

Premise Of Madness Or Higher Perception In Lessing's Briefing For A Descent Into Hell And The Four Gated City

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Abstract: *Doris Lessing is one of the best writers of twentieth century. The way she explores the human mind is unique in itself. Lessing very easily gets into the mind set of different characters. She not only gives the sketch of the central character but also goes deep into all the characters. As for the The Four Gated City she says "...various aspects of me were parceled out between the different characters. They were a fairly interesting map of myself, the role of the characters." During the 1970s, Lessing began writing what she called "inner space fiction." "These works reveal the influence of Carl Jung and particularly R. D. Laing, a well-known radical psychologist who proposed that insanity is merely a convenient label imposed by society on those who do not conform to its standards of behavior..*

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Both Freud and Jung conceived of the psyche as divided into areas with different functions, corresponding to their degree of accessibility. Freud characterized those as conscious, subconscious, and unconscious, while Jung identified them simply as conscious and unconscious. In the Freudian model, the unconscious contains material repressed from conscious awareness, primarily of a sexual nature, derived from past experiences and fantasies. In Jung's model, the unconscious contains all these, as well as elements of a nonsexual nature, which may never have been conscious, but which are capable of entering awareness through the symbolic language of dreams.

In essence, Jung describes a compensatory psychic system, in which elements of the personality which never function at the conscious level as a 'shadow', as the opposite of the conscious self. As Jung describes it:

"The activity of the unconscious is a balancing of the one-sidedness of the general attitude produced by the function of consciousness.... The more one-sided the conscious attitude, the more antagonistic are the contents arising in dreams from the unconscious, so that we may speak of a real opposition between the two.... As a rule, the unconscious compensation does not run counter to consciousness, but is rather a balancing or supplementing of the conscious orientation."

Various aspects of this compensatory and self-regulating system function as different levels of psychic energy, and are manifested in dreams, as well as in projections onto external objects and persons. The most rudimentary one is the 'shadow' – the hidden and alien

opposite component of the conscious, or acknowledged, personality. At a deeper layer of the psyche, the complementary qualities are personified in the form of an image of the opposite sex – the anima (for the male) and the animus (for the female). These entities are, according to Jung, products of an aspect of the mind's activity common to all human beings. They may correspond both to a person's actual life and to the larger collective experience of the human race.

Jung uses the term 'archetype' to designate those symbolic configurations, often personified, of dynamic mechanisms and experiences within the unconscious. The deepest of these potentialities is the 'Self', a hypothetical construct representing the totality of the personality, including both what an individual is and is not aware of. The process by which the individual becomes whole is called 'individuation'. – the idea that the psyche is inherently divided, but its inner dynamic leads to wholeness – is compatible with Lessing's own orientation. As she has commented,

“There are difficulties about the Freudian landscape. The Freudians describe the conscious as a small lit area, all white, and the unconscious as a great dark marsh full of monsters. In their view, the monsters reach up, grab you by the ankles, and try to drag you down. But the unconscious can be what you make of it, good or bad, helpful or unhelpful. Our culture has made an enemy of the unconscious.”

In *The Briefing for a descent into Hell* the doctors deal with a patient who is considered 'mad'. But he (Charles Watkins) has his own conclusion for everything happening in this world. Charles is found in a condition where he doesn't have any identity. He is well dressed, when he was found he was talking of some voyage. The police and the doctor conclude that he is a sailor but later when his identity is revealed, he was Prof. in Cambridge Classics, aged 50, married, with two children. But he refuses to respond to this name, he says he his name is Jason, and next day he is Jonah. Two doctors are treating Prof. Watkins, but he keep insisting that he cannot see Doctor x. Doctor x actually, wants to send Prof. Watkins for shock therapy, so Prof. Watkins say that Doctor x is all solid and an animal without light. On the other hand, he has a totally different opinion for Doctor y; Prof. could see light through him. Actually Prof. Watkins in his functional life was indifferent towards the people obliging him. And now he is able to recognize only those people who have compassion in them.

“..., and never where these mad microbes say I,I,I, for saying I,I,... is their madness this is where they have been struck lunatic, moon made, round the bend, crazy,..... Since I suppose we are free to presume compassion and derisiveness in the guardians of the microbes.”

In his dream or 'his speculative area of psychic geography' he *is* sailing in a raft, he is left out from a 'crystal disc' in which his other friends are lifted. Prof. Watkins' task is of assisting the Earth's people through the coming Planetary Emergency, in which all life may be lost. Charles dimly remembers another existence.

The relevance of dream is emphasized by Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, and he tries to explain their importance to his psychiatrist who finally treats him and send him to his wife 'cured'. 'Prof Watkins undergoes a psychical journey similar to that described by R.D.Laing in *The Politics of Experience*. Both characters are treated by psychiatrist in ways which attempt to deny or destroy their special powers.'

Like R.D. Laing, Lessing also explores the possibility that only the mad are sane. But much more intriguing than this idea is Lessing's decision to weave the language and metaphors of madness from the idiom of science fiction and the visions experienced. The

inner journey is travelled on the space-time warp of science fiction. The regions he visits are vividly depicted. The language which attempts to capture the visions Watkins is experiencing is one where words are understood by their sounds, not their connotative meanings. "I" glides into "aye" and "eye" as Watkins's mind seems to float in limbo, carrying his body through an unfamiliar medium, revealing images from the visionary realm. "Lessing sustains this style, interrupted by only the curt notations of the two psychiatrists, for over a hundred pages. The effect is startling. At times one almost drowns in verbiage, but the flow of the vision is interrupted with the banal observations of the doctors or the staccato questioning of the patient. This book introduces all the ideas and the paraphernalia of science fiction that dominate the Canopus in Argos sequence. In its ambiguous treatment of Watkins's identity, it anticipates questions rose in *The Fifth Child*." Watkins's hold on the link between the two ways of seeing is most precarious. We are also left puzzling whether Miles and Watkins are at some level identical, and whether it matters at all since others in the novel seem still to be around. Also, of course, there is the possibility that Watkins is nothing more than temporarily schizophrenic, though the weight of the story seems to negate this alternative.

Lessing never treats 'mad' as mad in her novels. They have many dormant and latent powers within them which are not recognized by the people who see them outwardly. One needs to have the capability to recognize the awkward behavior reflected through that 'madness.' Lessing's 'mad' characters always in some way try to convey some major concern which is not understood by the one living around them. I may say that the 'madness' in Lessing's novel is emphatic.

Madness is shown to be another method of getting in touch with forces of powers beyond everyday comprehension. In Lessing's novels what is ordinarily seen as madness is revealed as a state of heightened perception or receptivity. In *The Four Gated City*, Lynda Coleridge is telepathic, and hears voices. But later what proves to be the latent power of Lynda's mind is treated as 'madness'. She is drugged eye deep with sedatives.

Similarly, Martha also consults Dr. Lamb about how she sees pictures and hears voices, especially when she says that she had a vision of "Dorothy slashing her wrists before she did it."⁴⁴ The doctor concludes it as 'déjà vu' as Dorothy was of suicidal type and had made this attempt before too. Hence, Martha saw something she was predisposed to see.

Later Martha and Lynda try to sort out the mystery involved with what was called their madness or 'déjà vu'. They called it 'working'. 'They used their dreams, their slips of the tongue, their fantasies, not at all as Dr. Lamb might have wished them to do, but as maps or signposts for a country which lay just beyond or alongside, or within the landscape they could see and touch.' (FGC, 392) They could have sought Rosa Mellendip's (tarot card reader) help in what they were trying to know. But then, 'like all specialists, she tended rather to become impatient, or worse, tolerant, if they wished to speculate outside her field-' (FGC, 391)

Dorothy, a schizophrenia patient having suicidal tendency, on the other hand had quite early predicted about Paul.

'The direction of this had in fact, been indicated by Dorothy. Living with the mentally 'upset' is a lesson in our own splits, discords, contradiction. No one was more intelligent about Paul than Dorothy, provided he was not in the same room. She had said; 'What you've got to make him see is, he's not entitled to get away with it. Otherwise he's going to find himself in prison.' (FGC, 331)

Though, she too was under psychiatric observation and later slits both her wrist and

commits suicide. But one cannot deny that Lessing has bestowed her with heightened perception.

Lessing accepts the Laingian premise that madness is vision. For some, for Thomas, for Sally/Sarah, for Dorothy, madness and vision are also death. Though Lynda seems finally a kind of defeat, Martha survives. And Mark, an 'aboveground' visionary, also survives. In this context, calling Martha a secretary seems inadequate. She is collaborating an alter ego, a secret sharer of Mark's and the head of a family or collective. In terms of the novel's appendix, her journey is more radical and more successful than Mark's. Martha, more than Mark, comes to represent the remnant that becomes the new world.

The Four-Gated City chronicles the breakdown of decorum most completely and ends with Martha's search for documentation on the discoveries she has made by experimenting with her own psyche. The connecting link among all the houses, all the gates, is Martha herself.

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