian perspective, she is severely cut off “from the rest of the world, [her] identity and autonomy are always in question. [She] lacks the experience of [her] own temporal continuity. [She] may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness.” (Laing DS 42)

As a natural outcome of her ontological insecurity, Martha starts experiencing schizophrenia. Lessing's description of schizophrenic state of Martha is very much similar to Laing's interpretation of this process as an insecure individual's automatic response to cope with the threatening world which causes a split between body and mind. Daniel Burston in his book *The Wings of Madness. The Life and Work of R. D Laing* interprets Laing's idea of schizophrenia in the following manner:

Schizophrenia is a symptom of extreme ontological insecurity, with its attendant fears of engulfment, petrification, and implosion; the consequent defense mechanisms are designed to maintain the person's precarious sense of identity, such as the flight into fantasy and the deliberate cultivation of the rupture between the so called real and false selves. (238)

Martha in her new surroundings shows symptoms of schizophrenia. These signs become visible in the split between Martha's true self and what Laing terms "the false self systems." According to Laing this state of schizophrenia is not to be understood as psychological disorder. Rather this should be understood as a defense mechanism and a kind of social phenomenon. It is a normal reaction of the individual to the engulfing social repression.

In this state of alienation Martha feels threatened. In order to counter this situation she puts on personae. Lessing suggests that under these "disguises," she "call[s] strange identities into being with a switch of clothes or a change of voice—until [she feels] like an empty space without boundaries..." (FGC 26). Further she describes the complexity of the situation in the following words:

A stranger last week had said: 'What's your name?' Her mind dizzying, Martha had said: Phyllis Jones. For an afternoon and an evening she had been Phyllis Jones, with an imaginary history of war-time work in Bristol. [...] A week later, [...] Martha had been someone called Alice Harris instead... What difference did it make to her, the sense of identity, like a silent statement 'I am here', if she were called Phyllis or Alice, or Martha or Matty; or if her history were this or that? (FGC 26)

This situation of Martha directly corresponds to the Laingian concept of the "false-self system", which according to him "exists as the complement of an 'inner' self occupied in maintaining its identity and freedom by [disembodying itself in order to escape] being grasped, pinpointed, trapped, possessed. Its aim is to be a pure subject, with no objective existence"(95).

In Laingian terms, Martha is aware of her "true self" but simultaneously develops a "false-self system." This constitutes a persona behind which her "true self" can hide.

This state of existential insecurity forces her to create "false-self systems" as a forte so to say, which as Laing would say is a way for Martha to "transcend the world and hence be safe" (84). Initially this offers Martha a sense of freedom and security which she felt lacking in her African home. Lessing comments: "Coming to a big city... means first of all,...freedom: all the pressures are off, no one cares, no need for the mask. For weeks then, without boundaries, without definition, like a balloon drifting and bobbing, nothing had been expected of her" (12).

Martha at this stage keeps on putting the masks in order to integrate herself in the society, but

when the rupture between the “real” and the “false-self system” grows wider, her schizophrenia turns into psychosis. The splits between her real and false self becomes clearly visible. Martha in such psychotic states incarnates what Laing terms as “the disembodied self.” Lessing comments: “Her body [is] a machine, reliable and safe for walking” while “her mind [is] a soft dark empty space” (46-47). Martha feels as if her old self of “Matty” has come to revisit her.

Significantly, in *The Four Gated City*, Lessing through her depiction of Martha Quest, suggests that humankind must seek to open doors in their lives that lead them to become ‘whole’ individuals, individuals who develop fully their emotional, physical, and perceptual faculties. For Martha decides that the key to wholeness may be found within oneself rather than through external means. Near the end of *The Four-Gated City*, Martha seems to confirm the idea of such a discovery :

She walked beside the river while the music thudded, feeling herself as a heavy impervious insensitive lump that, like a planet doomed always to be dark on one side, had vision in front only, a myopic search light blind except for the tiny three-dimensional path opened immediately before her eyes in which the outline of a tree, a rose, emerged, then submerged in darkness. She thought, with the dove’s voice of her solitude? Where? But where. How? Who? No, but ‘where’... Then silence and the birth of a repetition : Where? Here, Here?

Here, where else, you fool, you poor fool, where else has it been, ever.... (591)

The "discovery" aids Martha in surviving the "great catastrophe" with Lessing presents in the novel's "Appendix". In the "Appendix", Lessing describes, through the use of documents, letters and diaries, the events directly preceding, during and following the "catastrophe" that Martha, along with other "whole" individuals, is able to perceive as a result of utilizing her heightened perceptual powers. Here Lessing implicitly suggests that the "catastrophe" -- resulting possibly from radioactive material from a sunk Russian submarine or from the crash landing of a Chinese pilot in a plane full of nuclear materials, or from a fire in a wing of Proton or from vandals who released nerve gas from the North sea -- might have been the result of actions of unwhole "creatures" like the ones Martha observed during her walk in London where she viewed the mass of humanity who looked like sleepwalkers (637).

In this regard, Lessing seems to make a direct connection between the "unwhole" individuals and the catastrophe, implying what conceivably might occur when people are not "whole", for the implication is that the sane unwhole individuals were busy making the nerve gases or the nuclear devices, the source of the disaster, rather than seeking understanding, brotherhood, and love. Additionally, Lessing suggests in the "Appendix" the birth of a new human race, a race with finely developed powers of perception somewhat similar to the powers Martha develops in her movement toward wholeness: "...more like them are being born in hidden places in the world, and one day all the human race will be like them" (P648). In this regard, Lessing appears somewhat optimistic about the fate of humankind. Yet, in her stylistic manner of presenting a "whole" picture, Lessing also ends the novel on a pessimistic note, for when one of the marvelous children, Joseph, is sent by Martha to a Reconstitution and Rehabilitation centre in Nairobi, he is at once classed as sub-normal and unfit for academic education. Here Lessing might be suggesting that even after the

holocaust humankind basically remained the same. Then, too, she might be suggesting that the mere existence of these "marvelous" individuals may represent a cause for hope.

Finally, Lessing in *The Four-Gated City* seems concerned with the process of reintegrating the individual psyche and transforming our civilization from one which has become rigid and unresponsive to the real needs of people to one responsive to the realities and demands of life, one suffused with love and concern for others. She suggests that any change, however, must be brought about by the transformation of the individuals of society. Perhaps Lessing, at one time, might have entertained the notion that a positive change in society could result primarily from group or collective action as she suggests through her portnaya of Martha's activities in the Party near the end of *A Proper Marriage*, in *A Ripple from the Storm*, and in *Landlocked*. But by the time she concludes *The Four-Gated City*, she seems to have concluded that the individual must achieve autonomy over his or her actions in order to offer significant contributions to the collective. Hence, she suggests that the individual must first discover the essence of his own being, become self-reliant and self-sufficient-whole. Thus, the new individual who will create the new society must be a sensitive and creative one, confident in himself or in herself-taking the risk and accepting his or her responsibility as a protector of a world where spiritual freedom can be found, a world that is not haunted by shadows of hate, hypocrisy, injustice, and violence.

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