

THE ALIENATED CHARACTER IN SELECTED
SHORT STORIES OF DORIS LESSING

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Southwest Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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San Marcos, Texas

August 1984

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank the following persons who have helped me greatly in completing this thesis:

First, my parents, Mr. and Mrs. M. A. (Vic) Vucinovich, whose love, encouragement, and support convinced me to pursue a college career.

Next, my husband, Rudy Cano, who has listened to many hours of frustration, anger, and happiness, and who has never let me lose sight of my goals.

To Becky B. McEntire, Melanie B. Lindsey, Kathy M. Lisauckis, Christine M. Magargee, and Sandra Banham who always had faith in me, provided both criticism and encouragement whenever necessary, and are dear friends, I thank them.

And last but not in any way least, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Nancy Grayson for providing me the leadership and friendship needed to accomplish this task; to Dr. Robert W. Walts and Dr. Patricia Deduck for inspiring me to strive for perfection, and to Dr. Alvin Short for showing me that graduate school can be a good experience.

CHAPTER I

DORIS LESSING AS A WRITER OF SHORT FICTION

Doris Lessing has become a familiar name in modern literature, not only in England, but in the United States and other countries as well. Her popularity can probably be attributed first to her novels and second to her short stories. During the past thirty years, she has made a significant contribution to literature, publishing eighteen novels, over sixty short stories in various collections, and a collection of poetry. In addition she has written four plays, two of which have been published, and various works of non-fiction. According to Paul Schlueter, author of The Novels of Doris Lessing, the themes found in her fiction include

. . . the appeal of communism to the liberals of the late 1930's and early 1940's; the black-white situation in British colonial Africa; the role of the 'free' woman in an essentially masculine world, and the manifestations, particularly sexual, of that woman's keen self-analysis; and the function of writing as a means of achieving therapeutic identity, even equilibrium, in a chaotic universe.¹

Schlueter's list reminds us that her fiction centers not only on controversial subjects such as politics, prejudices, and the characteristics of societies, but also on the pred-

¹Paul Schlueter, The Novels of Doris Lessing (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p. 5.

judices and characteristics of the individual. We can study, through her works, the societies of the spacious, green velds of Africa or those of the noisy, cluttered streets of London. We can see the individual in relation to the large society within which he or she lives, the small society of the family, or simply the private society within the self. No experience seems to be too large or too small for Lessing's fiction: her latest novels, the Canopus in Argos series, are set throughout the entire universe, yet some of her short stories are intricately set within one person's heart or soul.

This range of themes doubtless emerges from Lessing's own broad background. She was born to British parents in Persia, where she lived until she was five. That year, 1925, her father, Alfred Cook Tayler, felt he could soon find the independence and wealth he had always wanted. Britain had colonized Africa, and the colonial government was offering huge farms with easy payments to white (mostly British) settlers.² Tayler saw his opportunity to seek independence from the confines of the city. Describing his new environment, Lessing writes,

. . . there was my father in a cigar-shaped house of thatch and mud on the top of a kopje that overlooked in all directions a great system of mountains, rivers,

²Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1978), pp. 4-5. I am indebted to this source for the information in this paragraph.

valleys, while overhead the sky arched from horizon to empty horizon. This was a couple of hundred miles south of Zambesi, a hundred or so west from Mozambique, in the district of Banket . . . Lomagundi, gold country, tobacco country, maize country--wild almost empty. (The Africans had been turned off of it onto reserves.) Our neighbors were four, five, seven miles off. In front of the house no neighbors, nothing; no farms, just wild bush with two rivers but no fences to the mountains seven miles away. And beyond these mountains and bush again to the Portuguese border. . . .³

Here on this kopje, a wild and spacious country that would later appear in much of her fiction, Lessing spent her childhood. We see it as a setting of her first novel The Grass Is Singing (1950), then in her later novels Martha Quest (1952) and A Proper Marriage (1954). This Was the Old Chief's Country (1951), Five (1953), and African Stories (1964) are all collections of short stories set in Africa.

At eighteen, Lessing left her childhood home for Salisbury where she worked as a telephone operator. Here she met and married Frank Charles Wisdom and bore him a son and a daughter. This marriage ended in divorce in 1943, and two years later she married Gottfried Lessing. She gave birth to a son before this marriage also ended in divorce in 1949. At this point, Lessing made her way to England.⁴

³Doris Lessing, "My Father" in A Small Personal Voice, ed. by Paul Schlueter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), p. 90.

⁴Paul Schlueter, The Novels of Doris Lessing, p. 4. I am indebted to this source for the information in this paragraph.

London must have proved quite unsettling after the clean air and open spaces of her childhood, but it was in this city that her established writing career would begin. Her first novel The Grass Is Singing appeared in 1950, and according to Michael Thorpe, "It was accepted at once and acclaimed as one of the outstanding novels by a post-war English writer."⁵ This was the first of eighteen successful novels.

Fortunately, this success did not force Doris Lessing to write and publish within only one genre. Following The Grass Is Singing (1950), she published This Was the Old Chief's Country (1951), a collection of short stories with African settings. Martha Quest (1952), Volume I of her Children of Violence series, came next, followed by a collection of short novels, Five (1953), most of which are set in Africa. This collection won Doris Lessing the Somerset Maugham Award in 1954 for the best work of fiction by a writer under thirty-five. Following this pattern set in the first three years of the 1950's, Lessing has published one work nearly every year. Volume II in her Children of Violence series, A Proper Marriage, was published in 1954 and was followed by another novel Retreat to Innocence (1956). Selecting short stories from her previous collections This Was the Old Chief's

⁵Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa, p. 6.

Country and Five, Lessing published No Witchcraft for Sale: Stories and Short Novels (1956). The next year gave us her first collection of short stories set in England, The Habit of Loving (1957), as well as her personal narrative Going Home (1957). The next year Lessing's play Mr. Dollinger (1958) and her published play Each His Own Wilderness (1958) were produced in England, and she completed A Ripple from the Storm (1958), Volume III of her Children of Violence series. The next year she published her first collection of poems, Fourteen Poems (1959).

In the 1960's Lessing was as prolific as she had been in the 1950's; again she did not limit herself to one genre, but she did publish more short stories than she had during the fifties. Her first novel in this decade, In Pursuit of the English (1960), describes Lessing's arrival in London in 1949, and she followed that work with her unpublished play The Truth About Billy Newton, produced in 1961. The Golden Notebook, her now most publicized and discussed work, came out in 1961. It was followed by Play with a Tiger: A Play in Three Acts (1962). From this point until the end of the decade, Lessing published more short story collections than novels. The next two years gave us two collections: A Man and Two Women (1963), a collection of stories predominantly set in England, and African Stories (1964), a collection of stories previously published in This Was the Old Chief's Country and Five, plus four African

stories which had not appeared before. Lessing also published four smaller collections of various combinations of short stories drawn from African Stories: Black and White in Africa: Three Stories (1965), Winter in July (1966), The Black Madonna (1966), and Nine African Stories (1968). Her personal narrative Particularly Cats was published in 1967, and she completed her Children of Violence series with Volume IV Landlocked (1965) and Volume V The Four Gated City (1969).

The 1970's gave us the novel Briefing for a Descent into Hell (1971), The Summer Before the Dark (1973), Memoirs of a Survivor (1975), and Shikasta (1979), Volume I of her Canopus in Argos series. She published two collections of short stories in the seventies: The Temptation of Jack Orkney (1972), a collection of previously published stories set in England, and Stories (1978), a collection comprised of stories from her earlier short story collections, excluding the African stories. Thus far in the 1980's, Lessing has continued her Canopus in Argos series, publishing The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five (1980), The Sirian Experiments (1981), The Making of the Representative for Planet 8 (1983), and The Sentimental Agents (1983).

Although Lessing has published eleven collections of short stories, she is seen primarily as a novelist. Most scholarship published to date focuses on her novels. Before 1969, only a few pieces of criticism appeared on Doris Lessing's works. Prior to that year, there was only one significant book,

Doris Lessing (1965) by Dorothy Brewster, an article "The Fiction of Doris Lessing: An Interim View" by Frederick P. W. McDowell in the Arizona Quarterly (1965); and various reviews of her works. The 1970's became the decade in which to discuss Doris Lessing and her works in the critical journals. Unfortunately, the critics usually discussed only her novels. In the last ten years barely ten percent of the scholarly writings on Lessing's fiction deals with her short stories, and most of these only briefly mention them. Dorothy Brewster's Doris Lessing (1965) devotes one chapter to the short stories, but it was published before many of Lessing's short stories appeared. The only other substantial works about Lessing's short fiction are McDowell's article, mentioned above, also published in 1965, and Michael Thorpe's Doris Lessing's Africa (1978) which devotes a chapter to those stories set in Africa. Various other articles attempt to group all of Lessing's short fiction into one category or look only at the placement of the short stories in a collection in order to make a general comment about Lessing's short fiction. For example, Patricia Chaffee's "Spatial Patterns and Closed Groups in Lessing's African Stories" relies on the external distance between two groups of people in order to show the similarity of all of Lessing's short stories. This article states that alienation, or the "insider" versus the "outsider", is an important theme in Lessing's work, but Chaffee only discusses a select group of stories from the African Stories to support her thesis.

Selma K. Burkom's article "'Only Connect': Form and Content in the Works of Doris Lessing" provides an overview of criticism written about Lessing's fiction. Burkom presents a detailed examination of the story "Dialogue," a "representative work in the Lessing canon" according to Burkom, because the personal relationship within the story is made right by "reconciling the antithesis."⁶ This, Burkom feels, occurs in each short story by Lessing. In her article "'Two Forks of a Road': Divergence and Convergence in the Short Stories of Doris Lessing," Margaret K. Butcher writes that Lessing feels that her style has varied throughout her fiction. Butcher, however, argues that the change is only superficial. She comments that all of Lessing's work follows the same path, and she illustrates the similarities of style in the short stories by briefly discussing "The Pig," "The Trinket Box," "The Black Madonna," and "Old Chief Mshlanga." I have chosen these articles as a representative sample of the criticism I have read on Lessing's short fiction. In my research I did not find any in-depth study which did not attempt to generalize about all of Lessing's short fiction.

As Lessing says in her Preface to African Stories, "Some writers I know have stopped writing short stories be-

⁶Selma K. Burkom, "'Only Connect': Form and Content in the Works of Doris Lessing," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction 11 (1980): 67.

cause, as they say, 'there is no market for them.' Others like myself, the addicts, go on, and I suspect would go on even if there really wasn't any home for them but a private drawer."⁷ What seems to be lacking is not a market for her stories, but a serious study, an acknowledgement, of Lessing's ability as a writer of short fiction. McDowell writes that "her work in this genre is less imposing perhaps than her work in the novel, but her short stories represent a substantial extension of her accomplishment."⁸ Apparently other critics agree with McDowell that Lessing's short stories only exhibit an "extension" of her abilities as a novelist, considering the relatively small amount of criticism they have written about her short stories. But a close reading of these stories of the past thirty years reveals that her talent as a short story writer is not secondary to her talent as a novelist.

One mark of Lessing's skill as a short story writer is her ability to shape a theme in various and specific ways. One significant example of this found in her short fiction is the presence of an alienated character who is the focus of the story. In a number of these instances, the character has

⁷Doris Lessing, "Preface," in African Stories (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1965), p. iv.

⁸Frederick P. W. McDowell, "The Fiction of Doris Lessing: An Interim View," Arizona Quarterly 21 (Winter 1965): 321.

chosen to separate himself or herself from society or has been set apart by other people, and within the story reacts psychologically to the alienation. This alienated character is the focus of this thesis.

The word alienation has been used in almost every major discipline, and because its definition is general, the term has been used differently by writers in those disciplines.⁹ A definition most relevant to the study of Doris Lessing's short fiction is provided by Frank Johnson, a psychiatrist, in his book, Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings.

Stripped to its essence, the word [alienation] signifies separation (or distance between two or more entities). The fact of separation, however integral to its definition, does not in itself convey the full meaning of the word. Equally basic is the connotation of anguish or tension accompanying such separation--usually the quality of estrangement or loss, but also accomodating to the connotation of relief at the interposition of distance.¹⁰

Although the term alienation has been used by psychiatrists, social scientists, and psychologists to define specific disorders, for the purpose of this thesis, Johnson's definition will suffice. The type of alienation Johnson describes recurs in many of Lessing's short stories, and I have found that her alienated characters fall into three

⁹Frank Johnson, ed. Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings (New York: Seminar Press, 1973). Johnson devotes a chapter each to the following disciplines in an effort to show how diverse the meaning of this term is: Sociology, Technology, Economics, Politics, American Literature, Theology, Education, and Psychiatry.

¹⁰Johnson, p. 4.

categories: the character who chooses to alienate self; the character who is alienated by the family, and the character who is alienated by society. In Chapter II, I shall explore the reasons a character chooses to analyze parts of his or her personality and the effects of that decision. In Chapter III, I shall look at the character who elects to remove self from the mainstream of society and the purpose and/or result of that action. The character who is estranged from his or her family and/or society because of the family's actions will be considered in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, I shall examine the character in unfamiliar surroundings, alienated from that society. Finally, in Chapter VI, I shall trace the changes that have occurred in Lessing's alienated character since she began writing short fiction.

CHAPTER II

ALIENATION AND THE INNER SELF

In defining alienation, Johnson states that separation may provide the character "relief at the interposition of distance."¹ This relief may occur when the character realizes that the separation is for his or her well-being, when distance allows the character to focus on one or two of the disconnected parts, or when the separation provides the character a better understanding of his or her situation. In each instance, the "relief of the interposition of distance" benefits the alienated individual..²

A study of Doris Lessing's short fiction reveals that at times the alienated character chooses to separate portions of the inner self in hopes of experiencing this "relief." By analyzing one or two elements of the inner self, the character tries to understand or change the total self. Johnson says that this is an analysis of the "relationship of self to factors of self," and he explains that this "refers to a closed system approach and describes the relation

¹Frank Johnson, ed. Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 4.

²Johnson, p. 4.

of the overall person (personality, self, or ego) to components of [the person's] own experiential or psychological being (cognition, feelings, memories, etc.)."³

Four of Lessing's short stories provide examples of characters who have separated parts of the inner self: "To Room Nineteen" (1963), "Dialogue" (1963), "Our Friend Judith" (1960), and "How I Finally Lost My Heart" (1963). In each story the character chooses to alienate parts of the psyche in order to assuage a stressful situation, reinforce an understanding of the self as a whole, or explain a conflict within the total self.

One of Lessing's characters who finds parts of her personality in conflict is Susan Rawlings in "To Room Nineteen." The narrator of the story tells us that it is "about a failure in intelligence."⁴ More accurately, it is the story about a situation created by intelligence and the consequences of trying to change the situation.

Susan Rawlings is the major character around which "To Room Nineteen" revolves. She and Matthew Rawlings are the ideal married couple, described as "sensible," "intelligent," "well-matched," "well-informed," and "responsible" people.⁵ In all things the Rawlings' marriage is governed

³Ibid., p. 39.

⁴Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 396. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

⁵Lessing, "To Room Nineteen," pp. 396-399.

by "practical intelligence."⁶ When Matthew has his first affair after ten years of marriage, Susan ignores her feelings of resentment, hurt, and confusion. And concerning the incident, "there was only one thing to do, and of course these sensible people did it; they put the thing behind them, and consciously, knowing what they were doing, moved forward into a different phase of their marriage. . . ."⁷ Even though Susan feels less important as a person because of the incident, "her intelligence continued to assert that all was well."⁸ Her "intelligence" forces all emotion or feeling from her; "intelligence barred . . . quarrelling, sulking, anger, silences of withdrawal, accusation, and tears. Above all, intelligence forbids tears."⁹

Ruled by intelligence, Susan plays the role of a good wife and mother. And when she is on edge, or restless, or alone, she does not share her thoughts with Matthew; "they were not sensible."¹⁰ These emotional thoughts, resentment, entrapment, fear, materialize in Susan's mind and becomes a demon for her. He develops as a figure with

a young-looking face which . . . had dry lines about the mouth and eyes. He was thinnish, meagre in build. And he had a reddish complexion, and ginger . . . a gingery energetic man, and he wore a reddish hairy jacket, unpleasant to the touch.¹¹

⁶Ibid., p. 398. ⁷Ibid., pp. 400-401.

⁸Ibid., p. 401. ⁹Ibid., p. 402. ¹⁰Ibid., p.404.

¹¹Ibid., p. 410.

The irrationality Susan so desires to repress comes alive despite her intelligence. Because her demon is always near her, "she dreamed of having a room or a place, anywhere, where she could go and sit, by herself, no one knowing where she was."¹² She feels she needs "absolute solitude."¹³

Her first attempt to secure that "absolute solitude" comes when she is traveling through Victoria. A "Room to Let" sign suggests to her that a room in the city would be perfect. But how can she ever get the money from Michael? Without realizing it, she has made the assumption that she would not tell him about the room. Her fear of Michael finding out why she would need such a large sum of money convinces her not to take a room. Though she feels that letting a room somewhere is impossible, "she knew she must."¹⁴ Her second attempt occurs again in Victoria. She does her errands early, and in Victoria "searched until she found a small quiet hotel, and asked for a room for the day."¹⁵ At first the manageress refuses to let the room only for a day, but after Susan lies about not feeling well and wanting to rest, she agrees. This first room "was ordinary and anonymous, and was just what Susan needed."¹⁶ As she sits in the quiet room "she could feel the pressures lifting off her."¹⁷ But a sharp knock

¹²Ibid., p. 411. ¹³Ibid., p. 413. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 411.

¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 412. ¹⁷Ibid.

ends her peacefulness. The manageress, concerned for Susan's health, comes to see how she is feeling. The woman stays to talk, and even though Susan obliges her company by adding even more detail to the fabrication begun earlier, she cannot help but wish to tell the woman her real purpose for letting the room. Mentally, Susan hears herself say to the woman, "I am here in your hotel above all alone and with no one knowing where I am."¹⁸ Realizing the woman is not planning to leave her alone, Susan "paid her bill and left the hotel, defeated."¹⁹

Back at home, Susan remembers that brief moment of peace at the hotel. Now she "was determined to arrange her life, no matter what the cost, so that she could have that solitude more often."²⁰ One day soon after this decision, Susan announces that she will be away for awhile. "She knew exactly where to go and what she must look for."²¹ At Paddington she "walked around looking at the smaller hotels until she was satisfied with one which had FRED'S HOTEL painted on the windowpanes that needed cleaning."²² She makes arrangements to rent Room 19 three times every week from ten in the morning until five in the afternoon; it becomes a haven for her "absolute solitude." She does little but sit in her

¹⁸Ibid. ¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Ibid., p. 413. ²¹Ibid., p. 417.

²²Ibid.

room "treasuring her anonymity."²³ And during each visit she "brooded . . . feeling the emptiness run deliciously through her veins like the movement of her blood."²⁴

After her sessions alone in Room 19, Susan feels it is easier to play her role as wife and mother, especially since she has hired Sofie Traub as an au pair girl, who becomes the true mistress of the Rawlings' home, leaving Susan few responsibilities. Susan has found what she needs to be happy; her demon no longer haunts her, and the chores of wife and mother are cheerfully fulfilled by Sofie. Susan is now completely and happily alone.

The beginning of the end of Susan's solitude comes when Matthew discovers her trips to the hotel. During those previous weeks in Room 19, Susan has been able to leave her responsibilities at home with Sofie and Matthew. But when her haven is violated by Matthew's discovery, the fears she first knew in her household are now found in Room 19.

Instead of the soft dark that had been the room's air, were now waiting for her demons that made her dash blindly about, muttering words of hate; she was impelling herself from point to point like a moth dashing itself against a windowpane, sliding to the bottom, fluttering off on broken wings, then crashing into the invisible barrier again.²⁵

The old Susan, the sensible Susan, fights for control of this emotional Susan in Room 19. And for a while,

²⁴Ibid., p. 419. ²⁵Ibid., p. 423.

intelligence wins. Susan returns home to try to play her role as a wife and mother. But she cannot make herself hold or comfort her children; Sofie does that well enough. And when she tries to communicate with Matthew, his only need is to make sure that she has gone to Fred's Hotel because of a lover. He needs to ease his conscience because of his own affair. Susan allows Matthew to believe she does have a lover by inventing all the necessary information to create one. Matthew feels it is reasonable that they should make a foursome. "If one is sensible, if one is reasonable, if one never allows oneself to make a base thought or envious emotion, naturally one says: Let's make a foursome."²⁶ The practicality of all this is too much for Susan. The emotion on which she has survived in Room 19 cannot cope with such cool logic. She has to return to Room 19; she has to be rid of logic completely; she cannot allow it to take away her emotion again.

She makes her way to Fred's Hotel, and when Room 19 is available, she goes up to find her lost emotions. Finally she is in her sanctuary; "the demons were not here. They had gone forever, because she was buying her freedom from them."²⁷ She lay on the bed in Room 19, quite content, "listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured

²⁶Ibid., p. 426. ²⁷Ibid., p. 428.

into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river."²⁸

Susan Rawlings is a prisoner of her intelligence; it has choked her ability to feel or to hurt. She knows she has to allow her emotions to be part of her personality--they have been excluded for much too long. Room 19 in Fred's Hotel is the solution to her problem, for there she can exclude all responsibility; only emotion is allowed in Room 19. But simply shutting the door does not keep the "sensible" world away from her. Susan has to eliminate the cause of her problem, her logic, for good. And Susan, once she removes this, has nothing left; her entire life has been focused on intelligence, and her inability to find a harmonious coexistence between logic and feeling leaves her with nothing.

The main character in "To Room Nineteen" is in a situation she cannot change without changing something about her personality. Susan analyzes her situation and sees only one solution: remove that part of the psyche which seems the most obvious cause of the problem. She must eliminate the part of her that is governed by intelligence. By doing this, she can never be the Susan who had the perfect life with Matthew at the beginning of "To Room Nineteen." She knows she must change her personality so that it will include emotion. What she does not realize is that a change should

²⁸Ibid.

harmonize the conflicting parts. She only sees that the cause of her problem must be removed; she must kill that part of her ruled by intelligence. And Susan does this in the only way she can -- by committing suicide.

Two other characters in Lessing's short fiction, who also choose to examine an integral part of their personalities, are the unnamed woman in "Dialogue" and Judith in "Our Friend Judith." But neither uses her findings to change a particular situation. The purpose of each analysis is to gain understanding or acceptance of an integral part of her "psychological being"²⁹ and her overall personality.

In "Dialogue" an unnamed woman visits her friend, an invalid living in a highrise apartment building. Their meetings serve as a bridge between their now separate worlds. The story begins with details of the woman's journey to see her friend; she is hesitant, stopping to listen to the various conversations of the busy street merchants, engulfing herself with the vitality of the busy street. But finally she must leave this dynamic scene and enter the imposing building where her friend lives. The building, described as "secretive" and "impersonal," forces her to "hold the colours of growth firm in her heart."³⁰ Slowly she makes her way to Room 39,

²⁹Johnson, p. 39.

³⁰Doris Lessing, "Dialogue" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 369. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

Bill's flat. It has

. . . two rooms, one very small and always darkened by permanently drawn midnight blue curtains, so that the narrow bed with the books stacked up the wall beside it was in a suffocating shadow. . . . This bedroom would have caused her to feel (he spent most of his time in it) at first panic of claustrophobia and then a necessity to break out or let in light, open the walls to the sky. . . . The second room in which they both sat in their usual positions . . . was the room that challenged him because of its openness--he needed the enclosed dark of the bedroom.³¹

The differences between Bill and his female visitor are apparent from her commentary on his flat. She needs life, light, and space; he, on the other hand, needs the confines of a dark room, empty of life. For her, she says, to stand at the high windows of his highrise flat was a "release. To him, a terror."³²

This terror seems to pervade even the physical description of Bill:

She had thought his paleness was due to his dark blue sweater, whose tight high neck isolated and presented his head. It was a big head . . . a face where every feature strove to dominate, where large calm green eyes just held the balance with a mouth designed, apparently, only to express the varieties of torment.³³

Although she is unlike this stark creature, the woman always comes here. Even she asks, "Why had she deliberately left behind the happiness . . . she felt in the streets? Was it that she believed the pain in this room was more real than happiness?"³⁴ Each time she visits Bill these questions are

³¹Lessing, "Dialogue," p. 369.

³²Ibid., p. 370. ³³Ibid. ³⁴Ibid.

asked silently, and each time Bill silently acknowledges them. It is his choice to live in isolation, in this pain, just as it is her choice to bring herself into his darkened room and share that pain with him. Their silent conversation, as always, moves from a silent understanding of each other's worlds to a verbal discussion of the stifling characteristics of the institutions in her world: marriage, relationships, families. His disapproval of these angers her, and she finally allows herself to admit into her mind those dangerous, comforting words and feelings she had left behind in her world: "love, joy, etc. . . . She gave them leave to warm her" against Bill's cynicism.³⁵ Again speaking to her unspoken thoughts, he says, "You are more split than I am, do you know that?"³⁶ What Bill does not realize is that she understands she must be split between the two worlds, for if "one half were not able to move in this world, even if for only short periods," then she would not be able to exist in either world.³⁷

Her realization that her visits with Bill are important to her well-being keep her coming to this darkened flat. And each time she comes, she must leave part of her self outside of the room--down in the other world, her world. Her visits only last for short periods; the split from part of herself becomes too intense, and now, just as she has

³⁵Ibid., p. 372. ³⁶Ibid., p. 373. ³⁷Ibid.

chosen to come from her world into his, she must deliberately choose to leave him. She forces herself out into the street which now seems unfamiliar to her. She searches for the vitality she knew before her painful visit with Bill. As she moves through the street, "the tall building, like a black tower, stood over her, kept pace with her."³⁸ Finally, her hand, seemingly under its own power, picks up a leaf. The faint yet potent smell invades her nostrils and

. . . seems to explode with a vivid odour into the senses of her brain so that she understood the essence of the leaf and through it the scene she stood in. She stood fingering the leaf, while life came back . . . So she was saved from deadness, she was herself again.³⁹

The unfamiliarity of her world has passed, and once again she belongs to her world.

But why does she allow herself to experience Bill's pain and loneliness? Why does she force all her emotions that focus on life and joy to disappear in order to visit Bill? The answers lie in her own question, "Was it that I believed the pain in this room was more real than the happiness?"⁴⁰ Perhaps not "more real" but we do see that by sharing Bill's pain and loneliness she finds her own happiness more intense. In her world, happiness is the dominant part of her personality; in Bill's world, only pain can exist. She can move from one type of existence to another for brief periods because doing so is a way to learn to accept both

³⁸Ibid., p. 377. ³⁹Ibid., pp. 377-378.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 370.

happiness and pain. Both emotions become part of her overall self. With neither pain nor happiness controlling her personality, she, unlike Bill, has found a way to achieve harmony among potentially conflicting parts of her personality. For even when she walks in her world where she allows herself happiness, she never shuts out the dark side of the self; always the "dark tower kept pace with her, she felt it rising somewhere just behind her right shoulder."⁴¹

Judith in "Our Friend Judith" seems at first to have already achieved the harmony found by the woman in "Dialogue." Judith's personality is fairly well defined. She lives alone, was educated at Oxford, is from an upper-middleclass family in London, and writes poetry. Some refer to her as a spinster because she has never married, but her friends merely see her as a very independent woman. Judith's personal life and the events of the story are explained from the point of view of two of Judith's friends, Betty and the narrator of the story. They know Judith keeps company with a middle-aged professor, but they only view her doing so as an intelligent woman's means of having companionship. When Betty learns from Judith that she is the professor's mistress, Betty is shocked. In relaying this information to the narrator, Betty says that Judith explains the affair

⁴¹Ibid., p. 378.

saying that "while she liked intimacy and sex and everything, she enjoyed waking up in the morning alone and her own person."⁴² This sums up Judith's personality, intelligent and independent. And Judith is quite content with this. But her affair with the professor is changing; he wants to marry her. Judith tells Betty that "she doesn't see the point of divorce . . . surely it would be very hard on his poor old wife after all these years, particularly after bringing up two children so satisfactorily."⁴³ In any case, his talk of divorcing his wife to marry Judith affects her, and she decides it is best to leave for holiday in Italy in order to "collect herself."⁴⁴

After arriving in Florence, Judith is able to "collect herself"; she changes her personality almost completely. Her structured, well-defined, independent personality is loosened, and Judith, ever so slightly, becomes involved with Luigi, an Italian barber. She also befriends a pregnant cat, one much too young to have kittens. And as Betty observes when she sees Judith with the kitten during her own vacation in Italy, "It makes me nervous to see her, it's not like her, I don't know why."⁴⁵ Now Judith has become the exact opposite

⁴²Doris Lessing, "Our Friend Judith" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 333. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

⁴³Lessing, "Our Friend Judith," p. 333.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 334. ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 337.

of the Judith Betty knew in London. She seems to base her life on feelings and emotions, instead of logic and independence.

Betty and the narrator learn that Judith has quite suddenly returned to London, and when she is confronted about the circumstances of her departure, Judith gives a direct account of the events in Florence. Although Judith really sees no point in recounting the last day in Florence, she obliges her friend with an explanation of her departure. Judith's adopted cat was nearing the time to give birth. As Judith comforts the poor, frightened young cat, Luigi suggests that Judith go for a swim and let the cat "look after itself."⁴⁶ During her swim, Judith realizes that the cat has followed her to the beach and has already delivered one of the kittens; but the kitten is stillborn, and the mother abandons it on the beach. When Judith reaches the mother cat, the second of the litter is being born, and the mother is having difficulty. Judith delivers the second and third kitten and takes them and the mother back to the apartment. All seems fine until the kittens begin to nurse; apparently the largest kitten hurts the mother, and the mother instinctively slaps it with her paw, immediately killing it. Luigi tries

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 343.

to get the mother cat to accept her last kitten, but it is useless. When Luigi sees this, he takes the kitten by the tail and "banged its head against the wall twice. Then he dropped it into the rubbish heap."⁴⁷ Judith knows he did the right thing; the kitten would have been killed by its mother anyway. The impact of the incident comes later that evening. Luigi asks her to go dancing, as if nothing has happened. His lack of understanding about her involvement with the cat is too much for her, and she leaves for London the next morning, leaving that part of her which is able to become emotionally involved with someone or something.

Once in London, Judith becomes the same person that she was before she left, an independent woman who thrives on her own independence. But why does she go to Florence in the first place? On the surface it seems to have caused more problems than if she had stayed in London and decided whether or not to marry the professor, but the holiday in Florence is really an experiment. The professor's request to marry her has caused her to wonder if perhaps waking up each morning "her own person" is really the way she should spend the rest of her life. Therefore, she goes to Florence to experiment with living a life that is grounded in emotion, a life not centered on herself, but on another person. By allowing her-

⁴⁷Ibid.

self to become immersed in the plight of the kitten and subject to Luigi's attention, Judith tests her other personality, the one the professor would see if she were his wife. But her philosophy is proved by the course of events with the kitten and Luigi: "That's what happens when you submerge yourself in somebody [or something] else."⁴⁸ Her rule is that if you allow yourself to become a part of someone else, you will be hurt. The Judith in London would never be hurt the way the Judith in Florence was because in London Judith is involved only with herself. Judith's trip to Florence allows her to separate her feelings about independence and marriage and reassures her that she needs to wake each morning "her own person."

The speaker in "How I Finally Lost My Heart" also performs a type of experiment in her analysis of herself. She begins the story with a discussion of her real loves. She has been in love twice, with A and B as she calls them. With each of these two lovers those feelings that said, yes this is serious love, were present. But, as it happens, neither A nor B is a part of her life now. Those loves have left her heart a "ton weight in her side."⁴⁹ Her need to separate herself from this painful and tender heart is seen

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 341.

⁴⁹ Doris Lessing, "How I Finally Lost My Heart" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 248. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

in the lines of a song she remembers:

If this were a stone in my side, a stone
I could pluck it out and be free. . . .⁵⁰

But her heart is not a stone; it is a part of her that is joined to her physically and emotionally. And even though she really would prefer to keep it from loving and hurting again, she keeps looking for that perfect man. She thinks that perhaps her lunch date today will be with that perfect man, her next true love. But the pain left over from her lovers A and B is still present, and most likely her date too has some past A or B still weighing on his heart. This man and woman are, she observes, two people holding out their hearts, "all pink and palpitating" so that the other can take it and comfort it.⁵¹ This thought strikes the speaker as absurd; one never thinks of taking someone else's wounded heart, "one simply expects to get rid of one's own."⁵²

At that moment the speaker unconsciously makes the decision to remove herself from the source of all her intense thinking. As she describes it,

I felt the fingers of my left hand push outwards around something rather large, light, and slippery . . . my fingers were stretching out rather desperately to encompass an unknown, largish, lightish object, and I . . . looked down, and there was my heart, in my hand.⁵³

The speaker finally has the opportunity to view that object

⁵⁰Lessing, "How I Finally Lost My Heart," p. 249.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 250. ⁵²Ibid. ⁵³Ibid., p. 251.

which has caused her to search for the perfect mate and has given her so much grief when the one she finds is not the one for her. But what purpose can a heart attached to one's hand serve? Especially when the heart will not budge from where it is attached. The speaker tells us, "It was stuck. There was my heart, a large red pulsing bleeding repulsive object, stuck to my fingers."⁵⁴ And there it remains. She covers it with foil as she "couldn't have any Tom, Dick and Harry . . . looking at it."⁵⁵ And so she sits looking at this foil-covered heart, trying to imagine how to rid her hand of its new appendage. Suddenly, she becomes enthralled with a young woman walking down the street. The "tap-tap-tapping" of the high heels on the pavement seem to absorb the noises of the street.⁵⁶ The simplicity of the movement and sound of the woman makes the speaker "happy and exhilarated" as if she "had no problems in this world."⁵⁷ With that thought, she notices that the heart feels loose on her hand. Then an understanding of her whole life forms in her mind:

I understood that sitting and analyzing each movement or pulse or beat of my heart through forty years was a mistake . . . this was the way to attach my red, bitter, delighted heart to my flesh for ever and ever. . . .⁵⁸

Once her attention moves from her heart to something else,

⁵⁴Ibid. ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 252. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 253.

⁵⁷Ibid. ⁵⁸Ibid.

she finds that she can release herself from the grips of her heart.

The speaker chooses a ride on the subway to help her focus her attention on something other than her heart. On the train she sees a strange woman muttering to no one in particular the words, "A gold cigarette case, well that's a nice thing, isn't it, I must say, a gold case, yes. . . ." ⁵⁹ The woman was "sitting half-twisted in her seat, so that her head was turned over her left shoulder . . . it was as if she was not seeing anything . . . she was looking inwards." ⁶⁰ She continues to talk of the gold cigarette case, completely oblivious to all those around her. And between brief statements, she stares; she is "unhappiness embodied . . . the essence of some private tragedy." ⁶¹ As the speaker watches this poor woman, she observes, "I felt a lightening of my fingers, as my heart rolled loose." ⁶² It becomes evident to her that she does not need this pulsing, feeling heart, and so she "laid the tin-foiled heart down on the seat so that it received [the woman's] stare." ⁶³ And thus the woman loses her heart. That part of her which caused her so much pain and confusion in the past now offers joy to someone else. After the heart rolled off of the speaker's hand, the woman

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 254. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 255. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 256.

⁶²Ibid., p. 257. ⁶³Ibid.

. . . picked up the glittering heart, and clutched it in her arms, hugging it and rocking it, back and forth, even laying her cheek against it, while staring over its top at her husband as if to say: Look what I've got, I don't care about you and your cigarette case, I've got a silver heart.⁶⁴

And the speaker leaves, thinking, "No heart. No heart at all. What bliss. What freedom. . . ."⁶⁵ She is finally free.

Each character who chooses to analyze a part of the personality has reached some type of harmony between the inner and outer selves. Susan Rawlings in "To Room Nineteen" knows she needs emotion in her overall personality but because she sees no way to change her personality to include it, she destroys herself. The woman in "Dialogue" and Judith in "Our Friend Judith" achieve a harmony within their personalities from analyzing the parts of their personalities and then joining those parts; the woman keeps both happiness and pain within her at all times, and Judith experiments with her personality types to choose the one with which she is more comfortable. The most intense psychological analysis occurs in "How I Finally Lost My Heart." The speaker physically examines the part of her that she does not understand. What makes her different from the other characters is that she does not compromise. She does not create a new personality, nor does she eliminate herself as Susan Rawlings does. She

⁶⁴Ibid. ⁶⁵Ibid.

does not need to create two selves with two dominant emotions as the unnamed woman does in "Dialogue," and she has no need to choose one personality type over another, as Judith does. She simply examines her problem, realizes she does not need "her heart" in order to exist, and so removes it from her self. She, more than any other character, is, as Orphia Jane Allen states in "Structure and Motif in Doris Lessing's Man and Two Women," "free to be."⁶⁶ This freedom comes from her ability to distance herself from her problem. It can be said that all four characters have in some way reached a goal through alienation. Interestingly, the speaker in "How I Finally Lost My Heart," Lessing's most successful of the characters, is found in a surrealistic story. Only through symbolic terms has this character been allowed to be truly successful. This character also illustrates Johnson's statement that there is in alienation a "relief" through the "interposition of distance."⁶⁷ Though this "relief" is present in all four stories, it benefits the speaker in "How I Finally Lost My Heart" more than it does any other character.

⁶⁶Orphia Jane Allen, "Structure and Motif in Doris Lessing's Man and Two Women" Modern Fiction Studies 26 (Spring 1980): 70.

⁶⁷Johnson, p. 39.

CHAPTER III

ALIENATION AS A SOLUTION TO AN INDIVIDUAL NEED

Self-alienation can refer to two different actions: an internal action, by which parts of the self are separated from the total self, and an external action by which one deliberately removes self from society. Johnson states that self-alienation may result when one discovers "imperfections" or "deficiencies" within the personality.¹ These "imperfections" cause the character either to be in conflict with parts of the self or in conflict with society. The characters discussed in Chapter II of this thesis are in conflict with themselves and choose to separate the conflicting parts in hopes of changing or understanding the total personality. Not all of Lessing's characters, however, wish to change or explain these "imperfections." In four of her short stories, "Lucy Grange" (1957), "Pleasure" (1957), "Each Other" (1963), and "Plants and Girls" (1951), the reader is introduced to characters whose personalities have created needs that society cannot fulfill. These characters choose not to analyze but instead simply to remove themselves from the mainstream of

¹Frank Johnson, ed. Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 42.

society and remain either alone or with a person who shares their needs.

Two of Lessing's characters, Lucy Grange in "Lucy Grange" and Mary Rogers in "Pleasure," find themselves in societies where their own sense of what is important in life does not correspond to that of the people around them. The two women decide to retain their ideas, even though doing so excludes them from the rest of society.

Lucy Grange is partially accepted by the women who live on the surrounding farms in colonial Africa. The women have always discussed her, though only recently have their voices "held the good-natured amusement of acceptance."² Lucy is a stylish woman who puts too much emphasis on fashion and beauty to be comfortable on a farm "fifty miles from the nearest town."³ The women have grown accustomed to seeing Lucy in the garden "wearing gloves full of cold cream."⁴ The women also make the correct observation that Lucy "is very attractive to men."⁵ Because of these things, the women have seldom "'dropped over' to see Lucy Grange" and if they do they only "finger the books on child psychology, politics, art; gaze guiltily at the pictures on her walls" and feel their distance from her expand even further.⁶ Even the men

²Doris Lessing, "Lucy Grange" in African Stories (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1965), p. 561. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

³Lessing, "Lucy Grange," p. 561. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

see a challenging difference in Lucy Grange. Although they come to the farm to see George, the men "seldom pressed the point" sitting with Lucy "far longer than they had intended, drinking tea, talking about themselves."⁷ Lucy enjoys their attention, and even more so, enjoys poking fun at how they act around her. Acting for George's pleasure, and her own, Lucy recounts how a

khaki-clad, sun-raw youth had bent into her room, looking around him with comical surprise; had taken a cup of tea, thanking her three times; had knocked over an ashtray, stayed for lunch and afternoon tea, and left saying with awkward gallantry: It's a real treat to meet a lady like you who is interested in such things.⁸

The men were always more entertaining for Lucy than the "solid" women of the area.

So accustomed to the dusty policemen who traveled to the farm to see George, Lucy is surprised to see a "city man" at her house. When she first sees him, "she felt a shudder of repulsion" at the "course" and "sensual" face.⁹ He implies that he really has come to see her, not George, and she feels at that moment "as if he had started playing a record she had not heard for a long time, and which started her feet tapping."¹⁰ He speaks of a picture in Lucy's room "in his heavy, over-

⁷Ibid., p. 562. ⁸Ibid., pp. 562-563. ⁹Ibid., p. 563.

¹⁰Ibid.

emphasized voice, which made her listen for meanings behind his words."¹¹ As he is leaving, he kisses the palm of her hand, and Lucy looks at the "greasy dark head, the red folded neck, and stood rigid, thinking of the raw, creased necks of vultures."¹² Stiffly, she asks what business he has come for; he has been there three hours, and it has not come up in the conversation. His line of work is insurance, but he explains to Lucy, "One of the reasons I chose this district was because of you. Surely there aren't so many people in this country one can really talk to that we can afford not to take each other seriously?"¹³ With that he leaves. She hears this last statement like a "parody of the things she often said and felt a violent revulsion."¹⁴

On his next visit three days later, Lucy at first sight of him thinks, "It is the face of an animal." But as he talks to her of London and of the theater, she feels more comfortable with him. "She liked him because he associated himself with her abdication from her standards by saying, 'Yes, yes, my dear, in a country like this we all learn to accept the second-rate.'"¹⁵ Although she knows the purpose of his return to the farm, she refuses to acknowledge the affair that is about to start. "In the bedroom she kept her

¹¹Ibid. ¹²Ibid. ¹³Ibid., p. 564. ¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 565.

eyes shut. His hand travelled up and down her back" comforting her.¹⁶ Finally he leaves, and Lucy watches him as love and hate join within her as one passion. She knows he will come again, and each time he leaves she will stand at the door "hating him, thinking of how he had said: 'In this country we learn to accept the second rate.'"¹⁷

Lucy Grange knows that every time she opens her arms to him she will in essence be accepting something "second-rate." Although she cannot accept the second-rate farm women in their "straight tailored dresses . . . with their untidy permanent waved hair,"¹⁸ she can accept a forty-year-old insurance salesman who makes her feel a "shudder of repulsion" just because he satisfies her need to be desirable.¹⁹ Lucy feels she is somewhat above those around her, someone who is sophisticated, cultured; therefore, an affair with one of the men from the district is out of the question. The insurance salesman succeeds in his affair with Lucy because he acts the way she wants him to act. He is interested in her, and he admits it. He does not act like the men who come to see George, and Lucy allows herself to have an affair with him because of this. By wanting Lucy because of her reputation, he is in a way complimenting her, and because of this, Lucy can overcome her hatred for him and herself for accepting

¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 566. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 562.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 563.

something truly "second-rate."

Unlike Lucy Grange, Mary Rogers in "Pleasure" refuses to accept anything "second-rate." Mary cannot compromise her idea of pleasure even though it means ruining her vacation.

Mary's two favorite times of the year are Christmas and summer. With all the gift-making for Christmas over, Mary begins planning her trip to the south of France with her husband Tommy. Every summer since they have been married, except the last four, they have vacationed in France where they honeymooned twenty-five years before. Even though Mary knows the money will be scarce, she dreams of the vacation, making all of her clothes for the trip, and bragging to her friends about the lovely time she and Tommy will have. It is important for Mary to holiday in France; all of her friends will be settling for Brighton, while Mary knows her place is with the social class who chooses to holiday in Europe. After all, Mary cannot imagine "why anyone takes a holiday in Britain when the same money'd take them to the continent."²⁰ For her, Brighton is not her idea of a real holiday.

When they arrive in France, Mary and Tommy's expectations of the small, intimate village are soon dissolved. As they leave the train, they can see that the tiny village

²⁰Doris Lessing, "Pleasure" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 50. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

has changed; it is no longer the personal village of Mary's memory; it is larger than she remembers and is full of tourists. Mary's memory of the town is ruined. Despite the town's changed appearance, the couple is sure that they can regain some of their past by checking into the Plaza Hotel. Jacques, the proprietor who treated them as family each time they came, will surely remember them. But the Plaza is under new management and is now much too expensive for them. The clerk suggests they seek a room at the Belle Vue where most of the English stay. That is completely out of the question for Mary; "for years, staying at the Plaza, they had felt superior to the Belle Vue. Also, had the clerk not said it was full of English people?"²¹ And so after much debate and discouragement, Mary and Tommy resort to staying at a small villa outside of the village. It is not as comfortable or stylish as the Plaza, but it is not the Belle Vue.

The trip continues in much the same disappointing way for Mary as it began. After finding a small place in the sun, Mary and Tommy get extremely sunburned and have to seek shelter indoors for several days. But finally things appear to get better. With their skin becoming more accustomed to the sun, they finally feel comfortable at the beach. Of course,

²¹Lessing, "Pleasure," p. 53.

this is true only if they are "at a good distance from a colony of English which kept itself to itself some hundreds of yards away."²² Unfortunately, Mary is not content long. Tommy, out of boredom, takes up snorkling and spends most of the day in the water. Mary refuses to participate in an activity that causes one to look like "a spaceman in a children's comic," and so she sits, alone, on the beach.²³ Tommy makes friends with Francis Clarke, a young Englishman, on one of the diving adventures, and Mary becomes briefly acquainted with Francis' wife Betty while sunning on the beach. Because Tommy has grown fond of the young couple, they join the Rogers each day at the beach and for meals. Mary merely tolerates the Clarkes because it is "her principle that one did not go to France to consort with the English."²⁴

It is not just the Clarkes' being English that troubles Mary, it is that Betty reminds Mary of herself, the Mary who had honeymooned here so many years before. The girl is so young and vital that Mary feels it isn't fair for her to be getting old; when she sees Tommy with them, she feels that he looks "as young as the young couple."²⁵ Mary can tolerate the Clarkes at first, but their presence continually reminds her of her passing youth. And when Francis ridicules his

²²Ibid., p. 55. ²³Ibid., p. 57. ²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 60.

own wife for things that bring both Betty and Mary pleasure, Mary cannot stand to be around them any longer. At dinner two nights before the Rogers are to leave France, the Clarkes are discussing at dinner how much Betty wants her husband to move up in social position. This is one of the reasons they have chosen to holiday in the south of France, considering all the people they might meet and the importance of knowing French. As Betty points out, "A woman should think of her husband's career. . . . I'm sure he wouldn't have got that raise if it weren't for making a good impression."²⁶ To these comments, Francis remarks about his wife,

"She's cracked. . . . She spends half the year making clothes for three weeks holiday at the sea. Then the other half making Christmas presents out of bits and pieces. That's all she ever does."²⁷

This remark, though said "good-humouredly," strikes Mary deeply.²⁸ Francis has summed up Mary's life in one small, off-hand remark. It is too much for Mary to accept. Too many things, the changing village, the tourists, her passing youth, Francis' remark, all make Mary realize that she can no longer be a part of her special place. For her the vacation has ended.

At the crowded railway station, Mary looks at the other passengers who regret their vacation's end, but Mary is "regretting nothing."²⁹ She is going home where things will

²⁶Ibid., p. 62. ²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid. ²⁹Ibid., p. 63.

be as they should be. She will not have to recognize that things must change. Her own youth will no longer stare her in the face each time she sits down to dinner; she can return to a place where people understand that she needs for things to remain the same.

Mary Rogers and Lucy Grange both find themselves in situations where their needs are not satisfied. Lucy wants to be desirable to all men around her, and Mary wants to experience the pleasurable things of her past. Unfortunately for both women, the societies they are in do not completely satisfy their needs. They each must attempt to find a society which will comfort them. Lucy does this by compromising her standards, and her marriage, by having an affair with a man she finds repulsive. Mary, by removing herself from all activity, ruins her holiday simply because the situation does not satisfy each of her needs. Although Mary sees herself as one who does not accept anything "second-rate," she in fact does do this. When she refuses to return to the south of France, she is refusing something which brings her pleasure; from now on her pleasure will have to come from those experiences she looked down on before her vacation. Like Lucy, Mary has agreed to remain with something "second-rate" instead of changing her situation.

In "Each Other" Fred and Freda find that only they understand their needs and desires and that society does not. They are not like Lucy Grange or Mary Rogers, who wish for

something better than what they have. Fred and Freda take risks just so they can create a situation they desire.

When Freda once again tells her husband Charlie that her brother will probably visit while he is at work, Charlie cannot help but think once again, "There's something unhealthy about her."³⁰ "They were on the edge of disaster," but Charlie could not pin-point the reason.³¹ Anyway, he is late for work and cannot stay to search for the answer. After Charlie leaves, Freda stands by the mirror, noticing how unbecoming she looks in her short nightshirt.

She slipped this off over her head . . . then slipped on a white negligee that had frills all down it and around the neck. . . . She brushed her short gleaming black hair . . . and got back into bed.³²

The door opens, and Freda looks up,

. . . her face bursting into flower as in came a very tall, lank, dark young man. He sat on the bed beside his sister, took her thin hand in his thin hand, kissed it, bit it lovingly, then bent to kiss her on the lips.³³

He undresses and slides "naked into bed beside his sister, murmuring: 'Olive Oyl' . . . and she returned, in as loving a murmur: 'Popeye.'"³⁴ Alone in the small suburban bedroom "the long white bodies remained still, mouth to mouth, eyes

³⁰Doris Lessing, "Each Other" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books: 1980), p. 345. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

³¹Lessing, "Each Other," p. 345. ³²Ibid., p. 347.

³³Ibid. ³⁴Ibid., p. 348.

closed, united by deep soft breaths."³⁵ There they lay, waiting to see how long they could remain in this sexual embrace without climaxing. "In a moment they were pulling each other's hair, biting, sinking between thin bones, and then just before the explosion, they pulled apart at the same moment, and lay separate, trembling," then once again joined their bodies.³⁶

'Now it will be perfect' she said, content, mouth against his throat. The two bodies, quivering with strain lay together . . . they had become one person, abandoned against and in each other, silent and gone.³⁷

When it comes time for Fred to leave, "they separated gently, but the movements both used . . . were more like a fitting together" at a distance.³⁸ As Fred dresses, Freda feels jealous that he is to go back to Alice, but he reassures her that with Alice, all he does is "make her come, she wouldn't understand anything better."³⁹ Then to calm his jealousy about Charlie, Freda swears that Charlie knows nothing of what goes on when Fred visits. Although both Fred and Freda prefer to have only each other as lovers, they know that their marriages to Charlie and Alice allow them to continue their secret romance. When Fred could stay no longer, "they kissed, brother-and-sister kisses, gentle and warm."⁴⁰ And he leaves with both thinking only of when they will be together again.

³⁵ Ibid. ³⁶ Ibid., p. 349. ³⁷ Ibid. ³⁸ Ibid., p. 350.

³⁹ Ibid. ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 353.

For Fred and Freda, no matter the reason, it is important for them to seek through each other some type of love that neither her husband nor his wife can provide. The problem with this need is that their relationship is not accepted by society; therefore, they both must live within the structures set by society, their marriages, in order to continue their incestuous affair. Like Lucy Grange and Mary Rogers, Freda and Fred have agreed to accept what they see as vulgar and below them, their marriages to Charlie and to Alice. And like Lucy, each has compromised the value of marriage. What sets Freda and Fred apart from these other two characters is that their decision to choose something second-rate gives them the opportunity to have what they desire--each other. The other two characters merely accept their second choice because they can see no way of achieving what they truly want. And although, like Lucy and Mary, Fred and Freda have alienated themselves from those around them, they, unlike the two women, have succeeded in creating a situation that allows them to have exactly what they want--each other's love.

Another character who attempts to fulfill his own unique needs is Frederick in "Plants and Girls." Frederick is abnormal and therefore is alienated from society. As he grows older, he finds that trees provide him an experience that society has denied him, a relationship in which he is accepted.

As a young boy, Frederick "spent most of his time wan-

dering by himself through the vleis and kopjes."⁴¹ He enjoys looking at the trees of the veld, "thinking how they drew their strength through the layers of rubble and broken brick, direct from the breathing soil and from invisibly running underground rivers."⁴² People feel uncomfortable around him because "his eyes were enormous, blue, wide, staring, with the brilliance of distance in them."⁴³ This did not bother Frederick, for all he needs is his mother's love, "that was enough."⁴⁴

After Frederick's father dies his mother becomes extremely dependent on Frederick. He takes care of her, but as she ages he finds that he can no longer look at the old woman with "soft, elderly white shoulders."⁴⁵ He can only see her in her "dumpy flowered apron, her brown sinewy arms setting food before him. . . ."⁴⁶ And so after fixing supper for his mother each night, the seventeen-year-old youth walks among the neighborhood "gazing dimly about him at the deep starry sky or at the soft shapes of the trees."⁴⁷ One particular tree catches his attention each time he goes outside, a "big veld tree that stood a short way from the

⁴¹Doris Lessing, "Plants and Girls" in African Stories (Fawcett Popular Library, 1965), p. 613. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

⁴²Lessing, "Plants and Girls," p. 613. ⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid. ⁴⁵Ibid., p, 615. ⁴⁶Ibid. ⁴⁷Ibid.

gate in a space between two street-lamps, so that there was a well of shadow beneath it which attracted him very much."⁴⁸ He enjoys touching the tree, feeling its bark and its finger-like branches. Once, when visiting it,

. . . an extraordinarily violent spasm shook him, so that he found himself locked about that harsh strong trunk, embracing it violently, his arms and thighs knotted about it, sobbing and muttering angry words.⁴⁹

As he returns home, he fears his mother will see in his eyes the awful thing he has done, but as always, she simply smiles lovingly at his return; thereafter, "each night he returned to the tree, caressing and stroking it, murmuring words of love, he would come home simply, smiling . . . waiting for her to smile back, pleased with him."⁵⁰

Soon, one of the young girls from across the street becomes interested in Frederick and begins to visit him and take him out with her. Because of the "oppostion from his mother" Frederick knows that the girl is his girl, "as ordinary young men have girls."⁵¹ Frederick would take the girl "beside the tree outside the gate, embracing her as he had embraced the tree, murmuring strangely over her head among the shadows," and then rush into his room each night to avoid his mother's angry stare.⁵² When his mother becomes ill, Frederick stays home nights instead of seeing the girl from across the way. Once again he is alone with his mother.

⁴⁸Ibid. ⁴⁹Ibid. ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 616. ⁵¹Ibid., p. 617.

⁵²Ibid.

When his mother dies Frederick cannot comprehend her death. Although his lack of understanding about death makes him wary of the cemetery, he finally gains the courage to visit his mother's grave. During that first visit, he sits staring at the grave and the granite headstone, and the "glossy green branches" of the bougainvillea creeper.⁵³ During the following visits, he

. . . would sit by the headstone, fingering the leaves of the plant. Slowly he came to understand that his mother lay underneath where he sat . . . And he fingered the smooth leaves, noting the tiny working veins, thinking: They feed on her.⁵⁴

Again Frederick begins his ritual of looking at the trees in his garden. Though the big tree near his gate has been removed by the city, in its place grows a sapling. It does not cast a great shadow, as did the first, but its supple form intrigues Frederick. Each night he stands at the tree, running his hands up and down the slim trunk. One evening a young girl from the house opposite Frederick's stops to talk with him. At first he thinks she is his girl, but he soon realizes that she is her younger sister, the "youngest of that large pulsing family" across the way.⁵⁵ And as before, Frederick and this girl spend time together; not so

⁵³ Ibid., p. 619. ⁵⁴ Ibid. ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 620.

much because he desires it, but because she demands it. He does as she wants, and each evening "before parting from her he took her into his arms against the sapling that swayed and slipped under her weight and kissed her with a cold persistence that filled her with horror and with desire. . . ." ⁵⁶ She would always leave him each time vowing to never return, but she would always return the next evening.

Frederick learns that she will return no matter what he does, and in the garden

he would fold her against him, not hearing her cries . . . she would hear through the darkness a dark sibilant whispering: 'Your hair, your hair, your teeth, your bones.' His fingers pressed and probed into her flesh . . . so that he could grasp the bones of her arm, the joint of her shoulder. . . . ⁵⁷

Each time she leaves bruised, yet still she returns. One evening, though she had been afraid for her life the last time she had been with him, she makes her way across the street to see him, and

... he reached out and grasped her and carried her inside to the lawn . . . She saw the great crazy eyes immediately above hers. The cages of their ribs ground together; and she heard: 'Your hair, dead hair, bones, bones, bones.' ⁵⁸

The next morning the neighbors find Frederick lying over the girl "whose body was marked by blood and by soil" as he murmurs, "Your hair, your leaves, your branches, your rivers." ⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid. ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 621. ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 622.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Frederick, in his madness, has created his own world that includes only himself and trees because society has alienated him. His choice of trees is not as irrational as it first appears. Trees look similar to humans; they have a central body with appendages, and in the evening shadows one may discern features that appear to be a face. Frederick sees in them the people with whom he has never been allowed to form relationships. Because they have always intrigued him, he turns to the trees for companionship. After his mother's death, Frederick's relationship with the trees becomes more intense. A powerful emotional force has gone from his life, and his energy is now channeled into his relationship with his trees. Unfortunately, the young girl is caught up in this intense relationship between Frederick and the tree. He is not capable of distinguishing the differences between human friends and tree friends, and when his passion is focused on the young girl instead of the tree, the result is murder.

Frederick has little chance of ever becoming a member of normal society. In his own way, Frederick is only attempting, by loving the trees and killing the girl because of that love, to satisfy his own need to be loved by a friend. He cannot cultivate a normal relationship with a person; he must look outside of society for his friends. He finds them in the trees. Like Freda and Fred in "Each Other," Frederick, in his madness, has simply tried, in an unacceptable manner, to provide for himself those relationships not provided him by society.

In each story the character realizes that a particular need is not being satisfied by the society in which he or she lives. Instead of looking within the self to change the situation, these characters attempt to create a society which will fulfill their needs. Lucy Grange and Mary Rogers settle for something less than what they really desire because they do not want to change their needs to fit society. Fred, Freda, and Frederick all create relationships which benefit them. Fred and Freda arrange their lives so that they can continue their incestuous affair. But like Lucy and Mary, they only act; they do not attempt to analyze the reasons to change. Frederick, in the most extreme sense, creates his own society. Mentally, he is not able to look at the self and understand his situation. He is only able to attempt to satisfy those needs present in his personality. Lessing's characters in these four stories alienate themselves from the societies around them, but they do not try to analyze themselves as do the characters discussed in Chapter II.

CHAPTER IV

ALIENATION WITHIN THE FAMILY

A second type of alienation found in Lessing's short stories occurs in the family. Because of a need of a family member or the family as a whole, a character is distanced from the family member, from the entire family, or from the society as a whole. In three stories, "The Trinket Box" (1951), "Little Tembi" (1950), and "England Versus England" (1963), the character's ability to deal with this inflicted alienation varies in each setting. In each story is a character who is alienated because of actions over which he or she has no control.

The alienation in "The Trinket Box" is twofold. At first, we find that Aunt Maud, an elderly woman, has never been graciously accepted by her family. She has no money of her own, and for years she moved "from continent to continent, from family to family, as a kind of unpaid servant."¹ The family always let her visit, but she only possessed fleeting moments in their daily lives.

But now Aunt Maud is dying. "Distant relations who

¹Doris Lessing, "The Trinket Box" in African Stories (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1965), p. 26. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

have done no more than send her Christmas cards once a year come in to see her, sit by her bed for hours at a time, send her flowers."² Each family member sits by her dying body and remembers past experiences with Aunt Maud: How, after she had visited with one of the families, she would always send gifts, each one showing that she had taken time to learn each one's "most secret wants."³ And how she wrote letters every day to each family, discussing little occurrences in her life, the next family she would visit, and other niceties. But, at the time, these things went relatively unnoticed. In each family member's mind as he or she stands looking at the dying Aunt Maud, silent questions and answers come and go:

Do you realize, Aunt Maud, that now thirty years or more after you became our servant, it is the first time that we are really aware you were alive? . . . Or did you know it all the time . . . ? For that is what we want to be sure of: that she did not know it, that she never will.⁴

Finally, when the doctor announces that her death is only moments away, Aunt Maud lies peacefully on her bed, then speaks to those family members still around her. The relatives lean forward "waiting for her to say just that one thing, that perfect word of forgiveness that will leave [them] healed and whole."⁵ But all Aunt Maud says is that her will is made out

²Lessing, "The Trinket Box," p. 26. ³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 29. ⁵Ibid., pp. 30-31.

and all of her possessions are in her black trinket box.

"Everything is in order. I put everything right when people became so kind and I knew I was ill."⁶ With these words, she dies. After her death, the relatives search the black trinket box hoping to find the "diaries, or the bundle of letters which will say what she refuses to say. . . . She cannot die like this, leaving nothing."⁷ But that is what Aunt Maud does; she leaves nothing but a few trinkets collected over time. After realizing that this is all that is left, the family cannot help but ask themselves, "Are we expected to go on, for the rest of our lives . . . feeling this intolerable ache, a dull sorrowful rage?"⁸ And they know in their hearts that the answer is yes; the ache is Aunt Maud's only legacy.

There are two instances of alienation in this story. The first is only briefly described; Maud has been a minor part of this family throughout her life by no choice of her own. The family has never really acknowledged her as a major part of their lives, and they have never known, or cared to know, the effect their actions have had on her as a person. When Maud becomes ill, the roles in the family reverse. Now it is the family members who feel they need to accept her into their lives so that she will not die knowing they did not really care. But the years of alienation may not be erased from

⁶Ibid. p. 31. ⁷Ibid. ⁸Ibid., p. 32.

Maud's mind in a few brief displays of emotion over a dying woman. For once she has their full attention. Her last words tell them that all of her possessions are in her black trinket box. And because she says she has "put everything right when people became kind to me and I knew I was ill,"⁹ Maud gives the reader the impression that she perhaps knows that each member is hoping to find forgiveness in this box, but there is no such trinket there. By leaving only seemingly meaningless trinkets, and not the forgiveness that they desire, she has finally made a place in their lives. By alienating them from her last moments, she has left them with the ever-present guilt for alienating her throughout her life. Although the family feels that Maud has died "leaving nothing,"¹⁰ they have yet to realize that Maud has left them everything they deserve: "this intolerable ache, a dull sorrowful rage."¹¹

Tembi in "Little Tembi" is also an alienated character because his life has been altered by the actions of an extended family. By no choice of his own, Tembi, a black African, becomes a surrogate child for a white family during part of his childhood.

Jane and Willie McCluster are British farmers in colonial Africa who are respected by those in their community as well as by their African laborers. As a nurse, Jane pro-

⁹Ibid., p. 31. ¹⁰Ibid. ¹¹Ibid., p. 32.

vides medical care for the African laborers on the McCluster farm. This is Jane's way of staying active until she has a family. Jane discovers that she will have to wait two years longer than planned before having children because of an operation she must have. Having children is very important to Jane and to ease the stress of waiting for her first child, Jane puts all of her energy into her medical care for the Africans.

Little Tembi was brought to Jane soon after her operation. He had the "hot weather sickness" and was close to death.¹² Jane could not let this tiny baby die: "It seemed to her that if she could pull little Tembi through, the life of her child she herself wanted so badly would be granted her."¹³ Jane stayed with Tembi day and night willing him to live. Finally, Tembi grew stronger and was out of danger. Jane felt "she had thumbed her nose at death . . . and now she would be strong to make life, fine strong children of her own. . . ."¹⁴ Every day for a month after his recovery, Tembi is brought to Jane, "partly to make sure he would not relapse, partly because Jane had grown to love him."¹⁵ Even after Tembi is better, Jane sends for him, holds him proudly, and

¹²Doris Lessing, "Little Tembi" in African Stories (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1965), p. 136. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

¹³Lessing, "Little Tembi," p. 137. ¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

calls him, "Here's my little Tembi," asking, "Isn't he a sweet little piccanin?"¹⁶ As he grew, Tembi would go easily from his mother to Jane who would always greet him with open arms and presents of fruits and sweets. But then Jane has her first child. Tembi, now two years old, is frightened of the small white baby, and to calm him, Jane sends "the houseboy to fetch some fruit as a present. She did not make the gift herself, as she was holding her child."¹⁷ Tembi does not come around after the baby is born, and Jane really never notices his absence. She is very busy with her baby, and "she could not really be blamed for losing touch with little Tembi."¹⁸

At six years of age, Tembi decides he wants to work as the older children do. At first Willie is shocked that such a young child wants to work, but he is even more shocked that Tembi expects five shillings per month, the wage for boys twice his age. But Willie, "feeling Jane's hand on his arm," and remembering the extended family that had once included Tembi, agrees to let Tembi work for four and sixpence.¹⁹ Tembi does not enter Willie or Jane's mind after that because Jane now has three children to care for, and she "soon forgot the little black boy."²⁰ When Tembi reached seven, he

¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 138. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Ibid., p. 140.

asked Willie for a raise. Willie agrees even though he feels Jane has spoiled Tembi into thinking that he is something special, but when Tembi demands another raise a month later, without having proved himself a good worker, Willie refuses. At this, Tembi goes to Jane saying, "Tell the baas to give me more money . . . Tell him, missus. Tell him, my missus."²¹ Jane explains that she has nothing to do with the farm and sends Tembi away with a slice of cake that seems to cure everything.

After that incident, Tembi is Jane's constant companion. He comes to see her at the clinic if he has a tiny cut; he comes to watch her work in the garden. Finally he pleads with her to let him work for her, but Jane sends him on his way saying his place is with the other laborers. Disappointed, Tembi leaves, but often Jane sees him sulking near the house. Jane now feels that she has "'spoiled' Tembi, that he had 'got above himself.'"²²

Some time after Jane has sent Tembi away from the house, small things begin to disappear from around her house: Jane's diamond engagement ring, a pearl brooch, a feeding spoon, a pair of scissors, and other small things. One day Tembi's father arrives at the McCluster's home with a small bundle of things Tembi has stolen--they were all from the

²¹Ibid., p. 143. ²²Ibid., p. 145.

McCluster's home. Seeing this, "Jane was angry; but far more distressed--there was something ugly and persistent in this planned, deliberate thieving that she could not bear to associate with little Tembi, whom she had saved from death."²³

Soon after the incident, Tembi demands to be made nurse for Jane's children, only to be disappointed again by Jane's refusal. Tembi voices his request every day until Jane compromises and agrees to let him work in the garden. Whenever Jane visits the garden, she makes "a point of being friendly to Tembi."²⁴ She brings him books so that he can learn to read, and she teaches him about nutrition so he can teach others in the compound. For the first time since Jane's children were born Tembi seems to be back as a part of Jane's extended family. "This went on for about two years . . . and Tembi regarded himself as an apostle of the white man's way of life," explaining to those in the compound how to eat and take care of themselves.²⁵ But when Jane decides to have Tembi's little brother look after her children, Tembi's enthusiasm diminishes. He takes little interest in anything any more including Jane. Commenting on this change in Tembi's temperament, Jane says "half indignantly, half amused to Willie: 'Tembi behaves as if he had some sort of

²³Ibid., p. 146.

²⁴Ibid., p. 147.

²⁵Ibid., p. 148.

claim on us.'"²⁶

The next time Tembi enters into the McCluster's life is when Tembi decides he should have a bicycle. Willie does not allow it, and the next day the eldest child's bicycle disappears. Tembi admits to the theft but gives no reason for his action. Willie tells Tembi that he is to leave the farm, and Tembi runs to Jane pleading, "Missus, my missus, don't let the baas send me away."²⁷ Jane does not try to change Willie's mind, and, "Tembi gazed at her while his face hollowed into incredulous misery: he had not believed she would not take his part."²⁸ Tembi left to work on a neighboring farm, and soon the McClusters "forgot Tembi."²⁹

The McClusters hear little about Tembi after that until four years later when the robberies begin again. At neighboring farms, guns and valuables are missing; at the McCluster's, only small family items, like clothes and toys, are taken. The white families suspect every black person in the community, but the thief is not found. One evening Jane, after leaving her sewing basket for a moment, finds that the basket is missing. Someone has been watching her and has quietly slipped in during that brief moment to take her

²⁶Ibid. ²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid., p. 150. ²⁹Ibid.

sewing basket. While Jane is thinking of the risk taken for such a trivial item, "an old uneasiness filled her; and . . . the name 'Tembi' rose into her mind."³⁰ While sitting and waiting for Willie to return from the city, Jane remains on edge, even though she knows it is Tembi who watches her from the bush. Upon Willie's return, Jane recounts the day's events, and he agrees that the thief probably is Tembi. They decide to wait for him to try and come into the house before they call the police. As expected, Tembi comes in that evening, making no attempt to conceal himself; he simply stands trembling as Willie and Jane approach him, "his eyes . . . fixed on Jane."³¹

Willie, confident that Tembi will not harm Jane or attempt to leave, calls the police. As Jane stands and looks at this little boy whom she had saved from death, she cannot see him as an unscrupulous criminal. She tells him to run away before the police come, and then leaves him alone in the room. When the police arrive, Willie and Jane find Tembi "exactly where she left him, fists in his eyes, like a small child."³² Tembi silently leaves with the police as Jane and Willie stand quietly by. "'There's something horrible about it all,' she said restlessly . . . 'What did he want, Willie? What is it he was wanting all this time?'"³³

³⁰Ibid., p. 152. ³¹Ibid., p. 155. ³²Ibid., p. 156.

³³Ibid., p. 157.

Jane cannot see past her own needs and desires; therefore, she can never see the needs she has created in Tembi. Her desire for a child has caused her to extend her family to include Tembi when he is an infant, but as he grows and she has her own children, she no longer needs him to fill a lonely space in her heart. Tembi is set apart from the other children in his society because he is part of a white family, an experience few other black African children have. During the emotional bonding with Jane in his infancy, Tembi does not learn, as his playmates do, that there is a difference between blacks and whites in Africa. For him, those things that are given to a white child should also be given him. When Jane's need for Tembi ceases with the birth of her first child, Tembi is placed back into the role of the lowly black child on a white man's farm. Unfortunately, Tembi cannot identify the circumstances that allow him Jane's love at first and those that keep him separate from her as he grows up. Tembi develops a different sense of identity because of Jane's influence in his life. For this reason, he does not truly fit with the other black children on the farm, but he cannot leave them and join the white children because he is not white. Tembi is not part of any society. He tries to remedy his situation by re-creating the society he knew as a baby; he takes things from Jane's home in an attempt to be part of her life once again. But because Jane no longer needs Tembi, she does not see that he wants to be a major part of her life; she

does not even realize that he now feels excluded from her life. Forever Tembi will mentally remain in a non-existent society--one that includes a harmonious relationship among black and white Africans.

The main character in "England Versus England" is in a situation similar to Tembi's in "Little Tembi." Charlie Thornton finds that because he is the child chosen to go to a university, he no longer belongs to the society in which he grew up; but because he is not from an upperclass family, he does not fit in with the other students at Oxford. Charlie simply plays the part of a member of whichever society he is in at the time without really being a true member of either society.

Charlie's brief visit with his family is about to end, and he is "off to t'palaces of learning" once again.³⁴ Each time he leaves for school, his family and friends say things like "So you're back to the dreaming spires" or make some such statement about college.³⁵ "There was no hostility in it, or even envy, but it shut Charlie out of his family, away from his people."³⁶ Charlie, the son of a miner, has spent his life in a mining town, but through a scholarship has an opportunity to go to Oxford. Charlie has never liked

³⁴Doris Lessing, "England Versus England" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 281. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

³⁵Lessing, "England Versus England," p. 281. ³⁶Ibid.

the mining village; everything in it is grey: "grey stucco houses on either side of grey tarmac . . . grey ugly lamp-posts and greyish hedges. . . ." ³⁷ Charlie has the chance to have something better than all this--through a university education. But whenever Charlie "visited his home, he was careful that none of his bitter criticisms reached words, for above all he could not bear to hurt his father" or his family. ³⁸ Each family member willingly makes sacrifices so that Charlie can go to Oxford, and in their hearts, they are proud of him.

Charlie knows that his parents are proud, but every time he comes home he is "made to feel . . . that these people, his people, were serious; while he and the people with whom he would now spend his life were not serious." ³⁹ He does not really want to believe his family sees his life in this way, but he "felt it in everything they said and did . . . At his age, his father had been working in the pit for eight years," instead of living off of his parents in order to get an education. ⁴⁰ Charlie cannot fully remove himself from his family in order to join his college mates who are from a different social class. Whether he is at school or at home, the "clash of cultures" is overpowering. ⁴¹ The school psychologist says that Charlie is feeling what most men from his background

³⁷ Ibid., p. 283. ³⁸ Ibid., p. 284. ³⁹ Ibid., p. 286.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 286. ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 290.

feel when they come to college. "They are under the continuous strain of adapting themselves to middleclass mores that are foreign to them. They are victims of . . . divided loyalties."⁴² Charlie feels it is more than just "divided loyalties" that causes him so much frustration. He is not just uncomfortable at Oxford, he feels that he cannot go home because he believes he is a "perpetual reminder" that his family is "nothing but ignorant non-cultured clods."⁴³ Not only does Charlie feel that he had betrayed his social class by going to Oxford, he also feels he has betrayed his family by becoming educated while he is there.

Perplexing questions stay in Charlie's mind. Should he desert his family and become part of educated society, or should he forfeit his future to become comfortable with his family and his people? There are no right answers. During the train ride back to Oxford, he tries playing the part of the educated man. Imitating the elderly couple who is seated near him, he chats with them about insignificant things. The more he talks, the less sense he makes. Finally the girl sitting next to him demands that he stop. To her, he has been making fun of the couple. Realizing how foolish and cruel he must have sounded, when all he is trying to do is sort out his own life, Charlie leaves the compartment to

⁴²Ibid. ⁴³Ibid., p. 291.

regain his composure. "He stood in the corridor . . . his eyes were shut, his tears running," when the elderly woman came out to comfort him.⁴⁴ As if she knows exactly what he needs to hear, she says, "'You've got to take the rough with the smooth, and there's no other way of looking at it . . . After a while Charlie said: 'Yes, I suppose you're right.'"⁴⁵ Her advice reveals the only way to cope with his predicament, but Charlie has been too caught up in his family's needs and feelings to see this before. He has allowed his family and friends' actions to alienate him from everyone around him. He simply has to learn to "take the rough with the smooth" because those times that are rough for him, particularly his visits with his family, cannot be changed.

Charlie has a chance of finding his place in society if he can distance himself from the negative influences of his family. At the close of the story, he has not completely resolved his situation; he is in the same place as Tembi in "Little Tembi," somewhere between the two societies that he wants to combine. Charlie's non-committal response to the woman's advice suggests that there is a possibility that his two societies can join harmoniously.

Unlike the character who has alienated self from society, the character who is alienated from the family does

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 299. ⁴⁵Ibid.

not choose to be an outsider. The removal from a society in which he or she wishes to be is imposed by some action of the family or one of its members. In "The Trinket Box" Maud turns the tables and alienates her family, getting revenge for their actions against her. Jane's lack of understanding about the consequences of her actions leaves Tembi in "Little Tembi" searching for a society that cannot exist, and in "England Versus England," the family's desire to help their son achieve a higher status in life causes him to feel he has no place in any society. The family, the most influential of all human relationships, develops one's personality. Lessing, in these three stories, has illustrated several types of adverse results that can occur when one is set apart from the family.

CHAPTER V

ALIENATION AND PERCEPTION IN UNFAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS

Johnson points out that alienation from society can be considered either positive or negative, depending on the circumstances. If the alienated person has chosen to separate himself or herself from society, the result is usually positive in some way; if that person has no choice in his or her separation from society, the feelings that result are usually negative. In Chapter IV of this thesis, the negative results of unwilling alienation are illustrated through characters alienated by the actions of the family; in these instances the characters have little or no control over the situation. The negative effects of alienation can also be seen on the character whose alienation stems from being in new surroundings. Although this situation does not directly cause the character to feel alienated, the character's interpretation of a new setting can cause separation from society. Two of Lessing's short stories, "The Old Chief Mshlanga" (1951) and "The Eye of God in Paradise" (1957) contain a character or characters who find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Because of their perception of themselves in this new setting or because of the nature of the society itself, the characters realize that they are not

comfortable in these surroundings.

The young girl in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" does not at first realize that in order to fit in with a society, one must accept the surroundings as one's own for what they are, and nothing more. The young British girl in Africa, roaming her father's vast farm,

. . . could not see a msasa tree, or the thorn, for what they were. Her books held tales of alien fairies, her rivers ran slow and peaceful, and she knew the shape of the leaves of an ash or an oak . . . when the words 'the veld' meant strangeness. . . .¹

Everything on the farm was remote and foreign to her, especially the black laborers. She took them for granted; they were only to serve her: "She was called 'Nkosikaas'--Cheiftainess, even by the black children her own age."²

When Nkosikaas is fourteen, she experiences something that distances her from her surroundings even more than she has been previously. As she walks through the mealie fields on one of her daily adventures, three Africans appear some hundred yards in front of her. She waits "for them to move aside, off the path," thinking, "It was 'cheek' for a native not to stand off the path the moment he caught sight of you."³ Leading the group, "walked an old man, stooping his weight on

¹Doris Lessing, "The Old Chief Mshlanga" in African Stories (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1965), p. 49. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

²Lessing, "The Old Chief Mshlanga," p. 49.

³Ibid., p. 51.

to [sic] a stick, his hair grizzled white, a dark red blanket hung over his shoulders like a cloak."⁴ This group was different, with an "air of dignity, of quietly following their own purpose. It was the dignity that checked the girl's tongue."⁵

As the group neared, "the old man stopped, drawing his blanket close. 'Morning Nkosikaas,' he said. . . ."⁶ One of the young men in the group then says to the young girl, "My chief travels to see his brother beyond the river."⁷ The fact that the old man is a chief makes the girl understand; it is "pride that made the old man stand before me like an equal--more than an equal, for he showed courtesy, and I showed none."⁸ The old chief recognizes the girl as the daughter of Baas Jordan, a man he dealt with many years before. The chief is introduced as Chief Mshlanga, and the group goes on its way.

Soon after the incident, Nkosikaas reads from an "old explorer's" book,

Our destination was Chief Mshlanga's country, to the north of the river; and it was our desire to ask his permission to prospect for gold in his territory.⁹

For Nkosikaas, "the phrase 'ask his permission' was so extraordinary to a white child, brought up to consider all natives as things to use, that it revived those questions, which could

⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid. ⁷Ibid. ⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 52.

not be suppressed: they fermented slowly in her mind."¹⁰
 Through more research on her district, hoping to find the answers to her questions, and to those about her identity, she finds that less than fifty years earlier the Chief had been well-known. Nkosikaas meets the Chief several times on that path where they first exchanged greetings, and "being greeted by him, the exchange of courtesies, seemed to answer the questions that troubled her."¹¹

Nkosikaas' attitude changes. She no longer sees the natives as only slaves; she now feels that Africa belongs to both the natives and to her. After all, she thought,

"This is my heritage, too: I was bred here; it is my country as well as the black man's country . . . It seemed it was only necessary to let free that respect I felt when I was talking with old Chief Mshlanga, to let both black and white people meet gently, with tolerance for each other's differences: it seemed quite easy."¹²

After this revelation, Nkosikaas learns that her family's cook is the old chief's son, Mshlanga's successor. When the servant-boy leaves on his day off, Nkosikaas feels she must follow him. She walks nervously past her farm and familiar territory out into the vastness of the Africa around her, and looking for various landmarks, she finds that things change appearances in the shadows. As she moves through the frightening land, she realizes,

¹⁰Ibid. ¹¹Ibid., p. 53. ¹²Ibid.

a new sensation was added to the fear: loneliness.
Now such a terror invaded me that I could hardly
walk . . .¹³

But with the next step Mshlanga's village appears before her. Once at the compound, she really does not know what to do. She asks to see Chief Mshlanga, but the natives do not understand her. Finally, she walks to the center of the compound where a group of men are sitting on the ground. When Chief Mshlanga sees her "not a muscle of his face moved . . . he was not pleased."¹⁴ Thoughts race through young Nkosikaas' mind as she stands before the Chief:

I should not have come here. What had I expected? I could not join them socially: the thing was unheard of. Bad enough that I, a white girl, should be walking the veld alone as a man might: and in this part of the bush where only government officials had the right to move.¹⁵

But amid these thoughts, she says nothing; she only stands there "smiling foolishly."¹⁶ At last the Chief speaks: "The small white Nkosikaas is far from home."¹⁷ All Nkosikaas can say is "Yes . . . it is far," while she is thinking, "I have come to pay you a friendly visit, Chief Mshlanga."¹⁸ But the thought does not form into words. As much as she wants to feel the need "to get to know these men and women as people, to be accepted by them as a friend," she knows she has only "set out in a spirit of curiosity."¹⁹ Thinking of little else

¹³Ibid., p. 56. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 57. ¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid. ¹⁸Ibid. ¹⁹Ibid.

to say aloud, Nkosikaas leaves.

As she walks back over the veld, this land that once belonged to Mshlanga and his tribe, she feels an uneasiness come over her. The veld seems to say to her, "You walk here as a destroyer."²⁰ And the land is right; she has learned "that if one cannot call a country to heel like a dog, neither can one dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling, saying: I could not help it, I am also a victim."²¹

The questions that have been suppressed in her mind about her own identity have finally been answered. As a white, British child living in colonial Africa, Nkosikaas' identity has been confused. At first, Africa seems alien to her; she does not see it for what it really is; therefore, she cannot fully identify herself with it. Then after her first meeting with Chief Mshlanga, her perception of her surroundings changes. Now Nkosikaas feels that all of Africa, its past and its present, are one with her. Yet she cannot ignore the feeling of separateness that she had as she stood in Mshlanga's compound. There, Nkosikaas does not see Africa for what it is: a country that has been stripped of its heritage by her race. Only after she leaves the compound does she begin to see Africa's complexity and begin to develop her own identity within these surroundings. She knows now that she cannot

²⁰Ibid., p. 58. ²¹Ibid.

"dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling" ²²
 Through her perception of those things around her, Nkosikaas tries to create her identity. Twice her perception has been distorted, but now she realizes that she must have a realistic view of this society, both its past and its present, in order to be a part of the society.

Unfortunately, Mary Parrish and Hamish Anderson in "The Eye of God in Paradise" do not fully realize that their perception of their surroundings has alienated them from this unfamiliar society. Mary and Hamish are characters who choose to holiday in O_____ in the Bavarian Alps, a German community walled on one side by a high section of mountains, over which lies Austria. It is a typical tourist village with "charming little wooden houses weighted with snow . . . older inhabitants in their long dark woolen skirts and heavy clogs. . . ." ²³
 Although this is what the couple wants, "there was no denying that something weighed on them; they were uneasy." ²⁴ The year is 1951, but almost everyone in the village still wears "the uniform of the war which was six years past, and . . . the language most often overheard was American." ²⁵ The horror

²² Ibid.

²³ Doris Lessing, "The Eye of God in Paradise" in Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 101. All quoted passages from this story are from this edition.

²⁴ Lessing, "The Eye of God in Paradise," p. 101.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

of war fills Mary and Hamish, and concerning the villagers, the couple asks, "Had six years . . . been enough to still in the hearts of these Germans . . . all the bitterness of defeat?"²⁶ For Mary and Hamish,

. . . the knowledge of secret angers, or at the very best an ironical patience, that must be burning in the breasts of their hosts, the people of O____, deepened an uneasiness which was almost . . . a guilt which should surely have no place in the emotions of a well-deserved vacation.²⁷

It seems that this "guilt" occurs soon after they arrive, that

. . . from the moment they had seen the signs in German; had heard the language spoken all around them; had passed through towns whose names were associated with the savage hate and terror of headlines a decade old--from that moment had begun in both the complicated uneasiness of which they were both ashamed.²⁸

Already their view of their vacation in O____ is tainted by a memory of the war. It overpowers everything with which they come in contact, and they agree to leave O____ the next morning.

At dinner that evening, the couple attempts to enjoy their only evening in O____, but still the two "British tourists were conscious of a secret, half-ashamed unease."²⁹ As they glance at the Germans who are enjoying their dinners, Mary and Hamish think only of the war six years ago and of

²⁶Ibid. ²⁷Ibid., p. 104. ²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 107.

his wife and her fiancé who were taken from them in the war. Looking at one German family, Mary finds herself "seeing them as executioners."³⁰ For Mary and Hamish, O_____ is not a resort, it is a reminder of a very painful time in their lives.

Disrupting their thoughts about the Germans, Doctor Schröder joins Mary and Hamish at their table. At first they do not understand why they are staring at this stranger, but they soon realize "that the surface of his face was a skin-graft . . . an extraordinarily skilful reconstruction of a face which was nothing but a mask."³¹ His grotesque appearance makes them uncomfortable, and their discomfort is increased by "the impolite insistence of his manner."³² Because their impression of Doctor Schröder is created in pity, they are unable to refuse an offer to be Doctor's Schröder's guests for the evening.

The evening is disastrous for Mary and Hamish who find themselves being humiliated, to the pleasure of Doctor Schröder, in a German bar when a singer performs a ballad about occupied Germany which seems to be directed at the British couple. And being accompanied by Doctor Schröder, "a cripple, scarred mentally and physically," is too much for

³⁰Ibid., p. 112. ³¹Ibid., p. 113. ³²Ibid.

the British couple.³³ In the refuge of their hotel room, they agree to find lodging outside of the village. They have to escape the hostility, the madness, that they continue to find in this village.

The next morning Mary and Hamish leave for Frau Lange's house in the mountains near O____. Although she is a friend of Doctor Schröder's, the landlady of the hotel has assured Mary and Hamish that they will be quite comfortable at Frau Lange's. The trip up the mountain is the first truly pleasant experience of the couple's holiday. During the two hour bus trip as two native girls sing folk songs, Mary and Hamish think,

This was the real Germany--rather oldfashioned, a bit sentimental, warm, simple, kindly. Dr. Schröder and what he stood for is an unlucky and not very important phenomenon.³⁴

Frau Lange's home is as pleasant for Hamish and Mary as the bus trip, and they enjoy three pleasant days there before being interrupted. Doctor Schröder visits the couple at Frau Lange's on his way to his hometown. His own vacation's end reminds the couple that they too will be leaving soon. Although they have spent a good deal of their vacation here, they feel perhaps they should

. . . go down to one of the cities below . . . and make an effort to meet some ordinary people . . . not the rich industrialists who frequented the valley, nor people like . . . Frau Lange . . . nor like Doctor Schröder.³⁵

³³Ibid, p. 123.

³⁴Ibid., p. 129.

³⁵Ibid., p. 135.

They decide to visit Z_____, and upon arrival they pledge to "contact ordinary people and widen their view of present day Germany."³⁶ Their walks through the town present many opportunities to meet "ordinary people," but they never find that "pleasant-faced person" who is a "representative" of his country and can "divulge and unfold" all those things the travelers want to hear.³⁷

Realizing that they will not find this "ordinary person," and thinking how pleasant it would have been if Doctor Schröder had not been such "an utterly disgusting person," Mary and Hamish decide to learn about this foreign country through their own profession--medicine.³⁸ Hamish recalls a certain Doctor Kroll who is "attached to a hospital just outside the city of Z_____" and suggests that Mary and he make a professional visit. When they make the arrangements with Doctor Kroll, it is

. . . with a definite feeling that they were confessing a defeat. Now they were going to be professional people, nothing more. The 'ordinary people' had totally eluded them. Conversations with three workmen . . . two housewives . . . a businessman . . . two waiters and two maids . . . had left them dissatisfied. . . .

No³⁹ contact with that real Germany . . . had failed them.

Mary and Hamish want to learn about Germany, but they do not want the information to come from the repulsive Doctor Schröder, or from Frau Lange who is interested only in the affairs of the

³⁶ Ibid. ³⁷ Ibid. ³⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 136-137.

British. They want

Something which was a combination of the rather weary irony of the refugees both had known, the bitter affirmation of the songs of Bertolt Brecht . . . the crashing chords of Beethoven's Fifth. These qualities were fused in their minds into the image of a tired, sceptical, sardonic, but tough personage, a sort of civilized philosopher . . . ⁴⁰

Realizing this person cannot realistically exist, Mary and Hamish "simply accept the fact that they have failed," and prepare to visit Doctor Kroll.

Once again, the couple is confronted by Doctor Schröder; he has travelled to Z_____ to be their host during their stay. Mary and Hamish "once again faced with the scarred face and bitter eyes of Doctor Schröder . . . feel a mixture of loathing and compassion" towards him and "limply" make excuses to be away from him.⁴¹ At the disclosure of their upcoming visit with Doctor Kroll, Doctor Schröder "showed a sudden violent animation . . . " becoming "bitter, brooding, and respectful . . ." to the British couple.⁴² At last the doctor is silent; he is impressed that the couple knows Doctor Kroll, even if the Doctor is "for six months in every year a voluntary patient in his own hospital."⁴³ Mary and Hamish are slightly shocked at this information, but they refuse to allow Doctor Schröder to see their amazement. That evening, Mary and Hamish, from their discussion with Doctor Schröder,

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 137. ⁴¹Ibid., p. 138. ⁴²Ibid., p. 139.

⁴³Ibid.

. . . formed an image of Doctor Kroll as a very old, Lear-like man, proud and bitter in the dignified acceptance of his affliction . . . they were sympathetically looking forward to meeting this courageous old man.⁴⁴

The next morning Mary and Hamish arrive at the bus station to await their trip to Doctor Kroll's hospital. The station is in a very poor area of Z____, and remains of the war are still present with the rebuilding of the town progressing slowly. The two people stand among the bombed buildings remembering:

It was the bombs of their country which had created this havoc; thought of the havoc created in their country by the bombs of the people they now stood shoulder to shoulder with, and sank back slowly into a mood of listless depression.⁴⁵

Once again, that unease from O_____ reappears.

Finally the bus arrives, and they leave, traveling "forward in a world without colour."⁴⁶ After a while, the hospital becomes visible:

It consisted of a dozen or more dark, straight buildings set at regular angles to each other . . . at a distance, the resemblance to the mechanical order of a concentration camp was very great; but as the bus drew nearer the buildings grew and spread into their real size and surrounded themselves with a regular pattern of lawns and shrubs.⁴⁷

Once inside, each notice that "great care had been given to banishing bleakness from within, the walls were covered by bright pictures. . . ."⁴⁸ Mary and Hamish meet Doctor Kroll,

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 140. ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 141. ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁷Ibid. ⁴⁸Ibid.

an "extremely distinguished" man, obviously an aristocrat, and learn of his love for England which flatters them, "something very different from that appalling Doctor Schröder."⁴⁹

Amid the pleasant small talk, Doctor Kroll's comments about that "mongrel-upstart" Hitler revive in Mary and Hamish "some of the same sensations they felt when listening to Doctor Schröder . . . unease definitely set in."⁵⁰ Mary and Hamish remind Doctor Kroll their purpose is to visit the hospital's facilities, and so their tour begins. As they move into the inner office, Mary is

drawn to a picture on the wall above the desk. At a distance of six or eight feet was a gay fresh picture of a cornfield painted from root-vision . . . But as one walked toward the picture, it became a confusion of bright paint. It was finger-painted."⁵¹

To Mary's interest, Doctor Kroll comments on the picture, letting them understand that he, in fact, is the artist. Soon Mary and Hamish are being presented picture upon picture as Doctor Kroll begins to unveil his works in every part of the room. His pictures are of two types:

There were those, like the cornfield, done in bright clear colors, very fresh and lyrical. Then there were those which, close up, showed grim rutted surfaces of dirty black, grey, white, a sullen green and--recurring again and again--a characteristic sullen shade of red . . . like old blood.⁵²

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 144. ⁵⁰Ibid. ⁵¹Ibid., p. 145.

⁵²Ibid., p. 146.

The pictures depict scenes of nature in its most beautiful form, as well as scenes of the horrors of war. But the pictures can only be understood if the couple views them from a distance of about six feet, so that "the picture they had been examining five moments before and which they had now moved away from, lost its meaning and disintegrated into a surface of jumbled and crusted color."⁵³ They are drawn to the pictures; the emotion coming from these canvases is overwhelming, and they cannot help

. . . picturing the artist as a monster, a maniac, or a kind of gifted insect. Yet, turning to look at Doctor Kroll, there he stood, a handsome man who was the very essence of everything that was conservative, correct, and urbane.⁵⁴

Both Mary and Hamish acknowledge silently that this is an "exact repetition of their encounter with Doctor Schröder with his scarred face that demanded compassion" in the same way that these pictures demand sympathy.⁵⁵ Their comments to Doctor Kroll about his talent are polite and guarded, but Doctor Kroll understands that they wish to see no more and are interested in seeing his hospital.

The first wards they visit are much like those in any other public hospital. But in the last ward, the children's ward, the couple sees a "five-year-old child . . . upright against the bars of a cot. His arms . . . confined by a

⁵³Ibid., p. 147. ⁵⁴Ibid. ⁵⁵Ibid.

straightjacket and . . . he was tied upright against the bars with a cord."⁵⁶ The child is like an animal, his eyes glaring while he stands grinding his teeth at the visitors. The couple follows Doctor Kroll, speechless, as he shows them children lying under blankets, their bodies misshapen, missing arms and legs. He remarks that at one time these children would have died of pneumonia, but now modern drugs keeps them alive. Doctor Kroll then admits that "there are many people in this hospital who would be no worse for a quick and painless death."⁵⁷

Alone after visiting the wards, Mary and Hamish cannot believe that Doctor Kroll has made such a statement. Surely this conservative, pleasant man, ignoring his affliction, could not have agreed with the grotesque ideas of social hygiene in the Hitler regime. Mary tells Hamish,

"We don't know after all. We shouldn't condemn anyone without knowing. For all we know he might have saved the lives of hundreds of people."⁵⁸

Even when they ask of Doctor Kroll's involvement in the war, Mary and Hamish seem to notice only briefly that Doctor Kroll answers that the "Nazi regime had sensible ideas . . . " on "questions of social hygiene "⁵⁹ Without acknowledging Doctor Kroll's remark, Mary and Hamish agree that their tour is over and that it is time to leave.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 151. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 153. ⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 154.

Doctor Kroll detains them for one small favor: he wants to give the couple a memento of their visit. At the inner office he takes out one of his pictures and sets it on the desk for his visitors. Although already prepared to admire the painting beforehand simply to please Doctor Kroll, Mary and Hamish find this picture beautiful:

It was . . . done in clear blues and greens, the picture of a forest--an imaginary forest with clear streams running through it . . . full of plants and trees created in Doctor Kroll's mind. It was beautiful, full of joy and tranquility and light. But in the centre of the sky glared a large black eye . . . remote from the rest of the picture.⁶⁰

Mary understands that it is a picture of paradise, and learns from Doctor Kroll that it is titled "The Eye of God in Paradise." Although Mary says that she loves the painting, she cannot see herself transporting it back to England as a remembrance of their trip. And even if she could manage to take it back with her, she did not know if she could bear to look at that hideous eye that stared at her from paradise. Almost as if Doctor Kroll understands her plight, he hands her a small black and white photograph of the painting, in which nothing remains "but a reproduction of crude crusts of paint . . . from which emerges the hint of a branch, the suggestion of a flower. Nothing remained except the glaring eye, the eye of a wrathful and punishing God."⁶¹

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 155. ⁶¹Ibid.

The couple leaves with Mary knowing that "the moment they . . . leave this place will be the happiest of her life."⁶² Back at the bus station in Z_____ where they are to catch the cross-town bus, Mary takes out the photograph: "The black eye glared up at them."⁶³ Hamish asks her to tear it up, but for some reason, she feels it would not be "fair," and returns it to her purse.⁶⁴ Among the people, Mary and Hamish stand, waiting "eternally huddled up, silent . . . listening to the silence, under which seemed to throb from the depths of the earth the memory of the sound of marching feet, of heavy, black-booted, marching feet."⁶⁵

From the moment Mary Parrish and Hamish Anderson arrive in Germany, an uneasiness fills them, and they feel separated from those around them. The language is different; the memories are frightening, and they cannot seem to find a place where they truly fit in. First, it is simply the reminders of the second World War that leaves them uneasy, then Doctor Schröder with his persistence and physical handicap, and finally, their meeting with Doctor Kroll. Their perception of the German society has alienated them from everything and everyone around them. For Mary and Hamish this "paradise" where they are vacationing has been marred by war. And because they perceive the country and its members as the cause

⁶²Ibid. ⁶³Ibid., p. 156. ⁶⁴Ibid. ⁶⁵Ibid.

of the last war--Mary sees the Germans as "executioners" at one point--the couple cannot see any other aspect of the country. In their minds, Germany has a black, glaring eye staring from it, the war, and Mary and Hamish are not able to see anything but that eye. Through Doctor Kroll's painting, "The Eye of God in Paradise," Mary almost comes to understand why she and Hamish have been so uneasy in this country: their inability to come to terms with their ideas about the country has alienated them from this society.

Like Nkosikaas in "The Old Chief 'Mshlanga," Mary Parrish and Hamish Anderson have separated themselves from an unfamiliar society because of their perception of that society. Nkosikaas takes time to realize that only a rational view of the surroundings can allow one to determine one's place in society. For Hamish and Mary this realization is only partial. Mary makes it to an extent when she looks at the photograph. What the couple does not realize is that it is their perception of this society that has made them outsiders, not the fact that this country started World War II. The characters in these two stories find that it is not simply being in an unfamiliar setting that places one outside the society; it is how one perceives that society which determines one's acceptance of that society.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHANGES IN DORIS LESSING'S ALIENATED CHARACTER

After examining thirteen short stories by Doris Lessing which contain alienated main characters, the first story published in 1951 and the latest in 1963, one finds that a grouping occurs in Lessing's treatment of this character. The earlier stories "Little Tembi" (1951) and "The Trinket Box" (1951) show an alienated character who has become alienated from his or her surroundings because of family members and who reacts to the alienation by looking only outside of the self in order to change or to understand the alienation. In "Little Tembi" Tembi does not search within himself in order to understand why he does not belong with either the black or the white society in Africa; he looks to those around him to explain his alienation. When he does not find help, he attempts to change his environment by stealing from his neighbors and from his extended family. The dying old woman in "The Trinket Box" also refuses to look into herself to explain why her family has set her apart for so many years. By not explicitly forgiving her family for alienating her, and thus not releasing them from their own guilt before she dies, Maud has in a way acknowledges her alienation with-

out ever looking to herself to explain the alienation. These early characters, Tembi and Maud, seem to direct their attention to the environment from which they are set apart.

Three stories that follow "Little Tembi" and "The Trinket Box" also have characters set apart from their surroundings. Nkosikaas in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" (1951), Charlie Thornton in "England Versus England" (1963), and Mary Parrish and Hamish Anderson in "The Eye of God in Paradise" (1957) are characters who are separated from their environment, but unlike Tembi or Maud, they attempt to analyze their situations and their roles in society.

The first of such characters is in "The Old Chief Mshlanga"; Nkosikaas is a young British child in colonial Africa trying to understand her own identity. Her alienation stems from her place in African society; although she is British, she is also a native African, and thus her perception of her place in this society is distorted. But instead of looking to change the environment, she realizes that it is her perception that must change before she can understand this society and her place in it. This is the first time that Lessing's character searches within the self for relief from separation.

A character similar to Nkosikaas appears in the story "England Versus England" published in 1963. After studying at Oxford, Charlie Thornton is alienated from his lower middle-class family and friends in the mining village and is unsure of his place in this society. Charlie must search for his identity

within two different environments in much the same way as Nkosikaas has to search for her place in her African society. The success of Charlie's venture also lies in his ability to understand correctly his surroundings and his place within them.

The third story in which the alienated character attempts to analyze his or her alienation is "The Eye of God in Paradise" published in 1957. Mary Parrish and Hamish Anderson, like Nkosikaas and Charlie Thornton, are not comfortable in their surroundings. Mary and Hamish attempt to analyze their feelings of alienation by looking into themselves and at the German culture., but the conclusion they derive from this analysis is distorted by their irrational perception of Germany after World War II. Unlike Nkosikaas and Charlie Thornton, this couple does not realize that their perception must change before their situation can change.

Three stories published in 1951--"Lucy Grange," "Pleasure," and "Plants and Girls,"--show an alienated character who adjusts to his or her alienation through actions that range from unfortunate to horrifying. Lucy Grange in "Lucy Grange" and Mary Rogers in "Pleasure" compromise their ideas about what happiness is because they feel separated from the society of which they desire to be a part. Lucy Grange, a British woman in colonial Africa, compensates for her loneliness by settling for "second best"--an adulterous affair with an insurance salesman. Mary Rogers in "Pleasure" also

settles for what she considers "second-rate," a vacation in Brighton, after her trip to the south of France does not meet her unrealistic needs. In "Plants and Girls" the abnormal boy Frederick is unable to accept his separation from normal society and thus creates his own perverted society which focuses on trees. Frederick's means of accepting his place outside of society, though at first only a mental process, eventually becomes uncontrollable and results in the murder of a young girl. In each story, the character acknowledges and accepts, at times without regard to the morals of mores of society, his or her own alienation.

In the 1960's a group of stories appears in which the alienated character uses alienation to adjust his or her lifestyle. The first in this group is Judith in "Our Friend Judith" (1960), who deliberately alienates herself from her friends in order to analyze her own personal problems. This is the first time an alienated character in Lessing's stories has used alienation for his or her benefit. Judith successfully removes herself from society in which she normally lives, looks at her situation to see if it should be changed, and then returns to her original society ready to make a decision about her future. Her willed alienation has suited her purpose; she decides that her London life is one she likes and, therefore, does not want to change it.

In four stories published in 1963, "How I Finally Lost My Heart," "Dialogue," "To Room Nineteen," and "Each

Other," the characters also attempt to use alienation as a means of improving their personal lives. In "How I Finally Lost My Heart" the narrator chooses, subconsciously, to remove her heart, the physical symbol of her emotions, from her body. Through this surrealistically physical and symbolic removal of her heart, she learns that she has been bound to this heart, that she has let it rule her life. Now that she has looked at it as a separate entity, she can understand that it is possible to love and to give without having her heart completely control her. By alienating herself from a part of her own personality, the woman gains a new perspective on her life.

In "Dialogue" the unnamed woman is a character who needs to separate her life into two areas--the light and the dark. Like the woman in "How I Finally Lost My Heart," she alienates herself from a part of her own personality. The unnamed woman allows herself to have a dialogue with a friend, a conversation that rarely changes; they both feel depressed and lonely after the conversation ends, but she knows that this dark time during the dialogue is a necessary part of her life. By experiencing pain, anger, anguish, and depression, the woman is able to see more clearly the intense happiness that life can offer. This dialogue also keeps her from feeling that all the happiness life offers is free; her pain is the price she pays for happiness.

In "To Room Nineteen" alienation is once again pre-

sented as a character's method of altering his or her life. Unfortunately, for Susan Rawlings the method is fatal. At first Susan uses alienation to help her bring emotion back into what she feels is too practical a life. When a change in her surroundings does not satisfy her, she looks within herself for a solution, and realizes that only through suicide can she reach her goal. The method that was beneficial in "Our Friend Judith," "How I Finally Lost My Heart," and "Dialogue" causes Susan's death.

For Fred and Freda in "Each Other" alienation is a means of maintaining, instead of changing, a particular lifestyle. The unnatural sexual need each has can only be fulfilled by the other, and in order for Fred and Freda to continue their incestuous affair, they must accommodate the rules of society and be married to other people. Although they are prevented from being a couple, according to society, and are alienated from each other because of their marriages, Fred and Freda use the alienation to provide a situation to cover their unacceptable affair.

Doris Lessing's alienated characters have depth and variety. They are male and female, normal and insane, successful and unsuccessful in their attempts to find their places in society or to come to terms with themselves. But as diverse as these characters are, there do emerge certain groupings of characters at various stages of Lessing's career as a writer of short fiction. In two early stories, "Little

Tembi" and "The Trinket Box," these characters are alienated from the environment. These characters are not analytical, rarely looking inside the self for answers. In the later stories of the 1950's and 1960's, the characters analyze both their surroundings and themselves in an attempt to explain, understand, accept, or even use their alienation.

The ability to create such diverse personalities within one character type illustrates Doris Lessing's power as a writer of short fiction, and reveals that her short fiction is not merely an "extension" of her ability as a writer of novels as Frederick P. W. McDowell has stated.¹ It is an important part of her works which must be acknowledged.

¹Frederick P. W. McDowell, "The Fiction of Doris Lessing: An Interim View," in Arizona Quarterly 21 (Winter 1965): 321.

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