

PRE-SUFI NOVELS: DORIS LESSING'S NATURAL INCLINATION FOR SUFI THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the impact of certain sufistic ideas on one of Doris Lessing's celebrated novels: *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. This novel is the example that shall be analyzed as Lessing's markedly Sufistic novel in order to show the characteristics of Lessing's works which scholars recognize as undeniably influenced by Sufism. The discussion in this novel is important in order to examine the differences on the craftsmanship of the novel even before Lessing incorporated officially to Sufism in her succeeding novels right after she has known about Sufism. This paper also argues Lessing's expected inclination to Sufism, or her visions before she finally realized how Sufism has influenced her art and her holistic evolution.

Key Words: Sufism, Holistic, Mysticism, Sufistic

INTRODUCTION

LESSING'S VISION

Lessing offered us her views on Communism, feminism, mysticism, human relationships, politics, and life in general, and she took us to outer space when the earth proved too small for her visions. Drabble (1972: 52) describes her as a writer who "changes tense, tone, place, ... skips decades, moves from the past to the future, documents, speculates, describes, with relentless urgency". She appears to remain enigmatic and diverse, perhaps because she prefers ambiguity to the traditional labels with which we like to classify our writers. Yet her work *is* of a piece, when evaluated from a Sufi point of view, and not so radically different over the years. This orientation of Sufism is easily compatible with the already clear preoccupations and patterns in Doris Lessing's previous fiction: her interest in breaking through the conventional ways of thinking and being, the urge to understand and extend the parameters of consciousness, the mystical intimations expressed in her characters, the desire to overcome the dialectical antithesis of perceived experience in favor of a synthesizing vision of wholeness. In fact, even works written before Lessing began to explore Sufi ideas reveal her natural inclination for Sufi thought and demonstrate ways in which she was already working through processes of self-study and development. Lessing expresses this inclination in a letter to Roberta Rubenstein: "When I read *The Sufis* I found that it answered many questions that I had learned-I feel too belatedly-to ask of life. Though that book was only the beginning of a different approach" (Rubenstein *The Novelistic Vision* 1979: 121). The very core of Lessing's insights has been the same-that is, the need for perpetual evolution on all levels: individual, national, worldwide, and universal, and this concern in evolution has been as much biological as it is spiritual.

Fahim (1994: 136) has remarked on the progress of Lessing's style in the body of her work. For instance she writes,

While *The Grass is Singing* and *The Golden Notebook* dramatize the need for personal equilibrium and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* enlarges on the theme of personal and collective equilibrium, *Canopus in Argos: Archives* comprehends and complements the earlier works.

Fahim (ibid 137) explains the search for equilibrium in the space-fiction series as the dynamic force and the drive of the action in the individual novels. Sprague and Tiger (1986: 13) recognize a change from *The Children of Violence* series and African novels to *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, *The Summer before the Dark*, and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. In the latter three works, they see hints of the upcoming galactic voyages of the *Canopus* series, which they call "a kind of secular triptych". Draine (1983: 167) recognizes Lessing's tendency to commit to the role of prophet who will move the reader to a desirable state of consciousness.

She also recognizes allegory and teaching stories in Lessing's fiction and addresses Lessing's tendency to preach "whenever she feels the burden of evil to be just too heavy to be borne in silence". Later, Lessing preaches also because she wants to educate us about the Sufis.

Sufi thought has confirmed Lessing's insights and validated what she had suspected all along: the possibility of individual and world amelioration. Variations of this belief in evolution are echoed in all of Lessing's works under one guise or another, as the following two passages from novels written twenty years apart demonstrate: Doeg, the protagonist in *The Making of The Representative for Planet 8* (1982: 49), a product of Lessing's so-called space-fiction era in the early 1980s, says, "Do not sleep in all day in your dark rooms, but rouse yourselves, work, do anything-no, bear the burden of your consciousness, your knowledge, do not lose it in sleep" . These words recall Saul Green's words to Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook* (1962: 618): "We will use all our energies, all our talents, into pushing that boulder another inch up the mountain. . . and that is why we are not useless after all".

Both of these passages signal a positive outlook. As Fahim (1994: 76) notes, Lessing alters the myth of Sisyphus in her retelling of it. The rock described by Saul Green does not roll back all the way but ends a few inches higher than where it started, every time. In other words, there is progress and evolution in Lessing's vision of the world, which does *not* align with Camus's heroism of the absurd.

THE MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR

The Memoirs of a survivor is a dystopian novel by Doris Lessing in which a woman is struggling to survive in a violent post-apocalyptic world. Traumatized by both the war she's lived through and the regular atrocities that each day brings, she retreats from reality into a bizarre Victorian dream world within herself. However, when she takes in a teenage girl called Emily, she is drawn back into the harsh reality of her crumbling city and its feral street gangs. Desperate for some kind of salvation, she becomes convinced that her fantasy world of the past holds may hold the key to a better future.

Doris Lessing described *The Memoirs of a Survivor* as 'an attempt at autobiography', but the book – set in a frightening near-future world amidst the collapse of civilization – has the magical quality of a fable or allegory. From her window, the narrator watches a city where everyone has to fight for survival, and where men, women and even children are brutalized by necessity. She also watches over Emily, a girl entrusted to her while a child by a stranger who vanishes. Emily herself is guarded too by Hugo – an animal half-dog and half-cat – a creature who dominates this tale.

ANALYSIS OF THE MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR

Reading *The Memoirs of a Survivor* in light of Sufism allows on the one hand a useful additional way of reading some of the events in Lessing's other book called; *The Golden Notebook* and on the other hand provides a *necessary* way of reading some of the events in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. Sufism accounts for the difference in Lessing's vision between these two novels. In various interviews, Lessing has maintained that her seeming change of vision from utopian politics to spirituality or mysticism is not really so radical and that both areas deal with a psychological understanding of people, groups, and social developments. Furthermore, Lessing claims in a 1982 letter to Mona Knapp that "I became interested in the Sufi way of thought because I was already thinking like that, before I had heard of Sufis or Sufism". This is in fact the case when one evaluates *The Memoirs of a Survivor* which reflects the many aspects of the protagonist's life from the Sufi point of view. In *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking Through the Forms of Consciousness* Rubenstein (1979: 122) raises the point that the quest for the self implicit in Lessing's pre-Sufi novels is not altered but *deepened* in the context of Sufi thought. It is noteworthy to say that even though *The Golden Notebook* was written without Lessing's prior knowledge of Sufism; it anticipates her turn to Sufism, while later novels, such as *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), build upon that turn.

Following her immersion in Sufi study in the early 1960s, Lessing became more didactic in her novels in which analogies to Sufi experience were more overtly suggested and more clearly applicable.

The narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*-a novel written twelve years later was taken much further in the protagonist's self discovery comparing Lessing's other novels including *The Golden Notebook*, which suggests that perhaps Lessing later knew and did not only *intuit* that there was a further place to which one could go. Lessing was able to carry the narrator of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* into new worlds which she created and which she later explored at greater length in her space fiction. The space behind the wall in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, for instance, is clearly a metaphor for the narrator's inner life, which, like the infinite rooms behind the wall, daily unfolds into a rich tapestry of experience and self-discovery. It is also noteworthy that Lessing introduces the carpet imagery in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the weaving of carpets being one of many basic teaching tools in Sufism: the narrator sees a roomful of people gathered around a faded carpet, colors and patterns of which emerge brightly in patches as individuals find their particular piece in the carpet and place it on the faded material that is, as they fulfill their destiny. This carpet episode is further analyzed by Fahim

(1994: 108) as well as the four-walled garden and the iron egg as mandala symbols that activate the process of contemplation by inducing certain mental states which encourage the achievement of equilibrium between the levels of perception.

Like a Sufi tale, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is written to be read on different levels. As one peels the layers, one moves deeper along a spectrum from the political and rhetorical readings at one end, to the psychological and spiritual at the other. It is further suggested by Fahim (1994: 87) that in reading of *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, rational, psychological, and spiritual modes of consciousness are fully integrated to bring the different strata of the novel together. Given Lessing's Sufi knowledge, it is justifiable to suggest a mystical reading of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* without dismissing other readings. This has been the intent of Sufi teaching tales, as well: to offer many lessons to many audiences at many levels. In turn, my thesis, aims to provoke further discussion on all sides, not to foreclose it.

Sufism makes a noticeable difference in Lessing's vision as Lessing moves from her previously written novels to *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. There seems to be a continuation from these to *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. The Narrator of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* breaks through the walls of reality almost in the opening pages of the novel. Lessing, here, as a writer influenced by Sufism, sees that it is only in the fullest development and balancing of all available faculties that human beings can free themselves from mere predetermined repetition and so evade catastrophe. This evolution of consciousness is a precious ability which foresees the future course of human evolution. Emily and her guardian are aware of chaos, too, as it unfolds daily around them; but for them, Lessing can draw on the Sufi Path to self development and transformation. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974: 81), political and economic calamities prompt people to band together in tribes and move out of the cities, while those who remain behind resort to stealing, killing, growing their own food, and building air filters to survive. During this time Emily is left with the narrator who records the events and mood of the times: "Inside it was all chaos: the feeling one is taken over by, at the times in one's life when everything is in change, movement, destruction-or reconstruction". In light of Sufism, this guardian, who remains unnamed in the novel, could represent the mature Emily. Emily and the narrator of the novel are the same, otherwise how could the narrator, who is certainly not omniscient, view scenes of Emily's past. I argue that when the narrator and Emily are read as one and the same character, they create a whole, a state of integration and wholeness to which Sufis aspire. The guardian shares Emily's identity, especially during the times when she pays frequent mysterious visits to a space through and beyond the faded designs of the old wallpaper, where she is confronted with rooms in shambles. In the Sufi context, this imaginary space serves as a metaphor for Emily's inner life and childhood, and the guardian is the adult part of Emily who has committed herself to working on reconciling her inner and outer worlds, or her essence and personality, as well as her past and present. My interpretation here is that Emily's childhood scenes are necessary steps for learning about her past. She is aware that the past influences the present, as in the connection between baby Emily's frigid white nursery and teenager Emily's present sense of deprivation and isolation. These episodes show that Lessing believes in ultimate salvation which comes to the individuals who can achieve wholeness within themselves, again a state which is in accordance with Sufi thoughts.

At the heart of Sufi thought is the necessity for individual and cosmic evolution and the idea that men and women do not know themselves, nor their potentials. This corresponds comfortably to Lessing's natural inclinations, so that Idries Shah's representation of Sufism reinforces Lessing's own belief in an evolution of a more whole society. As a result, Lessing readily incorporates Sufi perceptions of human beings in her very involved and lengthy novels. Sufis see human beings as incomplete and expect them to transcend their merely human state of incompleteness through "work" in the Sufi Way. This is not only the situation humanity and its potential in most of Lessing's novels, but is also intentionally emphasized in the lives of her characters.

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Lessing's vision encompasses the discomfort her protagonist feels when faced with social and ideological corruption and fragmentation, her own and that of the rest of the world. When *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is considered against the backdrop of Sufism; it will lend itself to an additional reading: spiritual destitution. This despair is echoed in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, which reminds DuPlessis (1979: 4) of an abstract *Four-Gated City* because in this novel Lessing repeats similar arguments regarding the end of the world and spiritual transformation.

As a mystic, Lessing means us to take the reality of her narrator's time-travel literally. Lessing here is inventing a new world behind the walls which can be interpreted as if Lessing is giving hope to her readers in creating this world. She actually wants to transform our view of reality but interprets that transformation only as an intellectual exercise in stretching one's perceptions. The interpretation of the two realms, the inner and the outer, on either side of the wall can illustrate how the two worlds nourish each other in the narrator's life. Lessing actually is pointing out Sufi theories of literature to explain the

two irreconcilable universes in the world of *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the realistic and the fantastic. In the light of Sufism, teenager Emily in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974: 34) feels “a hunger, a need; a pure thing, which makes her face lose its hard brightness; her eyes their defensiveness. She is a passion of longing”. Here, the Sufi context offers not only an additional reading but provides the crucial key to understanding *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. Lessing does not define what Emily longs for, but the novel as a whole invites an allegorical reading. Through “working” on herself and fighting her battles, Emily has the chance to transform herself and thereby satisfy her longing. Walker (1989: 95) calls *The Memoirs of a Survivor* “an allegory of psychological integration” but also more literally a story of two “human beings painstakingly forming a social bond”. Walker (ibid 114) argues that *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is allegorical in the way Spencer’s *Faerie Queene* is allegorical; a single image in the novel often signals both social and psychological meaning. As its dust jacket describes it, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is “an attempt at autobiography,” which claims Lessing confirms in *Under My Skin* (1994). Here Lessing offers revelations on *The Memoirs of a Survivor*’s autobiographical dimension. Greene (1995: 149) adds, “That Lessing’s mother and grandmother were both named Emily suggests why *autobiography* is a relevant term”. Lessing had only recently encountered Sufism when she wrote *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and the narrator’s trips behind the wall can be read easily as Lessing’s own allegorical quests for her “self.” (Greene 1995: 149)

When evaluated in light of Sufism, the world behind the wall in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* emerges as the only real world, while the reality of daily life on the pavement pales in contrast. The classical Persian Sufi poet Omar Khayyam (d.1132) describes the human being as a lantern of imaginings inside a lamp: one’s petty and mundane experiences are the lantern of imaginings trapped within the brightness of the only real world (Shah *The Way of the Sufi* 1968: 60).

If read in light of the Sufi tradition, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* becomes a satisfying novel, one that offers more than a mere futuristic ghost story as Melvin Madoocks (1975: 79) calls the novel. To a great extent, Emily in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* lives during a time of “death and destruction” which seems stronger than life. She lives under the pressures of the dead and dying Western civilization, fighting in her own ways to escape death.

In direct correlation with Sufi thinking that we are incomplete and need years of hard work to complete ourselves, the guardian, during her earlier visits behind the wall, finds discord and turmoil, as any would-be seeker does at the outset of his or her “work.” “To make the rooms inhabitable, what work needed to be done!” (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 14) she tells us. The guardian adds,

I stood there marking fallen plaster, the corner of a ceiling stained with damp, dirty, or damaged walls. . . The exiled inhabitant: for surely she could not live, never could have lived, in that chill empty shell full of dirty and stale air? (ibid)

From a Sufi perspective, the rightful inhabitant exiled from this place would be Emily’s perfected self who may not return until Emily is properly prepared to receive her. However, for the time being, the incomplete Emily hides behind a cold, impervious, hard, and enamelled presence (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 16).

Throughout the course of the novel her guardian tries to get past or around Emily’s defenses, and the closest she gets to the Emily who is in hiding is when she walks through the old wallpaper into Emily’s inner world. However, the two worlds on either side of the wall still remain disconnected, “one life excluding the other” (ibid 25). The guardian recognizes this impasse that is so sharply pronounced in Emily and comments on the prison in which we all live and the difficulty we have in allowing anyone to come close to us (ibid 31). This idea later led to the title Lessing chose for her book of essays, *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* (1987).

As the novel progresses, more and more of the influence of the world behind the wall remains with the guardian when she returns to the external world. These memories help the guardian to protect Emily during the present disharmony. In fact, the trips behind the wall become such an obsession and an obligation that she experiences a sense of fear and of lowered vitality whenever she is about to cross over again, for what she finds there is chaos and turmoil as if savages and soldiers had been there (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 40). She finds chairs and sofas slashed with their stuffing spewing out, curtains ripped off, and feathers and blood everywhere. She works hard to clean and reorder, scrubs; the walls with buckets of hot water, and airs out the rooms with the sun and wind. However, she tells us, “Whenever I re-entered the rooms after a spell away in my real life, all had to be done again. It was like what one reads of a poltergeist’s tricks” (ibid 64).

In the light of Sufism, the apparent result of being out of touch with one’s inner self is a spiritual sterility, which Emily describes as a drying up of the well. This dried up state leaves behind a mere machine that is efficiently in control, but lifeless. Emily suffers from an experience of longing for meaning. Only in her case, this longing is more deliberately fashioned by Lessing, given the Sufi

context that can now accommodate such thirst and that can enrich Lessing's vision. Emily has felt deprived of fertile surroundings since she was a baby, and she still knows very little about the world behind the wall. Before she can grow out of her stifled existence, it is necessary for her to know this world thoroughly.

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Lessing has set up less than ideal surroundings to provide her protagonist with the friction against which she must work. Emily retains her glass wall almost to the end of her stay with her guardian and only rarely allows parts of herself to show through.

The Sufi hopes to reach the essence within and to help it grow into maturity. One's inner world needs to keep up with, or catch up with, one's external development in everyday life. Of course, a mind that could possibly begin to think creatively about its own improvement is one which is uncluttered. In order to reach one's essence, one is expected to undo the "useless superstition, habits, convention, irrelevant assumptions, and expectations" which one has been fed, so that the mind can see what is really there (Courtland 2002: 86). "To follow Sufism is to die gradually to oneself and to become oneSelf, to be born anew and to become aware of what one has always been from eternity (*azal*) without one's having realized it until the necessary transformation has come about" (Nasr 1973: 17). On this subject the thirteenth-century Persian Sufi poet, Sa'd ud Din Mahmud Shabistari, writes in *The Secret Garden*:

Go sweep out the chamber of your heart.
Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved.
When you depart out. He will enter it.
In you, void of yourself, will He display His beauties. (Friedlander 1975: 23)

The process of voiding oneself is an essential step toward acquiring real self-knowledge. But of course, this nothingness brings with it hopelessness and despair. This train of thought is evident in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974: 66) when the guardian frantically scrubs and cleans out the area behind the wall, trying to make it inhabitable for "the other" Emily. She also does her best in the apartment in her "real" life in order to accommodate Emily's growing life; or, in the Sufi context, the grown up Emily's personality accommodates the essence of Emily that is still in embryo. It is important to note also that Emily's room in her guardian's apartment is no larger than a closet space and that she shares even this space with her closest friend, the cat/dog-like beast, Hugo. This narrow space is symbolic of the underdeveloped state of Emily's essence. She remains stifled literally as well as figuratively until that time when her inner and outer worlds join in harmony. Meanwhile, the process of purification continues behind the wall. The guardian describes how she scrubs and paints the walls until the sheets of dust have been replaced by clean and clear whiteness like "new snow or fine china" (ibid).

In the Sufi context, the choice of concentrating on the hurdles in life, or deliberately engaging in conscious labor and intentional suffering, is essential for real transformation to take place. Just as the guardian literally works in the grimy areas of that other world, self-work in the Sufi Way is carried out in the problem areas of Emily's psyche.

It is also essential to recognize the difference that emerges in Emily's experience between ordinary and intentional suffering. In Sufism ordinary suffering is an indulgence in one's negative emotions, whereas intentional suffering always produces a new person. Ordinary suffering is self-pity grown out of self-importance, vanity, sloth, fear, jealousy, or greed; and the Sufi aspires to convert such suffering into a conscious act. Intentional suffering is impressively and deliberately demonstrated in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. Each of the guardian's journeys behind the wall into young Emily's disturbing world is an example of intentional suffering. At the end of these journeys, the guardian's and Emily's lives are changed. Every journey contributes to balancing the aspects of Emily's character within a unified person and to bringing her closer to completion and (psychological and spiritual) rebirth. Often the guardian witnesses Emily trying futilely to bring order into her life behind the wall. A poignant image depicts Emily trying to amass fallen leaves into heaps. But as she sweeps and makes piles, the leaves fly about in the wind. Emily/the guardian works faster and faster, trying to empty a whole house full of leaves to no successful end, while "The world was being submerged in dead leaves, smothered in them" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 137). Emily continues her frantic and desperate fight against nature - in this case, her own nature. And while going through this process of self purification, she appears discouraged and maddened with the seeming futility of her task: "Her stare, fixed, wide, horrified. . . She saw only the fragments of the walls that could not shelter her, nor keep out the sibilant drift" (ibid 137), and she vanishes among the rustling leaves and decaying world.

Moreover, in the Sufi tradition, only conscious efforts without expectation of rewards lead one to true liberation. The guardian in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* learns that unless one makes an effort,

one gains nothing real. This message is inherent in this novel and is shown overtly by Lessing throughout the course of the novel.

The Sufi idea that a conscious reactivation of memory can play an important part in the individual's quest for self-development has also had a noticeable influence on this novel. The Narrator stipulates that during her "visits" behind the wall she is brought into contact with "personal" scenes involving family situations. Although such incidents primarily concern Emily's childhood experiences, the emotions which are aroused are stated to be universal, and they prompt the Narrator into commenting that she is "conscious of memories assaulting me, claiming, insinuating" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 38). Moreover, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974: 148), as Emily develops further, her guardian begins to remember more and more of the world behind the wall.

This symbolically implies that Emily is becoming more and more successful in her self-remembering and that her essence is becoming increasingly empowered to assert itself over her personality. At first, this self-remembering manifests itself in the form of the guardian's ability to hear a child crying faintly in the distance, miserable, lost, and weighed down with incomprehension. Yet, whenever the guardian asks anyone else about hearing this sound she discovers that it is only she who hears it.

Emily cannot hear the cries. Sometimes the sobbing is almost inaudible and the guardian has to strain her ears to hear it. At other times, she "twists and turns inwardly not to hear that miserable sound" (ibid).

This attempt not to hear the crying is the natural human response to one's own pain. The fact that Emily's guardian can hear the crying even when she is on the ordinary side of the wall signals the break Emily has made through her personality to her essence or the breakthrough the adult Emily has made to the young Emily. Rumi-the Persian Sufi poet says;

Sema-our prayer-is an awakening. But he who awakens in a dungeon of course does not wish to wake up. However, he who has fallen asleep in the rose gardens ... If he wakes up, his joy increases, and perhaps he is spared from fearful dreams (*Divane-e Shams-e Tabrizi*: 1984 my translation from Persian).

In Emily's case, her inner world that used to be in shambles, worn out, pained, dark, mossy, smelly, tortured, and stifled, begins to be lifted out of Rumi's dungeons into the rose gardens. At least Emily is now awake enough to hear herself cry, her glimpses of truth stretching into periods of consciousness.

Emily takes pains to get to know herself and to arrive at that new person in herself who is capable of growing. Lessing's previous protagonists like Anna of *The Golden Notebook* does not go any further in her self-searching, perhaps because these novels were written during the time Lessing had been newly exposed to Sufism and this could be the reason why Anna lacks the further development which Emily experiences in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, written twelve years later. This can be viewed as a kind of cumulative evolution in Lessing's fiction. The Martha Quest-the character of Children of Violence-who emerges after *The Golden Notebook* carries not only the seeds of completeness but also evolution. This is rightly so, considering Lessing's deepened and enhanced perception of the human psyche since her introduction to Sufi thought. Anna of *The Golden Notebook* only experiences a temporary madness and depression from which she is restored to a healthier and more whole person, while Emily undergoes a permanent transformation. Emily's experiences can be read as a self-work manual which illustrates how one can transform one's self. As Emily awakens, there is new life behind the wall,

a few rotting planks lying about on earth that was putting out shoots of green ... clean earth and insects that were vigorously at their work of re-creation ... The smell of growth came up strong from the stuffy old room (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 101).

The work Emily's guardian has to do is not completed yet; but after this breakthrough, her task becomes easier and more rewarding. She now has new creation and not the moss and the shambles with which to contend. Greene (1995: 59) recognizes the same theme in *Landlocked*, in which "creation of the new requires the destruction of the old." She also sees that this new creation "is based on intuitive rather than logical faculties, the first step toward which is a radical disorientation" (ibid). This is similar to the disorientation that Emily experiences in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* until she gains some strength and balance.

Lessing points out that the guardian's journeys and activities behind the wall were never really her choice, but her duty. The narrator/guardian remarks,

Very strong was the feeling that I did as I was bid and as I must. I was being taken, was being led, was being shown, was held always in the hollow of a great hand which

enclosed my life (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 101).

This is reminiscent of the greater evolutionary cause of the Sufis. If an individual's personal growth can help to raise the level of the whole of humanity even a very slight degree, this is considered a success. Emily's guardian feels "too much beetle or earthworm to understand" (ibid) the greater purpose behind her own actions, but she still feels compelled to walk into that "other" world in order to explore and unearth the "real" Emily.

In this role, she is, according to Greene (1995: 26), a female Christ figure or cosmic mother, as are other saviors in Lessing's oeuvre, such as Al-Ith in *Shikasta* or Martha Quest of *The Children of Violence*. Greene (ibid) sees these protagonists as Christian, rather than Sufi seekers and saviors.

In Sufism, the color black denotes wisdom and leadership. Romance and glory are not qualities sought after by Sufis. Rather, rebirth or real transformation is possible only after hard work and a strong presence of being that results from self-remembering. After the disaster in the unnamed city in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the guardian is able to share her vision with Emily, Emily's lover Gerald, and her pet Hugo, feeling confident that the world behind the wall is now strong enough to withstand intrusion from outside. And together, they witness the following vision as it unfolds: "a bright green lawn under thunderous and glaring clouds, and on the lawn a giant black egg of pock-marked iron but polished and glossy (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 216). Lessing could have chosen a real egg, or a crystal egg for the occasion of Emily's rebirth; however, an iron egg by nature is difficult to break open, and this in itself provides the symbolic meaning of the difficulty of one's task in the Sufi Way.

In a Sufi light, the dissolving of the walls marks Emily's death and rebirth; it is only when the walls of the old rooms are demolished that Emily can move on to become her new, enlightened self. As Emily and her entourage stand looking at the iron egg, it breaks open "by the force of their being there" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* 1974: 216), revealing the apparition for whom the guardian had been waiting throughout the novel. Following this Being is Emily, but the new, transmuted Emily and her beast Hugo, followed by Gerald and the savage children of the ordinary world. When all of Emily's family crosses into that new order, "the last walls dissolve" (ibid 217). As a point of comparison, a classical Sufi account of renewal and rebirth, as it was experienced by Rumi-the Persian Sufi Poet-seven hundred years ago, is related by Ira Shems Friedlander below:

Like the Prophet before him, the angels descended to earth, cut open his breast, and removed the thin shell that remained over his heart. They removed the last bit of ego that remained within him and filled his heart with Love. Then they made his breast as it was before. As this was happening, Mawlana Rumi was in his garden lost in deep meditation, in a state of disassociation from his body, experiencing the highest initiation he would know until his 'wedding day' ... He was now ready to reenter the world. (Friedlander 1975: 55)

The "wedding day" refers to death, which is celebrated as a union with God, the Beloved, and marks one's rebirth. Aspiring Sufis must remember at all times that their purpose is to rise on the vertical ladder of enlightenment and share the fate of the legendary phoenix, the beautiful, graceful white bird that is reborn out of its own ashes after burning itself on a fire kindled with a-hundred trees. With its final breath the phoenix sings a most beautiful song from the depths of its soul, sounding a plaintive cry as it dies to its old self (ibid 153). In Gerald's efforts to build a new family structure, Gayle Greene (1995: 150) recognizes the necessity for destruction that can make new creation possible:

Human beings produced by the prison of the family are incapable of making a free society, and the ruined garden of Gerald's commune represents the impossibility of making anything new from existing social conditions: you can't get there from here.

It is required of all humans and beasts to be the phoenix, the emblem of immortality, between each of its deaths and rebirths. Similarly, students of Sufism are asked to work hard to preserve themselves, something that can be possible only through a lifetime of harmonious development, which involves the induced growth of the essence to an equal proportion with the personality. In support of self-preservation and transformation, which in turn contribute to the preservation and evolution of the human race, Lessing has remarked in an interview, "Maybe out of destruction will be born some new creature. I don't mean physically. What interests me more than anything is how our minds are changing, how our ways of perceiving reality are changing" (Raskin 1982: 66). Lessing, like the Sufis, expects that humanity will continue to participate in cosmic evolution. Beyond this, Sufis make no provisions; nor do they argue about whether every individual has the potential to share the lot of the phoenix. Gurdjieff (1975), for instance, speaks of the acorns that do not all become oak trees. Most serve as fertilizer while very few take root and develop into an oak.

Sufi context allows Emily to have an added new horizon comparing Lessing's previous protagonists. As for Lessing's vision, Emily in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is clearly delivered into a

new sphere in which the limitations upon her can be lifted. Emily's search for herself is presented to us as a spiritual quest, similar in many ways to the Sufi Way. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Lessing is able to develop this idea further, because she is able to reinforce her perceptions with Sufi truths.

As a student of Sufism, Lessing not only paints this world in new colors and strokes, but she would like us to believe in the mimetic dimension of the other world, as well. For example, the breakthrough to the other world at the end of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is not only metaphorical. The guardian and Emily are finally able to join forces in earnest, share the same vision, purpose, and future because of the guardian's preceding Sufi "work" behind the wall to make their union possible. No matter what the external circumstances, they are now one whole individual, who is able to withstand the challenges of daily life even at a time of war and destruction. Such a character is not only important in her thematic and synthetic dimensions but is equally important in her mimetic dimension. She is not a freak in the novel to be read only for the ideas she represents, but a plausible human being who is seeking something more than ordinary life. Any supernatural phenomena in Lessing's later novels really belong to the same world that we experience daily. However, as Lessing points out, only the so-called mad ones in her novels know and believe this to be true.

CONCLUSION

Two things become very clear from my analysis of *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, written after Lessing's exposure to Sufism: one, that Lessing was naturally inclined to promote "work" on oneself; and two, that the Sufi tradition has offered her a very welcome pathway to explore beyond the limitations of psychology, psychiatry, politics, Communism, Jungianism, or any other "ism" to which she had appealed prior to her study of Sufism. More specifically, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is totally built upon Lessing's turn to Sufism. Throughout the novel Lessing explicates the protagonist's self-discovery, draws her on the Sufi Path how to transform and develop her self. She actually wants to transform our perception of reality by giving us an intellectual exercise to stretch our insight. In the light of Sufism Lessing's vision is enriched and she could accommodate the thirst and longing for a meaning in life which Emily in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is suffering from. Furthermore, Lessing, through this novel, reminds us that ordinary suffering does not make a transformed person but what makes a new person is nothing but intentional suffering. These characteristics are impressively illustrated in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* when the guardian journeys behind the wall into young Emily's disturbing world. The significance of colors and the idea of rebirth and transformation are also remarkably demonstrated by Lessing in this novel of which black color denotes wisdom and leadership. Finally, Lessing invites us to understand that those who withstand the challenges of ordinary life, no matter internal or external, are thematically, synthetically and mimetically important to her.

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