THE PATH OF LOVE:
SUFISM IN THE NOVELS OF DORIS LESSING

DISSERTATION

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By

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What is to be done, O Moslems?
I do not recognize myself.

My place is the Placeless,
my trace is the Traceless;
'Tis neither body nor soul,
for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.
to Robert Jones

and Marilyn Waldman,

two who think with their hearts
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The Unreal City

The Sufi Path \((\text{tasawwuf})\) is "The Path of Love." The Beloved referred to by Sufi mystics and poets is God--often depicted, incarnated, and cloaked in the language, form, and garb of a sexual lover. The poem below is a popularized translation of a Persian poem written by the thirteenth-century Sufi poet Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi (d. 1273), Master of the Whirling Dervishes in Central Anatolia.

I want to say words that flame
as I say them, but I keep quiet and don't try
to make both worlds fit in one mouthful.

I keep secret in myself an Egypt
that doesn't exist. \(\text{[Mehr-e 'adam]}\)
Is that good or bad? I don't know.

For years I gave away sexual love
with my eyes. Now I don't.
I'm not in any one place. I don't have a name
for what I give away. Whatever Shams
gave, that you can have from me.

(Rumi, trans. Barks)\(^1\)

More often, it is reworkings like this poem that circulate in the
general populace in the West because they catch the readers' attention
(as this one did mine) with their mystery and romantic lure, while they
have very little to do with the original poem. Such popularizations
are faithful to the flavor and spirit of the Sufi poem, but they
unwittingly reduce to a secularized fancy the intensity of spiritual
passion and force of mystical insight that fueled the original poet’s imagination more than seven hundred years ago. Most translators do disservice to the Sufi tradition by drastically shifting the context of the poetry from the realm of God to the level of the mundane. The figurative lover who is really God in the Persian poem becomes a literal sexual lover in the translation that remains devoid of the smoldering spiritual core of the original.

One wants Westerners to become interested in The Sufi Way and in Sufi literature; however, the only access for people who cannot read the original languages is through popularized versions of Sufi poetry such as the above, which is both a beautiful, touching poem powerful in its own right, but which lacks the many-layered meanings of the original. The dilemma of the present-day Sufis in the East and West who have direct access to Sufi literature in Arabic, Turkish, or Persian is that they want to encourage Westerners to tap the wealth of Sufi material, while they cannot help but bemoan the loss in translation of what they feel to be the authentic message. The tendency on the part of those who have an inner understanding of tasawwuf, or Sufi practice (way), often is to say "That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all" (Eliot, "Prufrock"), which is equally futile, since, at the least, translated versions fulfill the role of attracting people to The Sufi Way. Readers must beware, however, that these reworkings do not pretend to represent tasawwuf (The Sufi Way).

The diverse literary and spiritual wealth of Islam, and in this case, of The Sufi Way (tasawwuf), has provided numerous western poets, playwrights, and novelists, including Doris Lessing, with
material and ideas from which to spin off new works. However, more often than not, these resulting modern adaptations have reproduced a finely filtered version of the Sufi message. One of the things that is consistently filtered out in the transfer is the association between Sufi thought and Sufi practice.

As a result of repeated filtering, The Sufi Way (tasawwuf) has been reconstructed and reconceptualized into a system of beliefs in the West called "Sufism," which is a systematic reinterpretation of a tradition that essentially resists mechanical and literalistic treatment. Lessing has inherited the wealth of the long history of the Sufi tradition through this filtering process, which has allowed her to manipulate disembodied Sufi ideas as they unfold in the lives of her various characters. The filter exempts her from the obligation to practice The Sufi Way beyond an intellectual engagement with it as a school of thought comparable to other schools of thought like Marxism, Feminism, or Jungianism. Hence, my discussion of Sufism in Chapter Two is labeled "Lessing's 'Sufism'," i.e., her version of a long, multi-faceted tradition, which is not to deny that this version, too, now constitutes a part of the history of The Sufi Way, and must be acknowledged as a legitimate stage of The Way.

Contrasted to followers of other "isms," Sufis pursue spiritual experience by bodily discipline and a whole different way of life that is in accordance with their particular relationship with God. For them, The Sufi Way is an experience, not an ideology. Therefore, as we look at the works of Doris Lessing, it is essential to remember two things: 1) that the Sufi traces in her works are decontextualized renderings of a long-standing tradition that is more than a thousand
years old; and also 2) that there are other living Sufis today elsewhere in the world whose lives and practices are very unlike those of Lessing's characters, and whose Way has a long history, integrity, and a power competitive with what Europeans have done with "Sufism."

Coleman Barks, the translator of the above poem, acknowledges that his is a reworking of a more literally-faithful English translation done by the late orientalist A. J. Arberry. Barks, in an introduction to a collection of his translations, sensitively distinguishes between Rumi's originals and his own adaptations by telling the story of an Ocean-Frog's visit to a pond-frog who lives in a pond three feet by four feet by two feet deep: "The pond-frog is very eager and proud to show off the dimensions of his habitat, which in the story signify the limits of mind and desire. He dives down two feet to the bottom and comes up and asks, 'Did you ever see water this deep? What is it like where you live?' to which the Ocean-Frog's answer is, "One day I'll take you there, and you can swim in it." Barks admits, "I am very much the pond-frog before [Rumi's poetry, which is] a sacred text that invites one to drown in it. I don't claim to have done that" (This Longing, ix). This is clear when the reader compares Barks' poem to the literal translation from the original in Persian given below, which comparison demonstrates the degree to which the authentic Sufi message is compromised in at least this instance. The Ocean in which Barks, Lessing, and my self flounder is the limitless Ocean of Divine Wisdom, a flavor of which is preserved in the following translation by Dick Davis.
I have a fire in my mouth for you [Shams]
But I have a hundred kindnesses on my tongue
These flames that I have hidden
will make the two worlds into a fine morsel
[i.e., will burn the two worlds into something edible]
If all the world should pass away
I have, without the world, the wealth of a hundred worlds
The caravans loaded with sugar
I have coming from the Egypt of extinction [Mehr-e 'adam]
From the drunkenness of love I have become ignorant
Whether I profit or lose from it [I don't care]
The eyes of my body wept pearls for love
Until now when my soul weeps pearls
I am not confined to the house [body or world], for like Jesus
I have a home in the fourth heaven
Thanks be to Him whose soul gives up the body
If the soul goes I have the soul of the soul
That which Shams-e Tabrizi gave to me
Seek that from me, for that's what I have [to offer you].

(Rumi, trans. Davis)

Although the work of a thirteenth-century Persian/Turkish mystic is
a far cry from twentieth-century British literature, I find the two
versions of Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi apt examples with which to open my
discussion of the works of Doris Lessing not only because a comparison
of the two poems illustrates the vast difference between the historical
Sufi Way (which is discussed in the Appendix of this work) and modern,
decontextualized "Sufism" in the West (which is discussed in Chapter Two
of this work), but also because the central image in both poems, "Egypt
of extinction" ("Mehr-e 'adam" or "Mehr-e fana"), offers the ideal
point of reference for the imagined spiritual spaces or the unreal
cities to which Lessing takes us in her novels, The Memoirs of a
Survivor, The Four-Gated City or the Canopus in Argos series, to name a
couple.

In Rumi's poem whether Egypt has a physical locale or not, it is an
ideal, abstract model of nothingness, or "fana," which is the
ultimate goal of a Sufi: to burn the ego and the individual soul until
they are extinguished, at which point they attain "the soul of the soul" and become One with God. That final stage is called "fana," which is the equivalent of "nirvana" in Buddhism. When the word "fana" is combined with the word "Mesr" or "Egypt," which has a geographically concrete location and a historical connotation of prosperity and fertility, the "Egypt of fana" represents a paradox, for it is both nonexistence and ultimate reality, both extinction and verdant fertility; it is a cultivated, immaterial place within that has no external locale. The literal translation of the whole line is, "I have caravans of sugar [or wonderful mystical insights] coming from the Egypt of extinction [or the place of the soul, the place of truth, the place of wealth]." Hence, this is a poem about the interiorization of space, as are many of Lessing's novels. In the last stanza, "Shams" refers to the poet's beloved Friend and Teacher on the Sufi Path, Shams-e Tabrizi, who guides Rumi to his ultimate Beloved or God. The only things of value Rumi feels he has are the words he received from Shams, which he in turn offers to us in the form of this poem.

Unlike Rumi's narrator who feels whole and able to offer his love, Lessing's narrators depict characters who feel spiritually disconnected from God, from Nature, from the universe, and from other humans. In his poem Rumi speaks of one kind of an "unreal" (or most real) city, that is, the heart in love and at peace. On the other hand, twentieth-century cities in literature have tended to emulate T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland in content, and Lessing has not fallen short of adopting the same subject matter: the barren and troubled heart. Her London after the Blitz, or Planet Eight during the Ice, or Zone Four at war represent desolate corners of the heart suffering an external
apocalypse and internal annihilation that are already here, suggesting that modern unreal cities are not necessarily cities of the future but are the real spaces that we inhabit today.

In "The Wizard of Oz" Dorothy exclaimed, "I have a feeling we're not in Kansas any more," and we watched her with delight, knowing that she was not in Kansas any more. In modern and post-modern literature, when we encounter Oz and places that are even more outlandish and hallucinatory, we have to remind ourselves that we are unfortunately and unmistakably in Kansas, which is always a wasted, surreal landscape, unlike Rumi's hypothetical thirteenth-century Egypt of fluorescence, greenness, and prosperity. Only in Lessing's case, the standard pessimism of twentieth-century apocalyptic literature is slightly mitigated given her knowledge of Sufism. Although Lessing's resolution may not be as satisfying or as positive as the message in all Sufi poetry that is undoubtedly written by practicing Sufis, the influence of Sufism on Lessing has resulted in making her work more optimistic and more constructive than it might have been, and definitely more promising of a viable future than are the works of her contemporaries.

Lessing shows us desolation in the guise of unreal cities in much the same way that we distance intimate corners of our hearts by casting them in foreign and surreal images in our dreams. She writes persistently of the collapse of the old society and of an apocalypse triggered by various catastrophes: freezing temperatures, pollution, bombs, radioactive spills, or nuclear war. Assuming the role of prophet in Shikasta, she writes in desperation about the ignorant inhabitants of the unreal planet:
But there the young are, in their hordes, their gangs, their groups, their cults, their political parties, their sects, shouting slogans, infinitely divided, antagonistic to each other, always in the right, jostling for command. There they are—the future, and it is self-condemned. (174)

Here the narrator expects no "caravans of sugar"7 to arrive from a spiritual Egypt, and the characters are not "drunk with love"7 but with egoism and its resulting hatred. Likewise in The Memoirs of a Survivor the slow and mysterious disintegration of society as we know it is chronicled in an effort to frighten and awaken readers. Memoirs reflects the breakdown of the old order on the level of government as well as on the level of society and individuals. People who undergo this breakdown revert to a primitive clan state of barbarism and terror. The narrator/protagonist refers to the immediate threat of destruction as "it" that cannot be averted:

"It" is a force, a power, taking the form of earthquake, a visiting comet whose balefulness hangs closer night by night, distorting all thought by fear—"it" can be, has been, pestilence, a war, the alteration of climate, a tyranny that twists men's minds, the savagery of a religion. (153)

She concludes that "It, in short, is the word for helpless ignorance, or of helpless awareness . . . a word for man's inadequacy" (154). She also observes how, as a result of "it," people are forced to move out of the city in tribes, and those who remain behind resort to stealing and killing, growing their own food, and building air filters.

Against this background Lessing introduces Emily, the fourteen-year-old from the world behind the wall who must be prepared [in the Sufi
Way] for her future role as leader of the new and evolved society. Emily's case is at least more hopeful than the plight of her counterparts in apocalyptic literature by other twentieth-century writers, even if her destiny does not measure up to the joy of Rumi's narrator whose "mouth is on fire" to speak words of love and whose "soul weeps pearls" or poems full of wonderful mystical insights. As Emily develops, we witness growth in her inner world. Her guardian describes the nonexistent place behind the wall, which is really an abstract spiritual state similar to the Sufi states described in Rumi's poetry.

a few rotting planks lying about on earth [were] putting out shoots of green. I pulled the planks away, exposing clean earth and insects that were vigorously at their work of re-creation. I pulled back heavy lined curtains to let the sunlight in. The smell of growth came up strong from the stuffy old room. . . . (101)

Emily is accompanied in her struggle to transcend destruction by her lover Gerald, the young clan leader who never gives up his faith in the savage street-children; and as the last walls of the old civilization crumble, Emily, Gerald, the cat-like dog Hugo, and the band of children are led by a female presence into "another order of world altogether" (217). Emily cannot quite say, like Rumi's protagonist, "If all the world should pass away, I have, without the world, the wealth of a hundred worlds." However, she is transformed and she does survive the apocalypse in Memoirs, even if the reality of her inner life lacks the richness and cultivation of the lush lower Nile valley that nourished the land of Egypt in the thirteenth century—the physical place Rumi uses as an external manifestation of a positive spiritual state.8
Lessing’s *The Four-Gated City* also opens with a war-torn city, in this case London in the fifties and the scenes of bomb-sites; and the novel closes with the end of civilization when a mysterious accident contaminates the atmosphere with toxic fumes. The narrator explains, "This was a country where people could not communicate across the dark that separated them" (35). There are rumors that the pollution is caused by the wrecking of a submarine carrying radioactive missiles, or by the crashing of a plane carrying lethal nuclear devices. Survivors escape to different islands around England, and many years later, a new race of special children comes into being in the aftermath of the apocalypse, and these children are trained as "gardeners" or nurturers of the new society. They are gifted with powers of telepathy, foresight, benevolence, a knowledge of history, and the ability to transcend it. That is, new organs of perception, i.e., Sixth, Seventh, and more senses, have manifested in them.

Ultimately, it is these special survivors with whom Lessing would like her readers to be concerned, since unlike most modern writers she is able to conceive of a way out of the surreal realms of chaos and destruction, given her knowledge of The Sufi Way or The Path of Love. The solution Lessing offers her characters is not so satisfying as that available to Rumi’s narrator, who exclaims that even "If the soul goes I have the soul of the soul."9 Truly Sufi works are produced in a heightened spiritual state, and they express the endless faith in something beyond all materiality, even beyond heaven. In fact, Sufis reject both worlds because they believe one must not love God for fear of hell or hope of heaven. Hence, they speak, like Rumi does, of giving up the body as well as the soul, and of not being "confined to the body, for like Jesus I have a house in the fourth heaven."10
While there is something parallel in Lessing to such declarations of faith one regularly encounters in Sufism, Lessing’s writings do not reflect the certainty of Sufi poetry. Consequently the outcome of Sufi parallels in her novels is only a slightly mitigated destruction, or "shikasta" in Persian, which word and theme even has become the title of one of her novels. In Persian shikasta means "broken down, destroyed, decrepit, doleful, sad, and infirm." Indeed, all of these adjectives describe the state of the Planet Shikasta in Lessing’s novel by that name. Many others of Lessing’s titles also reflect this destruction: words in the titles of her novels such as "survivor, representative, diary, memoir, or notebook" suggest that only a single person or a single record is left behind to report the end of the world; and words like "hell, dark, storm, violence, or descent" in various titles forewarn the reader that the end is near, and that it will be grim.

Much more common in modern literature are depictions of cities in their last throes like these that Lessing portrays. In so far as she perceives the world to be headed toward annihilation, Lessing resembles most apocalyptic writers like T.S. Eliot, George Orwell, and countless others. However, unlike most other western writers who urge their readers to take heed in some fashion but who are paralyzed to act themselves, Lessing appropriates from Sufism the vantage point from which also to offer some solutions; she has more hope for an evolved society or the evolution of the whole cosmos based on her Sufi faith in spiritual growth and mystical transformation even under the worst of circumstances. For this reason, she unceasingly urges her readers to prepare themselves for the end in the same way that she prepares her
characters for the various inevitable catastrophes that never fail to fulfill her predictions.

Because of her insight into Sufism, Lessing writes not only about the time preceding an apocalypse, but also about its aftermath with the promise of a potentially positive outcome. She believes that breakdown is breakthrough, which means the breakdown of a society, or an individual, and the breakthrough to a higher, more advanced society, or a higher personal and spiritual understanding. Her post-Sufi works hold out hope which is a rare instance in modern and post-modern literature in which we are invited to go past the "stuffy old room" to see the sunshine and new growth, and to come somewhat closer to the fountain of Love that Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the Sufi mystic, was able to offer in his poetry once, a long time ago.

Since she writes about humans on earth (a wretched place according to many Sufis,) even when she disguises the earth as a far-away "Planet" or "Zone," Lessing's fiction does not approach the clarity and conviction of Rumi's poetry that is so certain and secure in the embrace and light of The Beloved, so sure of the existence of the riches of a spiritual Egypt. And yet Sufism equips Lessing with the assurance and optimism that she can pass on to her readers. Given her pervasive Sufi point of view, Lessing promises a flickering flame of hope for the future which is considerably more than the promises her contemporaries can make. In so far as she is able to carry her characters beyond death to the safety of Canopus, to the Presence of the One, or onto an uncontaminated island where evolved beings can be born, Lessing is able to establish a rare twentieth-century facsimile of the medieval Sufi mystics' "Egypt," that immaterial but most real
city of nothingness containing "the wealth of a hundred worlds,"\textsuperscript{11} where dwells the Beloved.
I would not be at all surprised to find out that this earth had been used for the purposes of experiment by more advanced creatures . . . that the dimensions for buildings affect us in ways we don't guess and that there might have been a science in the past which we have forgotten . . . that we may be enslaved in ways we know nothing about, befriended in ways we know nothing about . . . that our personal feeling about our situation in time, seldom in accordance with fact, so that we are always taken by surprise by "ageing," may be an indication for a different lifespan, in the past--but that this past, in biological terms, is quite recent, and so we have not come to terms with it psychologically . . . that artefacts of all kinds might have had (perhaps do have) functions we do not suspect . . . that the human race has a future planned for it more glorious than we can now imagine . . .

(Lessing, Sirian Experiments viii)
II

Lessing's "Sufism"

In Memoirs of a Survivor, Doris Lessing expresses her narrator's awareness of God or a higher power as the sensation of "being held in the hollow of a great hand" (101); in The Four-Gated City Martha Quest is involved in what she calls her "work." By trusting that "great hand" and through "work on oneself," the Sufi believes there is the possibility of achieving a higher state of being—not higher in the sense of "superior," but higher in the sense of becoming more than what one already is. In The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, Roberta Rubenstein points out that the word "work" "appears throughout esoteric and hermetic traditions, including Sufism, as the term for the discipline facilitating greater spiritual development" (142). I.e., The Sufi Path is one of many paths that teach the idea of "work on oneself" as a means to spiritual enlightenment. Perhaps for this reason, another Lessing critic, Mona Knapp,¹ argues that it is possible to appreciate Lessing without a deeper knowledge of Sufism, and that Lessing's novels lend themselves to various other interpretations as well. While I agree with this position to a degree, I still believe that there are numerous subtleties to Lessing's work that go unnoticed without a deeper knowledge of Sufism on the part of the critics.
Understanding and evaluating Lessing demand a firm grasp of The Sufi Way both because Lessing so openly has declared her central involvement with Sufi study since the sixties, and also because The Sufi Way is a tradition distinctive and competitive with other traditions and does not yield easily to a glossing over.

The Sufi Way covers a wide range of ideas and practices that, when followed and carried out with careful attention to all of one's self, can lead to the transformation of individuals and to the evolution of humankind that are at the heart of Lessing's message in every novel. Lessing says in a taped lecture, "A Writer's Encounter With Sufism," for Sufis "the child's slow progress into manhood or womanhood figures as only a stage in his development, for which the dynamic force is love—not either asceticism or the intellect." According to Sufis, all of humanity can be induced to grow harmoniously in this fashion if individuals were to take upon themselves the task of following The Sufi Path while remaining in life and at work, as expressed by the maxim "in the world, but not of it."2

Many who might be called "Sufis" have taught and led in varying manners that were appropriate to their times, circumstances, and geography. As Shah quotes Ahmet el-Badawi in The Way of the Sufi, "Sufi schools are like waves which break upon rocks: [they are] from the same sea, in different forms, for the same purpose" (269). And in order to stress the fact that they are different, Lessing quotes a Sufi teacher in her essay "An Ancient Way to New Freedom" who has said, "If you encounter two institutions calling themselves "Sufi," exactly the same, then one of them must be a
fake" (81). Sufis characterise fake cults or imitations as a fur coat that one wears only in winter and has no need for in warm weather or good times. In contrast, they encourage a way of living and a way of interpreting the world that one maintains always and everywhere. As Lessing says in "Writer's Encounter with Sufism," dervishes have been "kings, soldiers, poets, astronomers, educators, advisers and sages" in the past.

And today, a Sufi can be a scientist, a politician, a poet, a housewife, the usherette in a cinema, and may never be known as one, since Sufism may have nothing to do with outward appearance or behavior. It is an operation all the time, all over the world, in every country—sometimes openly, sometimes not. The people offering it can be well known . . . or they may teach secretly.3

Sufis are Muslims who engage in certain interrelated modes of piety and thought. In general Sufis contemplate the possibility of direct communion with God and seek this goal through a variety of special practices. Some Sufis dedicate their whole lives to attaining this communion; others engage in it occasionally. Most Sufis view direct experience, rather than teaching, as the only real way to learn, and feel that inner transformation can only be experienced, not discussed.4

The word "Sufi" has many meanings. We do not know its total etymology, but in Arabic, "soof" means "wool," which could refer to the coarse woolen garments which the wandering mendicants or dervishes wore. "Sufi" may have also been derived from
"ashab-i Suffa" in Arabic, meaning "the People of the Bench," referring to the inner circle of worshippers who gathered around Muhammad's mosque. The word "suffa" in this case refers to the "sofa" or bench on which the worshippers sat. Or "Sufi" may have been derived from "safa," meaning "purity." Sufis believe: "He that is purified by love is "safi," or "pure," and he who is purified by the Beloved is a "Sufi" (Bennett 47). To its adherents the word "Sufi" has come to mean love, and The Sufi Path is called "The Path of Love," referring to the search for God or one's Higher Self, with whom the Sufi mystic enters a love relationship. This is the reason why most Sufi poetry is written in the form of love poetry in which the poet addresses, beseeches, and longs for the Beloved.

The word "Sufism" has come to be accepted as the Western term for the word "tasawwuf," which, in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, refers to the thoughts and practices of Muslims who call themselves "Sufis." However, unlike the word "tasawwuf," "Sufism" does not convey the disparate forms of Sufi practice, and implies a degree of coherence and systematization that may not really have been present. The word "Sufism" varies greatly in its meaning both in academic and nonacademic circles in the West. In academic circles sometimes it is used to cover all Sufi thought and practice and in nonacademic circles it sometimes refers to more practical elements more closely aligned with the word "tasawwuf." But sometimes in nonacademic circles, especially among those who practice it, the word "Sufism" tends to foreground systematic Sufi thought not always associated with
"tasawwuf." On the other hand, a practicing Sufi in a Muslim society might say that a Sufi is a particularly good Muslim. 5

Sufi faith and practices have been conveyed to adepts in specialized ways. These "ways" have been diverse, given the different circumstances under which individual Sufi masters and members of the Sufi orders or tariqas (such as the Naqshbandi, Mevlevi, Rifa'i, Qalandari, Chishti, and Bektashi) lived, each corresponding to the inner realities of its particular time and place. Among Western academic circles and orientalists, these individuals and groups have variously been recognized as "real" Sufis, and their thought and practice, the substance of authentic "Sufism." 6 (For a detailed historical context see Appendix.)

On the other hand, more popular aspects of various Sufi orders that have been disseminated to the general populace by means of sacred dances, folk tales, love poetry, music, weaving, and all other forms of craftsmanship, literature, and art have been preferred and used among members of nonacademic circles to produce a revised and comprehensive system of what Sufis believe, say and do. Members of nonacademic circles have tended to study The Sufi Way in order to practice it, as opposed to the study of Sufic theory and history which is the general trend in academic circles. These popular adaptations of The Sufi Way have focused on a body of Sufi thought apart from many other practical elements or life styles that tended to characterize Sufis in other places and times. Herein I use the term "Sufism" for what modern practicing Sufis in nonacademic circles in the West identify as their inspiration for their way of life. The "Sufism" discussed in this work with
reference to Doris Lessing is restricted to this modern reconceptualization and consolidation by practicing Sufis in the West, and for Lessing, it serves as a school of thought comparable to other schools of thought and other "isms" such as Marxism, Feminism, and Jungianism, in which she has found a resonance of her own thoughts. In that regard, Lessing's appropriation of Sufi material is not true to The Sufi Way because Sufism is not a school of thought comparable to some other schools of thought, but is a way of life.7

A prominent proponent of Sufism in the West today is Idries Shah, whose lineage connects him to the Naqshbandi order in Afghanistan. He was born in India, lived in Afghanistan and moved to England in the 1960's. Today he teaches Sufism not as a tradition of the past, but rather as a contemporary body of knowledge, "a visible, vital force" that has a place in the twentieth-century West ("Writers' Encounter"). As Lessing says in "Writers' Encounter with Sufism,"

Sufism is not a study of past civilizations. It must be contemporary, or it is nothing. Why is it being offered again in the West now? For the simplest of reasons: Sufism works openly when it can, silently when it must. Even fifty years ago the churches had so strong a hold on thought and morals that the introduction of this ancient way of thinking would have been impossible. But in an open society Sufism can be offered openly.

As "the product of an intensively varied education," Shah has "patented scientific devices; he has been journalist, explorer,
traveler; he has studied archeology, geology, economics, politics, writes books on travel, anthropology, magic, Sufism, each unique in its field. ... He corresponds in Arabic, Persian, English, French, Spanish, with experts in a dozen different fields. He is also a husband and a father of four" ("Writers' Encounter"). He has collected, translated and written thousands of Sufi tales about various ancient Sufi orders (tariqas); and has made them available to the Western public through his books and lectures. He has also established and now runs a publishing firm, and he has founded and runs the Institute for Cultural Research in London.

An important aspect of Sufism that especially disturbs the individualist Westerner is the idea that in order to follow the difficult Sufi Path, one must have a guide (shaikh or murshid), and must have absolute trust in him. Without a guide, one can read all the books of instruction for a thousand years, but can achieve nothing (Schimmel 103). Lessing says,

every person comes to a point when the need is felt for further inner growth; then it is wise to look for the guide, the teacher, the exemplar; that figure central to Sufism, who shows others what is possible. This person, the product of a certain kind of varied and intensive education will be master not of one trade but of a dozen, learned through pressures of necessity created by the people by whom he has been surrounded since birth. ("Writers' Encounter")

The image of the guide or master is frequently identified by Sufis with the true beloved who cures the lover's heart (Schimmel
104). The master's task is to open the eyes of the adept (murid) to act as a physician of the soul. Shah serves as such a guide to members of his Institute in London, among whom Lessing figures as an active participant. About the role of the teacher Lessing says, "God is love can be the highest experience one can have, or it can just be some words scrawled on a poster carried by some poor old tramp. In between these two are a thousand levels of experience. How to guide the student from one level to the next is the knowledge of a teacher" ("Writers' Encounter").

Lessing was first introduced to Sufism when she was asked to review Shah's book, The Sufis, in 1964. Since then, she has been a committed student of Sufism and has remained closely associated with Shah and his Institute. Particularly her later works, including her science-fiction series, Canopus in Argos, show the mark of Sufi thought and are in fact meaningless unless viewed as Sufi allegories. While she has always resisted aligning herself with any particular "ism," Lessing frequently incorporates Shah's teachings in her novels, as she does in the dedication to The Four Gated City in which she quotes a dervish teaching story from one of Shah's collections of tales, The Way of the Sufi. Lessing explains her inclination toward Sufi thought: "As for people like myself, unable to admire organized religions of any kind, this philosophy shows where to look for answers to questions put by society and by experience" ("Writers' Encounter").

As stated earlier, the term "Sufi" is too diverse to allow for a comprehensive definition in a brief chapter such as this; it is impossible to make generalizations about the practice of the
"Sufis," as each Sufi order or tarīqa has its own unique form of training and ritual--often unknown to the uninitiated researcher trying to capture the essence of its faith in mere words. This is why some Sufis, when asked, will simply say, "A Sufi is a Sufi"--not to be cryptic, but because it goes against the Sufis' grain to be pigeonholed. Such a definition is, as Lessing says, "an acknowledgment of the difficulty of defining something that must be experienced--and in a different way for every person according to his or her state of development." As Sufis believe, "it is only those who taste who can know" ("Writers' Encounter"), just as nothing that we might be told about a rose can give us the smell of the rose. Taste or smell, like any spiritual experience, are things that are very intimately inside us, and they only can be felt, not defined or explained.

In the following pages a more detailed study of the Sufi tale is offered as an example of one of the "ways" in which Sufi thought and faith can be transmitted. The preference in this chapter to discuss the Sufi tale as a sample form of transmission is weighted by the fact that this is a main tool that Shah uses to introduce "tasawwuf'" or The Sufi Way to the West, and also by the fact that Lessing has used Sufi tales as epilogues in various parts of Landlocked, the first novel she published following her introduction to Sufi thought, and in the opening of The Four-Gated City, as well as sometimes emulated the tales in her own writing. Furthermore, Lessing has been closely involved in the dissemination of these tales in the West by way of public readings of Sufi tales and announcing the publication of collections by Shah, as well as by
writing introductions to collections of tales such as Learning How to Learn by Idries Shah; The Tale of the Four Dervishes And Other Sufi Tales by Amina Shah, and Kalila and Dimna, Selected Fables of Bidpai by Ramsay Wood.

The choice in this chapter to present the popular character Nasreddin Hodja as a sample protagonist of Sufi tales is also dictated by the fact that Lessing's stories about the character Maudie in The Diaries of Jane Somers have a flavor of Nasreddin Hodja's humor in them. The following pages about the Sufi tale, then, do not represent the body of Sufi thought or practice by any means, but they magnify a minute portion of the enigma that is Sufism, to give the reader at least some idea of the breadth and depth of The Sufi Way.

There exist innumerable Sufi tales that were originally told orally and later written down for the main purpose of transmitting the Sufi faith and practice (tasavvuf) to future generations. In the Middle East where these tales are told and retold, they are not considered to be "for children only"; rather, they are said to contain several layers of meaning which render them suitable for anyone. Shah likens the Sufi tale to a peach: "A person may be emotionally stirred by the exterior as if the peach were lent to you. You can eat the peach and taste a further delight... You can throw away the stone—or crack it and find a delicious kernel within. This is the hidden depth" (Shah, The Sufis 88). It is in this manner that Shah invites his audience to receive the Sufi tale; if one does not seek to uncover the kernel, one will have accomplished nothing more than looking at the peach or regarding the
tale as merely amusing and superficial, while others may internalize the tale and allow it to touch them.

In addition to the intentional layering in its content and structure, the Sufi tale also acquires embellishments of many more layers as it undergoes the natural transformation of traveling across time and space. Hence every story also becomes a new story in the retelling, acquiring new twists and mysteries depending on the idiosyncrasies of the particular storyteller and on the context in which the story is being told. Lessing likens these longer tales to a ball of magic thread which "You unwind and unwind, going back and back, to long before the birth of Islam, and then still farther back, and you find yourself thousands of years away, and still the thread is unwinding, with no end in sight" (Shah, The Tale of the Four Dervishes xi). One story leads the way to another, and another, stories unfolding like Chinese boxes until the audience is lost in the maze. Finally no one cares about the very first king who had abandoned his kingdom in search of wisdom, and who had met four dervishes, each of whom had told a different story which had unfolded into many more stories. At that point of abandonment, the lesson is quietly learned, sometimes unbeknownst to the hearer. The most important purpose of enchanting the audience with this ball of magic thread, in addition to entertaining, is to blur the black and white distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad, cause and effect, villain and saint, guilty and innocent. Actions do not necessarily provoke the reactions one is conditioned to expect, the future is not always shaped by one's plans, and one's life and behavior are not as independently governed by the self as one would
like to believe. On the contrary, everything is infinitely interconnected, even if through bizarre and unexpected ties.

It is crucial to note here that stories translated by Shah frequently do not fit the above description of the longer Sufi tales. Rather, Shah eliminates many embellishments which characterize the original tales, thus considerably shortening them. He makes sure that the kernel of the stories is not completely obscured amid centuries of accretions and tall-tales. Thus, for instance, stories about Mulla Nasrudin or Nasreddin Hodja are only a few sentences long in Shah's translation. In contrast, the same stories might be several pages long in the translation by Alice Geer Kelsey, who narrates the stories primarily in order to delight her audience. Sometimes, Shah's renderings consist almost only of the moral itself, narrated to make its intent more accessible to the Western ear unaccustomed to search for Sufi wisdom amidst layers of narrative. However, this is not to say that tales interpreted by Shah do not have still deeper layers of meaning beneath the moral to which Shah points.

On the whole, all tales, whether shortened or not, still sufficiently disorient the audience's rational faculties so that a potential channel for hearing the story's wisdom can be established. Lessing does this in many of her later narratives, including Memoirs of a Survivor, Briefing for a Descent into Hell, and Shikasta. In Substance Under Pressure Betsy Draine argues that it is the novelist's task to mark boundaries between worlds very clearly, which Lessing doesn't always do in Memoirs, and which poses a problem for the reader. Draine believes that Memoirs falls short
of accomplishing this fully because Lessing is unable to make her reader "[stay] with the experience of disorientation" (p.141). However, it is precisely because Lessing wants to keep her reader disoriented and to break formatory thinking that she doesn't provide clear markers. Assuming she emulates Sufi tales, it must be Lessing's hope that the reader will relinquish her usual thought patterns and let the story guide her to a fresh space and time.

The Sufi tale aims to shake the audience's existing worldview to such a point that one stops looking at the world through any single lens. The tale allows for no fixed points of reference, daring its audience to flirt with boundaries. It aims gently to remove blinders, to show the greater picture. The expected logical result is eliminated by the change in the frame that shakes the participating party in the tale and the audience out of their habitual thought patterns. In The Tao of Physics Fritjof Capra\(^9\) writes, "the joke . . . is meant to produce . . . [a] liberating laughter . . . with a sudden intuitive insight . . . . In the split-second [in which one understands] a joke, [one experiences] a moment of enlightenment. [And] it is well known that this moment must come spontaneously, that it cannot be achieved by explaining the joke" (24), or by intellectual analysis. Similarly, Sufi tales are meant to serve as tools for growth and enlightenment. The Sufi teacher knows that the depth to which a tale succeeds in touching its hearer and the degree to which the tale is decoded depends completely upon the hearer's level of being. Hence at any one telling, only the received portion of the tale can be considered the "real" story. The transmitter of Sufi tales is aware that for every
single telling of a tale, there emerge as many "real" tales as the number of hearers in the audience. Knowing this, the Sufi teacher does not only expect multiple interpretations but intentionally creates tales so as to evoke them.

Nasreddin Hodja or Mulla Nasrudin is a recurrent folk-hero in many Sufi anecdotes. Stories and jokes about him have been made available to English speakers by various translators, including Idries Shah. Hodja is known and enjoyed by all in the Middle East as a spiritual teacher (mulla or hodja), a fool, a joker, a judge, a trickster as well as a victim, whose witty stories have been and are still told in the teahouses, coffeeshouses, homes, and over radios throughout North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. It is debatable whether Hodja really lived or whether he is only legendary; however, some scholars are convinced that he lived in Central Anatolia in the thirteenth century during the reign of the Anatolian Seljuks (Selçuklular), attended a Muslim theological school (medrese) in Sivrihisar, worked as a prayer leader (imam) in the mosque, taught in a medrese, and was a government official. There is even a grave on a hilltop in Akshehir, Turkey, to indicate that he did live, and there is no question about Hodja's popularity; he and his patient, long-eared donkey, who is his best friend, are like family to every Turk.10

Hodja demonstrates the interconnectedness in life when, while he is walking along a deserted street in the night, he sees a troupe of horsemen coming toward him. Frightened out of his wits, he jumps over a wall and finds himself in a graveyard. The horsemen follow him and see Hodja cowering with fear. "What are you doing there?"
they ask him, and Hodja replies, "It's a lot more complicated than you think! I am here because of you, you are here, because of me!" (Shah, The Sufis 81).

On the surface, this is a great joke and the point is obvious. We can take the Mulla at his word. On further examination, the tale also illustrates the inevitable interconnectedness of human life—that we can do nothing without affecting others, and that our actions open up infinite new possibilities and have unlimited consequences and repercussions. Still deeper, is embedded the fundamental understanding between the Sufi Master and the disciple: that the former needs the latter as much as the student needs the teacher to move up the evolutionary Sufi ladder. They are co-dependent, so to speak. Yet another layer might be that until the student appears, the teacher is not yet a teacher, and until the student recognizes the "teacher," s/he does not know what s/he is seeking, and who s/he herself is. The story sets up a simple, humorous circumstance under which the master and disciple can recognize, then in turn identify, one another: "I am here because of you, and you are here because of me!" Perhaps a deeper layer would disclose the unbelieving novice on the Path who fears, rather than loves, God, and yet who cannot escape God's presence since God is everywhere, in life and in death, on the deserted street as well as in a graveyard.

The Sufi approach to knowledge is a practical one. Sufis feel that although books have their place in one's development, true knowledge cannot be attained only through books. Sufis are more interested in immediate knowledge that comes from experience. Sufic
education favors a holistic approach to learning in which students are asked to see and understand with the heart and with all of their being, not the mind alone, or the body alone. Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi (d. 1280) of Central Anatolia, the Master of the Whirling Dervishes (Mevlevis) says, "If you grasp knowledge through the heart, it is a friend. If you limit it to the body alone, it is a snake" (Friedlander 58). Similarly, Sufis shun a purely academic approach to learning. The paradox, however, is that Sufis who condemn book learning are at the same time the most productive, prolific writers in Islamic history, and their theoretical books are not very enjoyable to read. On the other hand, Sufi love poetry and teaching tales do not only entertain the mind, but nourish the soul. Nasreddin Hodja demonstrates the anti-intellectualism of Sufis in the following tale:

Hodja, ferrying a pedant across a piece of rough water, said something ungrammatical to him. "Have you never studied grammar?" asked the scholar.

"No."

"Then half of your life has been wasted."

A few minutes later Nasreddin turned to the passenger.

"Have you ever learned how to swim?"

"No. Why?"

"Then all your life is wasted—we are sinking!"

(Shah, The Sufis 65)

All audiences, whether eastern or western, Sufi or not, laugh at this joke. On an intellectual level, it is easy to side with Nasreddin against the pedant; however, why not laugh at Nasreddin,
too, if rowing and swimming are all he can do? In Sufic
understanding, "swimming" is a metaphor for survival. Therefore,
the Sufi is required to refine properly all of his/her faculties in
order to adequately survive life. On a spiritual level, the story
stresses the first half of being "in the world but not of it." It
is not enough to be well-versed in Sufi thought, i.e., to be not so
much "of the world," without first being fully "in the world,"
capable of the basic necessities of living, such as swimming, to
stay alive; and only when one is both "in" and "not of" the world at
the same time, is one's life truly not wasted.

Sufis do not advocate that people should abandon their worldly
duties. On the contrary, they say that the treasure which a
would-be disciple seeks should derive from his/her work in the
world. They call for a commitment to the evolution of all of
humankind through the struggles that an everyday-living provides.
Practical work is considered to be the means through which the
seeker can do self-work, whereby s/he becomes perfected. Throughout
history Sufis have always followed ordinary professions to earn
their livelihoods. Their surnames point to these professions:
*saqati*, "huckster;" *hallaj*, "cotton carder;" *nasaj,*
"weaver;" *warraq*, "bookseller" or "copyist;" *qawariri,*
"glassmaker;" *haddad,* "blacksmith;" and *banna,* "mason"
(Schimmel 84)

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi warns both the academician and the
theologian: "When will you cease to worship and to love the
pitcher? When will you begin to look for the water? Know the
difference between the color of the wine, and the color of the
glass" (Shah, *The Sufis* 138). In other words, if confused and incomplete people make money or become professional successes by worshipping "the pitcher they still remain confused and incomplete" (Shah, *The Sufis* 138). Life merely has happened to them, their behavior continually changing with their mood, state of health, the weather, or other external stimuli. Lessing reminds us in her lecture on Sufism of an old Sufi who was called "The Lord of the Skies" who said that Sufis find strange the belief that one can progress only by improvement, for they realize that "man is just as much in need of stripping off the accretions to reveal a knowing essence as he is of adding anything." Sufism is also carried out "by exclusion of those things which make man blind and deaf" ("Writers' Encounter").

In the introduction to *The Golden Notebook* Lessing calls the present system of education in the West "indoctrination," and she believes that "[w]e have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination" (xvii). She feels that we still teach the current prejudices of our particular time and culture, and we mold and pattern people to fit the needs of our particular society. In her lecture on Sufism she adds, "I am sure that the manifold talents, creativity, inventiveness of young children who can sing and dance and draw and tell tales and make verses and whose view of life is so very clear and direct could go on into adult life and not disappear as tends to happen in our system of education" ("Writers' Encounter"). The Sufi aim, therefore, is to encourage balanced and creative beings with properly working minds, hearts and bodies, who are adequately prepared to encounter the "Beloved."
The term *taqiyyah* in Arabic refers to the "pious dissimulation of one's true opinions" (Hodgson, Vol 1 381). In the Sufi experience, it was natural for a dervish to cloak his teaching intentionally under various disguises as the need arose. The reason behind concealment is threefold: Sufis believe that (1) the truth must be protected from the ignorant, that it is unsuitable to expose it to those who cannot yet understand it; (2) those who are not properly prepared to receive the truth must also be protected, until they can absorb it; and (3) the bearers of truth must be protected against persecution. Scientists as well as spiritual and political leaders have been persecuted for publicly sharing their discoveries or insights at various points in time, and one needs only look at history to see cases in which the practice of *taqiyyah* has been proven necessary and right. One of the most popular cases in the history of *tasawwuf* is that of Mansur al-Hallaj who refused to practice *taqiyyah* or dissimulation, and who publicly declared himself to be one with God. His ecstatic exclamation, "I am the Absolute Truth," or "I am God," was so threatening to the Abbasid caliphate that he was tortured and put to death in 922 C.E. He was stoned, his hands and feet were cut off, and he was left hanging on the gallows overnight before he was decapitated and burned. And we are only too familiar with his Western counterparts from Socrates to Galileo. Consequently Sufis have at times operated underground, and their teachings have been subtle and obscure. However, "hidden" does not mean "extinct." Sa'di of Shiraz, the thirteenth-century Persian Sufi poet, reassures us of this: "If a gem falls into mud it is still valuable./ [But if] dust ascends to heaven, it remains valueless" (Shah, *The Way of the Sufi* 83).
Not only are Sufi faith and thought and their transmitter intentionally disguised in order to protect them from disbelievers and from those unprepared to receive them, but the truth is also kept within, because Sufis believe that it is not right to explain the experiences of the heart with words formulated by the intellect. The only proper form of communicating anything real is carried out from heart to heart, without words. This is why The Sufi Path is called "The Path of Love" and the aspirant a "lover" for whom explanations and apologies not only are considered unnecessary but are to be avoided lest they interfere with the exercising of true communion with the Beloved. If judged by these principles, the following pages will prove to represent just what Sufis conclude one must avoid doing. Nonetheless, it is my hope here that an analysis and clarification of Sufi tendencies in Lessing's novels will facilitate an understanding of The Sufi Way as a body of knowledge worthy of investigation and as a vital and natural force in Lessing's "Work."
III
Lessing's "Work"

A writer who offered us her views on communism, feminism, mysticism, human relationships, politics, and life in general, and who took us to outer space when the earth proved too small for her visions, Doris Lessing appears---on the surface---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.¹ In fact, even works previous to her exposure to Sufi ideas reveal her natural inclination for Sufi thought and demonstrate ways in which she was already working through Sufi-like processes of self-study and development when she came upon The Sufis by Idries Shah in 1964. In a letter she wrote to Roberta Rubenstein, Lessing expresses this inclination: "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" (121). The very core of Lessing's insights has always been the same---that is, the need for perpetual evolution on all levels: individual, national, world-wide, and universal. Furthermore, as Rubenstein notes in The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing, Lessing's concern in evolution is as much

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biological as spiritual (128), considering the various epigraphs quoted in The Four-Gated City, some of which are scientific and others philosophical in nature. Overall, Sufi thought has confirmed Lessing's insights and validated what she had suspected all along: the possibility of individual and world melioration. 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 B, a product of Lessing's so-called "space-fiction" era in the eighties, 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" (49). These words recall Saul Greene's words to Anna Wulf in The Golden Notebook, a product of Lessing's "Communist" era in the sixties: "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" (618).

Following her immersion in Sufi study in the sixties, Lessing became more didactic in her novels in which analogies to Sufic experience are more overtly suggested and more clearly applicable. In contrast to Anna Wulf in The Golden Notebook, for instance, the narrator in The Memoirs of a Survivor--a novel written twelve years later--is taken much further in her self discovery, which suggests that perhaps Lessing now knows (and does not only intuit) that there is a further place to which one can go. While she could not have pushed Anna with her context any further, she is able to carry the
narrator of *Memoirs* into new worlds which she creates (and which she later explores at greater length in her space-fiction). The space behind the wall of the living room in *Memoirs* 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 *Memoirs*, 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.

Lessing writes about a sense of duty in *Memoirs*, and this same sense often results in Lessing's sacrificing her art to her teaching, which is apparent especially in her space fiction. These novels read more like historical texts than novels, which was in fact Lessing's intention when she wrote and referred to the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series as "Archives" and "Chronicles." In *Shikasta* lessing's introduction of background facts is mystical, implying a hierarchy of the ruled and the rulers, or the disciples and the initiates within a cosmic order. This strongly other-worldly nature of *Shikasta* is further complicated when Lessing introduces the acronym, "SOWF," which she calls the "Substance Of We Feeling"—a substance necessary for humanity's survival. This acronym is so close to the word "SUFI" that it is impossible to overlook the implied connection.

A significant change in Lessing's fictive technique in her post-Sufi novels is her use of parables. She does not only directly
employ Sufi parables in the dedication to, for instance, *The Four-Gated City*, but she also attributes Sufi—or Sufi-like—anecdotes to her characters. Despite such intentional insertions or subconscious borrowings from Sufi material, Lessing denied in a letter to Mona Knapp that *The Four-Gated City* "owed anything to Sufism" (102). This disclaimer once again reinforces my argument that the Sufi Way is so familiar to Lessing that the two cannot be separated in her novels, and Lessing's writings that resonate to Sufi thought should be credited as much to Lessing's own inherent affinity to mysticism as to Sufi literature itself. Sufi traits are also attributed to Maudie in *The Diaries of Jane Somers*, a character reminiscent of Nasreddin Hodja, the popular folk-figure in the Middle East about whom there exist an infinite number of humorous Sufi teaching tales. In Maudie's case, the anecdotes about her are retold by other characters in the novel.

Lessing also structures many of her narratives in the form of parables and fables; this is the case in *The Marriages Between Zones 3, 4, and 5*, *The Making of the Representative* for Planet 8 and *The Fifth Child*, each of which offer enigmatic lessons that make sense in the Sufic context, and whose narratives have the unmistakable flavor of a parable or a fairy tale: "You ask how the Canopean Agents seemed to us in the times of The Ice" (3), begins the narrator in the opening of *The Representative*; and *The Fifth Child* all but opens by saying Once upon a time: "Harriet and David met each other at an office party . . . " (3) and a few pages later, "The first baby, Luke, was born in the big bed . . . " (17).
For Sufis madness is a step toward enlightenment. Schizophrenia or multiple personality disorders are not treated as illnesses, but are accepted as signs of a person's incomplete state and of his/her need to work on him/herself. Roberta Rubenstein discusses Lessing's indebtedness also to R. D. Laing whose position on schizophrenia is similar to the Sufi position, in that Laing too regards schizophrenia as "a natural process of mind-healing"; that is, madness or loss of one's self is regarded as a positive affliction that eventually can help one achieve self-knowledge and true identity. Sufis believe the mad are mad because they can see more, and yet are not developed enough to comprehend their "hallucinations," while the enlightened are those who survive their madness and who can understand their "visions." The Golden Notebook, then, (despite the fact that it was written before Lessing's exposure to Sufism,) is a very "Sufi" book, in which Anna Wulf has a bout with madness from which she emerges more whole than before. Lessing also explores madness at length in The Four Gated City in which Linda, Mark's "mad" wife, develops telepathic powers and becomes a wise one who survives the apocalypse at the end of the novel. Along similar lines, Rubenstein studies the madness of Charles Watkins in Lessing's Briefing for a Descent into Hell as an inner space voyage in which Watkins "is periodically interrupted by the medical staff's observations on their patient's mental condition, and their disagreements about appropriate treatment" (184). Through Watkins's experiences, Lessing blurs the fine line between madness and extra sensory perception.
In *Substance under Pressure* Betsy Draine recognizes Lessing's tendency to commit to the role of a spiritual guide who will move the reader to "a correct, or at least a desirable state of consciousness" (181), and she further addresses Lessing's tendency to preach and her "moralizing urge." She argues that Lessing does this "whenever she feels the burden of evil to be just too heavy to be borne in silence" (167). As a student of Sufi thought, Lessing does this also because she has made it her mission to spread the word of the Sufis. Regardless of whether she strictly follows and advocates the Sufi Path, Lessing manifests a strong sense of duty to teach and to demonstrate the development of consciousness through daily struggle and much suffering. To this end, she subordinates her characters to her message. She appears to be only secondarily interested in a protagonist as a well-rounded person and character in her own right. For instance in *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf is presented in choppy, kaleidoscopic segments, and Martha Quest in *The Children of Violence* series, who is named after her occupation, the quest for herself, is fragmented in the many small pieces of a mosaic. With the introduction of the narrator in *The Memoirs*, a switch takes place in Lessing's characters: from here on, they are not even fragmented, but are almost nonexistent; they become harder to recognize as "real" persons living "normal" lives, but become only functional: they are there to serve Lessing's didactic purpose.

Moving further into the realm of science-fiction in the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series, Lessing eliminates even that small role of the protagonists, not allowing them to carry the story line; they
are now two-dimensional abstractions that serve as tools to demonstrate an allegory in which Lessing articulates her view of humankind and history. Individuals are important only because of the ideas they represent. This is not to say that Lessing's works should only be read allegorically, but that they lend themselves very readily to allegorical interpretation. For instance the mainland or mainplanet Canopus, named after an astronomical constellation, and the planets around it—Shikasta, Planet 8, Volyen, and Sirius—constitute a parallel to our solar system. In the preface to Shikasta Lessing writes by way of explanation, "It is by now commonplace to say that novelists everywhere are breaking the bonds of the realistic novel because what we all see around us becomes daily wilder, more fantastic, incredible...fact can be counted on to match our wildest inventions" (ix). Having exhausted the possibilities in the existing, visible world, Lessing creatively appropriates the world of fantasy in which she can show what is possible. As she writes in the preface to The Sirian Experiments, "It has been said that everything man is capable of imagining has its counterpart somewhere else, in a different level of reality" (xiii). Therefore space fiction serves Lessing—for a time—as the appropriate tool with which she can express her insights into human consciousness and illustrate her conviction that we must learn to expand our minds to new ways of seeing, thinking, and being if we wish to survive.

In The Making of the Representative for Planet 8, characters cannot even keep the same name for long, but change their names as their nature and allegorical roles on the planet change. For instance, anyone involved in building is named "Masson" for the
stretch of time that he remains a builder. (As Shah points out in *The Sufis*, it cannot be coincidental that the Masons of the middle ages, members of a fraternal order involved in the development of human consciousness, were almost certainly intermingled with "Sufi Builders" [215].) The effect of the subordination of characters to Lessing's teaching is that we are hardly concerned with them as heroes and heroines but rather in their allegorical role in the planet's evolution, just as Lessing is interested in the role of individuals in the evolution of the whole of the human race within the expanse of the universe. In her preface to *The Sirian Experiments* Lessing writes, "I would so like it if reviewers and readers could see this series, *Canopus in Argos: Archives*, as a framework that enables me to tell (I hope) a beguiling tale or two; to put questions, both to myself and to others; to explore ideas and sociological possibility" (ix). In her preface to *Shikasta* she shares her "exhilaration that comes from being set free into a larger scope, with more capacious possibilities and themes" (ix). She adds, "It was clear I had made --or found--a new world for myself, a realm where the petty fates of planets, let alone individuals, are only aspects of cosmic evolution expressed in the rivalries and interactions of great galactic Empires: Canopus, Sirius . . . " (ix).

In her latest novels, *The Diaries of Jane Somers*, *The Good Terrorist*, and *The Fifth Child*, Lessing once again introduces memorable characters who are troubled in their souls in a very Lessingesque manner, reminiscent of *The Golden Notebook* of twenty-five years ago. However, Lessing's concerns still do not
stop at the level of individuals on earth, but go far beyond the visible world; she wants her protagonists to make efforts on a cosmic level where they will contribute to a universal growth and the survival of humanity, and her overall message in all of her novels and space fiction adds up to this common cause.

Characters such as Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook*, or Martha Quest in *The Four Gated City*, or the narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* are irrelevant in themselves; likewise, the lives of the unnamed masses who suffer Shikasta’s fate in *Shikasta*, or Al Ith who suffers the alienation of the wise in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*, or both the representatives and the represented who have to be annihilated in *The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight* are also of no consequence; and it is irrelevant whether Alice in *The Good Terrorist* and Janna in *The Diaries of Jane Somers* are "successful" in their daily struggles. What matters ultimately is all their contribution to the greater plan. Saul Greene, Anna’s "Other” self in *The Golden Notebook*, describes his contribution to this common cause:

There are a few of us in the world, we rely on each other even though we don’t know each other all the time. We’re a team, we’re the ones who haven’t given in, who’ll go on fighting. I tell you, Anna, sometimes I pick up a book and I say: Well so you’ve written it first, have you? Good for you. OK then I won’t have to write it. (542)

In this and other works, in keeping with the Sufi tradition, Lessing stresses the importance of commitment to self-remembering so that one may live by the guidance of one’s mind, body and heart, and make
discoveries about the self who perpetually approaches that elusive shadow of "the Other" one is to know. Lessing, like the Sufis, wants us to become responsible for the small part we are privileged to play in the greater evolution of humanity and of the universe by fulfilling our individual destinies.

"Humanity" is a big word; however, in Lessing's case we have to take her use of the word seriously. She is not concerned with the social or political reform of humanity, but believes that each of us has a niche to fill, or a part of the pattern in a large oriental carpet—or the cosmos—to color-in. Even if we may not take ourselves seriously, Lessing does, and she insists on including us in a larger plan in which a person is both unique and individual and also completely subordinate to the whole, as a finger is to the hand—that is, we are both ourselves and subjects of the larger community of humankind. Nowhere does Lessing prescribe any particular methods for acquiring this balance, beyond demanding that we pay attention to our unique place in the universe. She puts no restrictions on us, but appears to believe in the essential ingredient of time to be one's best teacher. Perhaps as a result of her insights into Sufi teachings which encourage perpetual self-study and growth and that do not recognize achievement of any goals as an end in itself, Lessing often carries her characters through to the end of their lives; most of the protagonists in her lengthy novels not only grow old in the process of their lives' "work," but also die.

In addition to her fictional characters who work to rise to a higher level of being for the sake of a greater common cause,
Lessing also speaks frequently in her prefaces, afterwords, essays and lectures of actual, nonfictional persons such as Edward Wilson, the explorer and scientist, and Idries Shah, the main proponent of Sufism in the West, who is a writer, businessman and scientist. What these persons share with each other and with Lessing's characters is their ways of learning by living through "crammed and thoughtful" times (Lessing, "Ancient Way" 81). Lessing offers us these lives as possible role models. Whether it is Wilson's journey after Penguin eggs in the South Pole, Anna's struggle to overcome her writer's block, Martha's search for harmony, the Memoirs' narrator's courageous maturing process, Al Ith's sacrifice for the sake of educating those on a lower level than herself, Doeg's painfully prolonged death, or Alice and Janna's struggles with themselves and their friends, Lessing provides us with testimonials on real souls, experiencing real emotions.

It is irrelevant that Martha Quest's island is only Lessing's vision, or that the black iron egg out of which the new humanity is born is supernatural, or that Shikasta, the plains of Al Ith's territory, or Planet Eight cannot be located on a map. Lessing hardly worries about "reality" with regard to the externals. She instead concentrates on precisely mapping out the inner worlds of her characters, and she does this especially carefully in her space fiction. Therefore, when we feel disappointed that Lessing is exploring spaces which are not familiar to us, we need to stop and consider whether these foreign territories do not in fact correspond to the lands which we know in our dreams and the places which we experience in our minds. And if so, then Lessing deserves our
gratitude for her part in familiarizing us with these plains and for finally mapping out "the twilight zones" for us. We have much to learn about the art of inner Work from Anna Wulf, Saul Greene, Martha Quest, Al Ith, Johor, Doeg, Alice, or Janna, all of whom belong to that same team of "boulder-pushers" on the Sufi path, who, through their individual struggles within and "Work" on themselves, have persevered and born the cross of our moral and spiritual education.
There's a great black mountain. It's human stupidity. There are a group of people who push a boulder up the mountain. When they've got a few feet up, there's a war, or the wrong sort of revolution, and the boulder rolls down—not to the bottom, it always manages to end a few inches higher than when it started. So the group of people put their shoulders to the boulder and start pushing again. Meanwhile, at the top of the mountain stand a few great men. Sometimes they look down and nod and say: Good, the boulder-pushers are still on duty. But meanwhile we are meditating about the nature of space, or what it will be like when the world is full of people who don't hate and fear and murder.

'Hmm. Well I want to be one of the great men on top of the mountain.'

'Bad luck for both of us, we are both boulder-pushers.'

Lessing, The Golden Notebook 627-28
IV

Sufi Allegories in Lessing’s Vision

In various interviews, Doris Lessing has maintained that her change of interest from utopian politics to religion or mysticism is not really such a radical one, and that both areas of interest deal with a psychological understanding of people, of groups, and of social developments. Furthermore, Lessing claims in a letter to critic Mona Knapp that The Golden Notebook (1962), written before she encountered Sufism (1964), is her “most ‘Sufi’ book” (13). In the same letter, dated 12 June 1982, Lessing says, “I became interested in the Sufi way of thought because I was already thinking like that, before I had heard of Sufis or Sufism” (13). This is in fact the case when one evaluates The Golden Notebook, fragmented necessarily to reflect the many aspects of Anna Wulf’s life, from the Sufi point of view.¹ Even though The Golden Notebook was written without Lessing’s prior knowledge of Sufism, it clearly anticipates her turn to Sufism, while a later novel, such as The Memoirs of a Survivor (1975), builds upon that turn. A Sufi reading of The Golden Notebook and Memoirs allows on the one hand a useful additional way of reading some of the events in The Golden Notebook, and on the other hand, provides a necessary way of reading some of the events in Memoirs. Sufism accounts for the difference in Lessing’s vision between these two novels.

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The necessity for individual and cosmic evolution and the idea that men and women do not know themselves nor their potentials are at the heart of Sufi thought and are the main factors that drew Lessing to Sufism. Idries Shah's interpretations and evaluation of Sufism only reinforced Lessing's natural inclination toward belief in an evolution of a more whole society, and she readily incorporated a Sufi perception of human beings in her very involved and lengthy novels. Furthermore, unlike the case with most "isms" that she rejected at some point or other, Lessing has remained a devoted advocate of Sufi ideas, perhaps because of the comprehensive nature of Sufism. The metaphor of a fresh branch that has been cut from a tree is used by Sufis to define the imminent tragedy of humanity. Sufis say "[the branch] is full of sap, happy because it does not yet know that it has been cut off. Ignorant of the damage which it has suffered it may be--it will know in due time. Meanwhile you cannot reason with it. This severance, this ignorance, these are the states of men" (Shah, Way of the Sufi 72). Similarly, Anna in The Golden Notebook writes in her diary, "I came home thinking that somewhere at the back of my mind when I joined the [Communist] Party, was a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live" (16)). Sufis see human beings as incomplete and expect them to transcend their merely human state of incompletion through "Work" in The Sufi Way.² This is not only the situation of humanity and its potential in most of Lessing's novels, but is also intentionally stressed in the lives of her characters.
In *The Golden Notebook* and in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* Lessing portrays the discomfort her protagonists feel when faced with social and ideological corruption and fragmentation, their own and that of the rest of the world. Assuming the Sufi context here allows us an additional reading of *The Golden Notebook*: Ella, Anna's fictional double, thinks to herself, "probably they were all like this, all in fragments, not one of them a whole, reflecting a whole life, a whole human being; or, for that matter, a whole family" (222). And echoing Ella, Anna says, "I don't know anyone who isn't incomplete and tormented and fighting, the best one can say of anyone is that they fight..." (522). Later in the novel when Anna's mad double Saul surfaces, he laments the same plight of humans: "My God, what we've lost, what we've lost, what we've lost, how can we ever get back to it, how can we get back to it again?" (629). Other than their meaning at face value, Saul's words also can be read to echo the Sufi parable about the fresh branch that has been cut.

Similarly, Emily, the teenager in *Memoirs*, 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" (34). In *The Memoirs*, the Sufi context offers not only a complementary reading, as is the case in *The Golden Notebook*, but provides the crucial key to understanding *The Memoirs*. Lessing does not define what Emily longs for, but the novel as a whole implies that through working on herself and fighting her battles, Emily has the chance to transform herself, and can thereby satisfy her longing.
Both Anna in The Golden Notebook and Emily in The Memoirs exist during a time of "death and destruction" which, to Anna, seems "stronger than life" (235). Both women live under the pressures of the dead and dying society of western civilization, fighting in their own ways to escape death. When read as a Sufi allegory, The Golden Notebook gains more meaning and The Memoirs becomes a more satisfying novel, one that offers more than a mere futuristic ghost story.

In The Golden Notebook London of the fifties provides Anna, a single parent, with only married men as potential lovers in a society that shuns women who choose to be "free" from traditional roles intended for them. The novel is imbued with Anna's sense of emptiness and despair, her self-searching and struggle. She is frequently described as an "empty shell" or an "empty paper bag":

she had a mental image of a dry well, slowly filling up with water. Yes; that's what's wrong with me--I'm dry. I'm empty. I've got to touch some source somewhere or ... . (394)

Anna switched off; something inside her went dead, or moved apart from what was happening. She became a shell. She stood there, looking at words like love, friendship, duty, responsibility, and knew them to be all lies. She felt herself shrug. ... [she] faced Marion with a smile, which she knew to be empty. ... . (514)

She had no idea at all of what to say, or even what she thought. She was standing in the middle of her room, empty as a paper bag, ready to walk over to Marion, to Tommy, and say--what? (510)
Anna becomes an expert at observing herself during such states of intense nothingness, and she usually emerges from them feeling at least more honest and whole than before. She also observes the emptiness of those around her and the meaninglessness of their emotions. For instance when she confronts De Silva, a potential lover, and tells him he doesn't really "care a damn whether [he sleeps] with [her] or not," he responds in the following manner:

Suddenly he cracked into the pathetic child of the moments in the night, and he said: 'But I do, indeed I do.' He was positively on the point of beating his breast to prove it—he stopped his clenched hand on the way to his breast.

. . . (502)

Such manifestations of hollowness in herself and in others drive Anna to the point where she can no longer write for publication, having lost faith in her ability to feel or write anything authentic. Instead, she spends long hours with her therapist Mrs. Marx, possibly a Sufi guide, discussing her self-imposed writer's block. When "the world is so chaotic, art [feels] irrelevant" (42), she says, and she finds writing degrading when it serves merely as an outlet for indulging in one's own emotions. Furthermore, when she is asked to authorize the creation of a television version of her earlier book, The Frontiers of War, she is mortified and refuses to prostitute her mind to television. She fears, as Lessing also must, the possibility that television could take over and demean the noble activity of teaching.

It is possible to understand Lessing's switch from Communism to Sufism here. Communist art, according to one of Anna's comrades, is
"joyful, communal [and] unselfish" (350). Anna's and Lessing's original reasons for becoming Communists had included the hope of saving the world through teaching and conversion. And their reasons for breaking away from Communism are again the same: to save the spiritual lives of people through teaching them how to learn. The only difference between the two ideologies is that in their later choice Anna and Lessing teach and fight their battles alone, not in a group effort. They have realized that their first responsibility is to themselves, and that without first becoming whole within themselves, it is useless to try to save the world through any "ism" or novel. Mrs. Marx reminds Anna,

My dear, you must remember the artist has a sacred trust . . . you wrote that book, you are an artist . . . . I became a psychotherapist because I once believed myself to be an artist. I treat a great many artists. How many people have sat where you are sitting, because they are blocked, deep in themselves, unable to create any longer.

(234-35)

Mrs. Marx accuses Anna of dissipating all her creativity into her dreams; she urges her to start writing again, for the simple reason that it is her calling, and she owes it to herself to write. If dreams are, as in Mrs. Marx's and the Sufis' understanding, the result of unused creative energies, then it becomes clear why Anna dreams so very much during her inert period. Nonetheless, Anna is too conscious of her own spiritual emptiness to have the audacity to write. She feels she has nothing worthwhile to say, except to emphasize the chaos and nothingness with which she has become so finely in tune.
Sufism makes a noticeable difference in Lessing's vision as she moves from *The Golden Notebook* to *The Memoirs*. Emily and her guardian in *Memoirs* are aware of chaos, too, as it daily unfolds around them; but for them, Lessing provides The Sufi Path to self development and transformation—a remedy that was not yet part of her vision when she wrote *The Golden Notebook*. People move out of the cities in tribes due to political and economic calamities, and 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, but that is not always evident at the time—a feeling of helplessness, as if one were being whirled about in a dust-devil or a centrifuge. (81)

When interpreted in a Sufi context, this guardian, who remains unnamed in the novel, could represent the mature Emily. She 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 could serve as a metaphor for Emily's inner life, and the guardian, as the part of Emily who has committed herself to Working on reconciling her inner and outer worlds, or her essence and personality. During her earlier visits behind the wall, the guardian always finds discord and turmoil, as
any would-be seeker does at the outset of his/her Work. "To make the [rooms] inhabitable, what work needed to be done?" (14), she tells us. This is in direct correlation with Sufi thinking that we are incomplete and need years of hard work to complete ourselves even after we have accepted our incompletion. The following lines depict the degree of Emily's incompletion:

Yes, I could see that it would take weeks, months . . . . 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? (14)

In the Sufic context the "rightful inhabitant" who has been "exiled" from this place would be Emily's perfected Self who may not return until Emily is properly prepared to receive Her. This return indeed takes place at the end of the novel when She, or "the One" arrives to lead Emily and her entourage out of the world of chaos into the New World. However, for the time being, the incomplete Emily hides behind a "cold defense" (16), with "a manner that [matches] her bright impervious voice and smile . . . a hard, an enamelled presence" (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 exclud[ing] the other" (25). The guardian recognizes this impasse that is so sharply pronounced in Emily:
But it was not until Emily heightened it all for me that I realized what a prison we were all in, how impossible it was for any of us to let a man or a woman or a child come near without the defensive inspection, the rapid, sharp, cold analysis... (31)

As the novel progresses, more and more of the influence of the world behind this allegorical 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. She recounts what she finds there:

The place looked as if savages had been in it; as if soldiers had bivouacked there. The chairs and sofas had been deliberately slashed and jabbed with bayonets or knives, stuffing was spewing out everywhere, brocade curtains had been ripped off the brass rods and left in heaps... there were feathers, blood, bits of offal. (40)

Confronted with such disorder, the guardian works hard to clean and do away with the chaos. She scrubs the walls with buckets of hot water, and airs out the rooms with the sun and wind. However, she tells us,

no matter how I swept, picked up and replaced overturned chairs, tables, objects; scrubbed floors and rubbed down walls, 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. (64)
In Sufism, the necessary step for attaining harmony and perfection to replace chaos is self-knowledge. Not knowing ourselves, we appear to be not one, but many, for we are unaware of our body's needs, our spirit's wishes and our mind's intentions. There is not only one "I" within us, but hundreds of "I"s who either desire or repel, love or hate, are curious or disinterested. In Sufic understanding, the manifestations of schizophrenia or multiple personalities are not treated as illnesses but regarded as glaring signs of a person's incomplete state and the need to work on the self. This "Work" is done by relentless self-observation. A retrospective look at The Golden Notebook through Sufi lenses discloses Anna and Ella who are frequently engaged in self observation:

At this point, Ella detached herself from Ella, and stood to one side, watching and marvelling. (323)

... she could see herself go through a process which, it seemed to her, she was now having to make use of a hundred times a day: ... she set her brain on the alert, a small critical, dry machine. ... And she thought: this intelligence, it's the only barrier between me and-- ... cracking up. Yes. (395)

Anna further observes the phenomenon of multiple personalities emerging in herself in the form of Saul, her psychological double, or animus, and notes her impressions in the notebook which she lets Saul read:
I was thinking how, in any conversation, he can be five or six different people; I even waited for the responsible person to come back. . . . Literally, I saw him come out of the personality he had been. . . . He came down, his face like a hatchet, and I looked at it and knew the switch had been turned. . . . The person speaking then was the good person. I didn't know what to say, fearful of driving him away and bringing the other back. . . . (20-21)

Saul may totally agree with Anna, and then thoroughly disagree with her a few minutes later. Anna well understands this inconsistency in the human psyche. She writes, "All self knowledge is knowing, on deeper and deeper levels, what one knew before" (239), again anticipating the Sufi context that was soon to follow. While Saul accepts and rejects truths about himself, he still retains what Anna tells him, and he even learns a portion of it; when he learns something more about himself, it isn't any new information, but a deeper understanding of what was already registered in his mind.

The apparent result of being out of touch with one's inner self is a spiritual sterility which Anna describes as a drying up of the well. This "dried up" state leaves behind a mere machine, which is efficiently in control, but lifeless.

She lay frightened, and again the words came into her head: the spring has gone dry. And with the words, came the image: she saw the dry well, a cracked opening into the earth that was all dust. . . .
Anna slept and dreamed. She was standing on the edge of a wide yellow desert at midday. The sun was darkened by the dust hanging in the air. . . . Anna knew she had to cross the desert. . . . She was enclosed by the vivid colours. There was no water anywhere. Anna started off to walk across the desert, so that she might reach the mountains. (407)

Emily, too, in Memoirs of a Survivor, suffers from this experience of being a dried-up well. Only in her case, the longing for meaning is more deliberately fashioned by Lessing, given the Sufi context that can now accommodate such thirst, and that enriches Lessing's vision. Emily has felt deprived of fertile surroundings since she was a baby, and still knows very little about the world behind the wall. And before she can grow out of her stifled existence, it is necessary for her to know this world thoroughly. Just as Anna's contact with Saul, her mad animus, is necessary for her growth, the guardian's contact with the world behind the wall is necessary for Emily's growth. In both novels, Lessing has set up less than ideal surroundings to provide her protagonists with the friction against which they must work. Anna, who has sought Mrs. Marx's help in order to work her way through the dark alleys of her psyche, tells Mrs. Marx:

You've taught me to cry, thank you for nothing, you've given me back feeling, and it's too painful.

How old-fashioned of me to seek a witch-doctor to be taught to feel. Cool, cool, cool, that's the word. That's the banner . . . . a quality of measured emotion, coolness. (544-45)
. . . Oh, yes, I understand that glass wall certain kinds of Americans live behind, I understand it too well—don’t touch me, for God’s sake don’t touch me, don’t touch me because I’m afraid of feeling. (485)

This defense mechanism is not used against other people as much as it is used against one’s own inner world. Emily in Memoirs retains her glass wall almost to the end of her stay with her guardian and only rarely allows parts of herself to show through. Anna, who is older than Emily, is conscious of her own defenses, but she has realized that without outside help from Mrs. Marx, she cannot break through her "glass wall."

Sufism divides the psyche roughly into two parts: essence and personality. The essence is believed to be an actual organ located in the solar plexus below the breasts, near the diaphragm. Many meditation exercises are carried out to awaken this organ, which is often retarded in its growth. Personality is the protective shell covering the essence, or it is the person we are on the surface of that "glass wall." Sufi education attempts the harmonious development of these two aspects of the human psyche. The usual imbalance always takes place, with personality growing out of proportion at the expense of the essence. This produces Lessing’s "empty paper bag" or "empty shell." When speaking about Ella, who is another "I" or aspect of Anna, Anna refers to the solar plexus, stressing its importance. Ella’s discomfort in the following passage is caused by a lover’s offensive question accusing her of promiscuity, asked after the intimacy of intercourse: her bodily response to this vulgar attack is a feeling . . . as if she had
been dealt, deliberately, one after the other, blows which were aimed at some place just below her breasts. She was almost gasping at the pain of these blows. Her lips were trembling, but she would rather have died than cry in front of him. (195)

The Sufi hopes to reach his/her essence and to help it grow into maturity. Our inner worlds need to keep up with, and/or catch up with, our external development in our everyday lives. Of course, a mind that could possibly begin to think creatively about its own improvement is one which is uncluttered. In order to reach our essences, we are expected to undo the "useless superstition, habits, convention, irrelevant assumptions, and expectations" which we have been fed, so that the mind can see what is really there (Courtland 96). Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, Master of the Whirling Dervishes says:

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 23)

The process of "voiding" one's self is an essential step toward acquiring real self knowledge. But of course, this nothingness brings with it hopelessness and despair. Saul says to Anna:

We are comforting each other. What for, I wonder? . . .

We've got to remember that people with our kind of experience are bound to be depressed and unhopeful . . .

Or perhaps it's precisely people with our kind of experience who are most likely to know the truth, because we know what we've been capable of ourselves? (567)
Despite her depression, Anna knows that she is closer to knowing the truth in her present state than she was as a "successful" career woman and writer. In her dream of being in the desert she sees herself "a long way from the springs," and she wakes up knowing that "if she [is] to cross the desert she must shed burdens" (408), reminiscent of the experiences of Christian in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As in the case of Christian, Anna's choice to shed burdens and thereby become a whole person demands that she pay a high price. The analogy of a full glass of water is often used in Sufi teaching: a full glass can only overflow if one tries to pour more water into it; likewise, neither can a cluttered mind admit fresh knowledge.

In *The Memoirs*, 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 the "real" life to accommodate Emily's growing life; or, in the Sufic context, the grown up Emily's personality accommodates the essence of Emily that is still only an 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 tells us,
I stacked what was usable in the middle of the room under dust-sheets. I scrubbed down the ceiling and walls with sugar soap, with hot water, with detergents. Layer after layer of white paint went on, first dull and flat, then increasingly fine, until the last one covered everything with a clear softly shining enamel, white as new snow or fine china. It was like standing inside a cleaned-out eggshell; I felt that accretions of grime had been taken off which had been preventing a living thing from breathing. (66)

Just as the work goes on in the grimey areas of that "other world," self-work in the Sufi Way is carried out in the problem areas of Emily's psyche. In the Sufi context, this choice of concentrating on the hurdles in life, or deliberately engaging in "conscious labor and intentional suffering" (Gurdjieff) is essential for real transformation to take place. A retrospective look at The Golden Notebook through Sufi lenses reveals that Anna, too, often chooses this kind of suffering, which illustrates the inclination toward Sufism that was part of Lessing's vision even before she encountered Sufism. Anna writes,

if what we feel is pain, then we must feel it, acknowledging that the alternative is death. Better anything than the shrewd, the calculated, the non-committal, the refusal of giving for fear of the consequences. . . . (545-46)

Anna recalls times in her past when she used to concentrate on her difficulties, but she is now able to distinguish the ordinary
suffering of those days from the conscious suffering of the present time. In the past, she enjoyed indulging in her pain and had even made it profitable in the form of a book, *The Frontiers of War*. Having advanced in her personal growth, she now looks back at her publishing days and confesses to Mrs. Marx, who, as was indicated earlier, is potentially a Sufi guide, "Mrs. Marx, there's pleasure in pain. . . . that sad nostalgic pain that makes me cry is the same emotion I wrote that damned book out of" (239).

It is essential to recognize the difference that emerges in Anna's experience between ordinary and intentional suffering. In the context of 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. For instance, the manner in which Ella waits for Paul night after night against her own better judgement is an example of ordinary suffering:

She stood there, night after night. She could see herself standing there, and said to herself: "This is madness. This is being mad. Being mad is not being able to stop yourself doing something that you know to be irrational. Because you know Paul will not come." And yet she continued to dress herself and to stand for hours at the window, waiting, every night. . . . (227)

Intentional suffering, on the other hand, is impressively and deliberately demonstrated in *Memoirs*. Each of Emily's 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 hence Emily's life is changed. Every journey
contributes to balancing the aspects of Emily within a unified
person and to bring 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. One poignant
image is that in which she tries 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 that is full of leaves to no successful end. The
narrator/guardian writes, "The world was being submerged in dead
leaves, smothered in them" (137). Nonetheless, Emily continues her
frantic and desperate fight, even 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. She stood back against the wall
and leaned on her futile little broom, and locked and
listened as the leaves rustled and fell over and about her
and over the whole world in a storm of decay. She
vanished. . . . (137-38)

Both Anna in The Golden Notebook and the guardian in The Memoirs of
a Survivor know that unless one makes an effort, one gains nothing
real. In the Sufi tradition, only the kinds of conscious efforts
described above lead one to true liberation. This message is
Anna contains her fragments by keeping four different notebooks in which she compartmentalizes different aspects of her experiences, irreconcilable in any other way. The black notebook contains records of her financial success as a published novelist as well as reflecting her loss of faith in art; the red notebook is a record of her political involvements and her loss of faith in the Communist party; the yellow notebook is a fictionalized version of her personal life and reflects her loss of faith in love; and the blue notebook is her current diary. She purchases a fifth notebook which she calls the "golden notebook" and starts writing in it only after she has emerged from her descent into madness. At that point she decides, "I’ll pack away the four notebooks. I’ll start a new notebook, all of myself in one book" (607). In her conversation with Saul after this descent, she decides to write again, this time having something real to say. Saul reminds Anna,

But my dear Anna, we are not the failures we think we are. We spend our lives fighting to get people very slightly less stupid than we are to accept truths that the great men have always known. . . . It is our job to tell them.

Because the great men can’t be bothered. (618)

Saul’s comment "[b]ecause great men can’t be bothered" is perhaps Lessing’s own way of saying that she doesn’t consider herself a great woman—only a "boulder-pusher," a middle person who feels the responsibility to tell the rest of us what we don’t know. "We will use all our energies," says Saul, "all our talents, into pushing
that boulder another inch up the mountain... and that is why we are not useless after all" (618). These conversations between Anna and Saul—his name being reminiscent of the word "soul"—eventually lead to the thawing of Anna's emotions, and along with that, to a free flow of her creativity, at which point Saul is no longer necessary.

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 more and more capable of asserting 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. Sometimes this sobbing is almost inaudible and she has to strain her ears to hear:

the sobbing of a child, a child alone, disliked, repudiated; and at the same time, beside it... the complaint of the mother, the woman's plaint, and the two sounds went on side by side, theme and descant...

All that morning, I listened to the sobbing while I sat working with [Emily]. But she heard nothing...

"Can't you hear someone crying?" I asked, as casual as could be, while I was twisting and turning inwardly not to hear that miserable sound. (147-48)
This attempt to not hear the crying is the 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. "Sema, [our prayer] is an awakening," says Rumi. "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" (Araz, 239). 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 the Sufis' "dungeons," into their "rosegardens." At least Emily is now aware of herself enough to hear herself cry, her glimpses of truth stretching into periods of consciousness.

Both Anna and Emily take pains to get to know themselves and to arrive at that new person in themselves who is capable of growing. However, Anna does not go any further in her self-searching, perhaps because The Golden Notebook was written two years prior to Lessing's introduction to Sufism. She lacks the further development which Emily experiences in Memoirs,5 written twelve years later. Anna only experiences a temporary madness and depression from which she is restored to a more healthy and whole person, while Emily undergoes a permanent transformation after which she is no longer the same person. Emily's experiences can be read as an allegorical self-work manual which illustrates how one can transform one's self. Following is a description of what Emily finds upon her awakening:
the floor boards were beginning to give, had collapsed in some places. . . . there were not really floorboards, but only a few rotting planks lying about on earth that was putting out shoots of green. I pulled the planks away, exposing clean earth and insects that were vigorously at their work of re-creation. I pulled back heavy lined curtains to let the sunlight in. The smell of growth came up strong from the stuffy old room, and I ran from there . . . leaving that place, or realm, to clean growth and working insects. . . . (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.

Lessing also does not neglect to point 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." (101). This once again reminds the reader of the greater evolutionary cause of the Sufis. If an individual's personal growth can help to raise the level of being of the whole of humanity a very slight degree, this is considered a success in Sufic understanding. Emily's guardian feels "too much beetle or earthworm to understand" (101) 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.
After the disaster in this unnamed city, 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 pockmarked iron but polished and glossy . . . " (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. Elegance or glory are not the qualities sought after by Sufis. Instead, rebirth is possible only after hard work and a strong presence of being, enabled by self-remembering. As Emily and her entourage stand looking at the iron egg, it breaks open "by the force of their being there" (216), revealing the apparition for whom the guardian had been waiting throughout the novel:

No, I am not able to say clearly what she was like. She was beautiful: it is a word that will do. I only saw her for a moment, in a time like the fading of a spark on dark air—a glimpse: she turned her face just once to me, and all I can say is . . . nothing at all. (216)

Following this Being is Emily, but the new, transmuted Emily "in another key," and "quite beyond herself," and her beast Hugo, "a splendid animal, handsome, all kindly dignity and command" (217). In this transformed state, Emily walks with Hugo "out of [the] collapsed little world into another order of world altogether"
(217), while Gerald and the savage children of the ordinary world follow them to begin their new life. And when all of Emily's family crosses into that new order, "the last walls dissolve" (217).

In the Sufi context 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. A Sufi account of renewal, as it was experienced by Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi seven hundred years ago, is given below as a point of comparison:

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, Mevlana (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 55)

The "wedding day" here refers to death which, in Sufic understanding, is celebrated as a union with God, the Beloved, and, in essence, marks one's rebirth. The aspiring Sufi must remember at all times that his/her 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 (Friedlander 153).

It is required of all humans and beasts to protect the phoenix, between each of its deaths and rebirths, the emblem of immortality. Similarly, it is asked of the student of Sufism to work hard to preserve him/herself, which can only be possible through a life-time of harmonious development and after the induced growth of the essence to an equal proportion with the personality. In support of self-preservation and transformation, which in turn contributes 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 66). Lessing, like the Sufis, expects that in a thousand years, humanity, like the phoenix, will still be participating in cosmic evolution. Beyond this, Sufis make no provisions, nor do they argue about whether or not every individual has the potential to share the lot of the phoenix.

As for Lessing's vision, Emily in Memoirs is clearly delivered into a new sphere in which the limitations upon her can be lifted. Anna, on the other hand, does not have the added horizon that the Sufi context allows Emily. Anna can be rescued from the ordinary world and its madness only to the extent that a psychiatrist can deliver her. Consequently, while Emily's search for herself is presented to us as a spiritual quest, similar in many ways to The Sufi Way, Anna's search has to suffice as a psychological soul-searching that must necessarily come to its resolution in the
ordinary realm of existence. The closest Lessing comes to a
different kind of solution for Anna is to suggest that there might
be "a crack in [some people's] personality like a gap in a dam, and
through that gap the future might pour in a different
shape--terrible perhaps, or marvellous, but something new--" (473).
Yet this idea is only suggested and dropped during a conversation
between Anna and Mrs. Marx. "But sometimes," says Anna, "I meet
people, and it seems to me the fact they are cracked across, they're
split, means they are keeping themselves open for something" (473).
In The Memoirs, on the other hand, Lessing is able to develop this
idea further, possibly because her perceptions have been reinforced
by Sufi truths.7

Two things become very clear as a result of a comparison and
contrast between these novels written before and after Lessing's
exposure to Sufism: one, that Lessing was naturally inclined to
promote "Work" on oneself no matter the cost; and two, that The Sufi
Way has offered her a very welcome avenue of escape beyond the
limitations of psychology, psychiatry, politics, Communism,
Jungianism, or any other "ism" she had tapped prior to her study of
the Sufi Way. In general, her later novels suggest that within the
context of Sufi mysticism, she found new pathways she had not
explored before and the possibility of a more profound and
comprehensive study of the human race, which we also witness in the
Canopus in Argos series. As each of the characters in the series
grows to varying degrees of completion in the Sufi Way, we witness
their deaths and afterlives, unlike Anna Wulf's story, written
before Lessing's exposure to Sufism that stopped short of Anna's old
age or death. Furthermore, Anna had a last name indicative of her mimetic identity, while the protagonists in novels written after Lessing’s knowledge of Sufi ideas have either no name, i.e., no identity, as in the case of The Memoirs' narrator, or have interchangeable names, as in the cases of Johor and Doeg in Shikasta (1979) and Making of the Representative for Planet Eight (1982), suggesting their allegorical nature.

In the context of Sufism, a character such as Johor (George Sherban) in both novels could be read as a potential Sufi master like Mrs. Marx in The Golden Notebook. Although his name is not spelled "Jawhar," it could be that Lessing intentionally gave him a name that sounds like the Persian, Arabic, and Turkish word "jawhar," meaning "jewel or jewelry," i.e., "something precious"; Johor is indeed the most valuable asset in Lessing's cosmology. And Doeg's name, whose pronunciation slightly resembles the Arabic "Dā'ī," meaning "messenger," is "the representative," as Lessing chooses to call him. In a Sufic reading, he could be the disciple in training or on the "Path," like Anna in The Golden Notebook or Emily's guardian in The Memoirs of a Survivor. When faced with the freezing of Planet Eight, Doeg asks in desperation, "If we are not channels for the future, and if this future is not to be better than the present, then what are we?" (39)—a question that drives Lessing herself to write these and other novels narrating the fates of nations and planets confronted with a holocaust of one kind or another.

It cannot be coincidental that the title Shikasta, which Lessing picked for her novel that begins the science-fiction series,
has a double meaning in Persian, both of which meanings are relevant to her apocalyptic vision in the *Canopus in Argos* series. On the one hand, "shikasta" means "weighed down, broken down in health, decrepit, infirm, and weakened," all of which accurately describe the state of the planet Shikasta; on the other hand, "shikasta" also means "breakable, that may or must be broken, and broken," which is how those on the mainland Canopus regard the planet Shikasta. The planet is crumbling and already broken down because of its inhabitants' wicked ways, as is our own planet, earth. Lessing then concludes that it may or must be broken down, precisely because of its wicked state: nothing new or fresh can come from corruption, until all are destroyed, so that, like the legendary phoenix, something new can be born out of the ashes. This is definitely a central view of Sufism, which Lessing seems to have adopted without reservation, and because of which various critics have accused her of "copping out."

In the Afterword to *The Making of the Representative* Lessing offers as token Sufis the team of British explorers who travelled to the South Pole and manifested the will to withstand painful and impossible circumstances simply in pursuit of knowledge that would enhance the consciousness of humanity. Edward Wilson, a scientist on the 1910-13 expedition to the South Pole led by Scott, is one of these explorers who risked his life to gather penguin eggs to further science. Lessing suggests to her readers that so long as people such as Edward Wilson and his co-seekers succeed in their endeavors, then the possibility exists for all humans to use all, not only a part, of the potential with which they were born.
Lessing's prophetic call to action is not necessarily supernatural or metaphysical. When she praises Edward Wilson for his courage to break out of his ordinary possibilities, which she calls "the cage we live in that is made of our habits, upbringing, circumstances, and which shows itself so small and tight and tyrannical when we do try to break out" (134), she does so with the belief that people could do anything if they only awakened from their atrophied existences, and worked at something—anything! In Shikasta Johor reports,

every child has the capacity to be everything. A child was a miracle, a wonder! A child held all the history of the human race, that stretched back, back, further than they could imagine. . . . Just as a loaf of bread holds in it all the substance of all the wheat grains that have gone into it, mingled with all the grain of that harvest, and the substance of the field that has grown it, so this child was kneaded together by, and contained, all the harvest of mankind. (167)

In as much a practical sense as a spiritual one, Lessing implores her readers, and demands of her characters, to work to the limits of their strength and capabilities and no less. "Man is woefully underused and undervalued," she says, offering the analogy of children born in a circus, who become acrobats. "Is this because these children have 'acrobats' genes' or because they are expected to be acrobats?" When we answer this question for ourselves, we have to agree with Lessing that our ordinary education is geared toward narrowing us and creating only "a tinker or a tailor, but not
both." Meanwhile, the few multi-faceted persons appear so unusual to us that we congratulate them on their versatility as though they were superhuman ("Ancient Way" 78-79).

To demonstrate The Sufi Way of creating whole persons, Lessing portrays a people challenged by and coping with the worst of circumstances in The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight. Throughout the tale the characters who are urged to remain awake and fight are offered no rewards for their suffering. In the context of Cherry Garrard's biography of Edward Wilson, which Lessing quotes in the Afterword to her novel, the survivors are not the "shopkeepers," which Garrard considers populate England and who cannot respect research unless it promises financial gain. And in Garrard's opinion Edward Wilson is of those few whom we congratulate for marching on his Winter Journeys alone simply for the sake of securing penguin eggs while expecting no monetary rewards (137). Just as, upon his return to England, Wilson is not greeted with fanfares, neither are the inhabitants of Planet Eight rewarded outwardly for their suffering and endurance. What matters is not Wilson's visible accomplishments, but the fact that he survived a violent inner conflict, and a "high drama that results from such tensions" (140).

Lessing's purpose in Shikasta, when interpreted in the Sufi context, is the same: offering the means to develop whole human beings. The action of Shikasta spans the time immediately before a holocaust and the time immediately after it. The book consists of a series of reports by Johor, the emissary from mainland Canopus, on the condition of the Shikastans throughout the holocaust. Johor's
reports specify that this holocaust is a result of a war between Sirius, an enemy colony, and Canopus, at the end of which the Shikastans suffer from radioactive-like destructive emanations and an illness which is both physical and mental. To this planet, Johor brings "the Signature" representing "Canopean Law," tries to remind the inhabitants of their Canopean origins, and warns them of their doom. His wish is to relocate them in Canopus. In the Sufi context, "Canopean Law" could represent Sufi teachings. Furthermore, it cannot be a coincidence that Lessing invented the word "SOWF," which is an acronym for "The-Substance-of-We-Feeling," but is pronounced quite similarly to the words "SUF" or "SOFU," referring to enlightened beings or those seeking enlightenment. "SOWF" is the spiritual nourishment the Shikastans receive from Canopus, and it is due to a lack of this nourishment that the Shikastans are asleep and cannot hear Johor's warnings; i.e., they have the "degenerative disease" discussed throughout the novel. Allegorically, this disease causes a gradual loss of faith, which results in spiritual death: SOWF would protect and preserve them. They must reverence SOWF. . . . If they, those who sat before me now, listening to these precious revelations, did not guard themselves . . . they would become worse than animals . . . They must not let themselves become animals who lived only to eat and to sleep and eat again--no, a part of their lives must be set aside for the rememberance of Canopus, memory of the substance-of-we-feeling, which was all they had. (73)
If we are to interpret as Sufi allegories the *Canopus in Argos* series, to which both *Shikasta* and *Making of the Representative* belong, then Lessing could be implying that Canopus is the place where all the enlightened beings reside and from where the rest of the inhabitants of Shikasta and Planet Eight originated—what was called "heaven" in the old order. In turn, Johor from Canopus could be a Christ figure, sent from "heaven" to "save" lost souls. The various holocausts Lessing imagines, whether they take the form of nuclear war or an ice storm, could symbolize complete spiritual death or a complete senility involving the forgetting of the nature and even the existence of Canopus on the part of the Shikastans or on the part of the inhabitants of Planet Eight, both metaphors for earth. For example, as long as the inhabitants of Planet Eight remember their connection to Canopus, the mother planet, they can find the courage within themselves to withstand the ice and the snow, much like Christians who live for the day they can enter heaven. It is those who are numb and indifferent to the idea of Canopus/heaven who eventually freeze and disintegrate under their protective hides of worldly material possessions.

In *The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight* we meet both those inhabitants who eventually die, i.e., the acorns which become fertilizer in Sufic symbolism, and the inhabitants for whom quitting is not even a choice; i.e., the acorns which evolve into trees. While everybody "dies" physically in the long run, those who evolve first have the chance to survive their bodily death. In the context of Sufism not all persons can evolve, but all beings at all levels are useful for the balance of nature. Johor, the messenger
from Canopus, and Doeg, as well as the other representatives for Planet Eight, can be seen as the acorns which have evolved into trees, just as Wilson in the nonfictional world has evolved into sainthood in Lessing’s eyes. In Shikasta, too, there are the rulers and the ruled, the rulers being the spiritual teachers who can guide the ruled in their ascent on the ladder of consciousness. Lessing also refers to them as "The Guardians" at the end of The Four Gated City, or "The Providers" in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five. Johor and Doeg, in this case, are the "Providers" and the "Guardians" of Lessing’s fiction, and it is their level of being to which Lessing urges her characters, as well as her readers, to aspire. Passion and wholeheartedness, she feels, are at the core of all meaningful endeavors that bring one closer to perfection. She quotes Edward Wilson’s diary: "It is amazing and most puzzling when one tries to think what is the object of our short life on earth—a mere visit—and how desperately this must represent our effect on the little part of the world with which we come into contact" (143).

The purpose in both Shikasta and The Making of the Representative is to reconnect with Canopus. In the Sufi context, Lessing describes the atmosphere of Shikasta as contaminated, and she renders Planet Eight as uninhabitable to provide her characters with situations that force them to decide whether they will fight and earn the right to live in Canopus, i.e., become acorns that grow into trees, or give in to the hardships and die, i.e., disintegrate into fertilizer. Doeg, who is a potential Representative for Planet Eight, tells us in the opening pages, "We knew that we had ceased to understand. We had understood—or believed we had—what Canopus
wanted for us, and from us: we had been taking part, under their provision, in a long, slow progress upwards in civilization" (5). Doeg feels that he and his companions may be forgetting why they have to suffer so intensely since they know they are going to die anyway, with or without the struggle. In the Sufi context such suffering results in a spiritual evolution, whereas ordinary suffering results in nothing at all. Lessing offers many elaborate descriptions of the conditions of life on Planet Eight: "the winds screamed over us and sometimes came sucking and driving down where we were, and we shivered and we shrank, and knew that we had not begun to imagine what we had, all of us, to face" (13).

Suffering this intensely, Doeg and his companions are humbled and are drawn closer together to share their warmth against the blizzard and their inner strength against their fate. Their situation makes them acutely aware of their vulnerability under Canopean Law and of their place in the hierarchy of levels of being. In Sufi understanding, a disciple looks up to his/her master, as Doeg does to Johor, and the master aspires to become like his saint, always with the ultimate goal of coming nearer to God, the Beloved, or, in this case, Canopus. Likewise, Doeg and the others with him are aware that there are other beings above and below themselves; they feel they are being watched by other creatures which they cannot see, just as they themselves keep watch over their surroundings for signs of edible vegetation or animals that they can see—this makes them realize their place within the cosmos.
We each took a watch, and all felt that a watch was being kept on us—we had a sense of being stared at. . . . All five of us, in a strong close group, went as far into the cave as we dared, and knew that not far from us were living beings. We sensed a mass of living warmth. Many small things? A few large ones? And if large, what? (28)

These beings belong to various levels of consciousness, which levels in turn correspond to various steps on the allegorical Sufi ladder toward enlightenment. On this ladder, both those higher up on the ladder and those further down need one another to pull, or to push, to feed, or to be fed. As Doeg tells us,

Both kinds of us, the people of Planet Eight, the represented and the Representative—endured. The thought in our minds was that they were being changed by what we were forced to do; that we were being changed by their being made to stay alive when they would so very much rather have drifted away from our common effort into death.

(101-102)

This joint effort towards the same purpose recalls the carpet imagery in Lessing’s Memoirs of a Survivor. The faded carpet in a room behind the wall through which the protagonist of Memoirs often walks represents all of life. The faded patterns on the carpet come to life only as each individual realizes his/her own purpose, and contributes to the whole picture by placing his/her piece onto the carpet, causing parts to glow with life. The hidden element of Sufism is symbolized by Lessing in the faded quality of this carpet. The narrator of Memoirs tells us,
It was like a child's game, giant-sized; only it was not a game; it was serious, important not only to the people actually engaged in this work, but to everyone. . . .—there was no competition here, only the soberest and most loving co-operation. . . . I, too, sought for fragments of materials that could bring life to the carpet, and did in fact find one, and bent down to match and fit. . . . everyone around . . . would in their turn drift in here, see this central activity, find their matching piece. (80)

As in Memoirs, in Making of the Representative and Shikasta, too, Lessing portrays a breaking and broken (shikasta) people who are alive under the worst possible circumstances. In the case of The Making of the Representative, the people are broken to the point of not even caring about their own children, the inheritors of their civilization, therefore their potential future: "A child died, and we all knew we might be thinking secretly: So much the better; what horrors is it going to be spared. . . . And . . . one less mouth to feed" (39). The Shikastans, too, are in pain and in need of help, but at the same time they reject Johor's warnings and his offers to help. They are so detached from their origin in Canopus that they cannot recall it or trust it. Johor says, some were already mad. One of them would shake and shake a pain-filled head, and put up both hands to it with that gesture: What is this? I don't believe it!—and then let out howls of pain and start running, rushing everywhere, howling as if pain were something he could leave behind. (53)
In this state, the Shikastans do not heed Johor's pleas, and continue to stay in their doomed but nevertheless familiar surroundings. A Sufi interpretation would be that in order to grow and become enlightened, one must be able to give up what one possesses—his/her ego, his/her outer shell, and his/her habitual ways of being, with the faith that in essence, he/she will lose nothing. Johor's efforts to awaken the Shikastans' memory, however, are in vain. He writes in his journal,

Everywhere ideas, sets of mind, beliefs that have supported people for centuries are fraying away, dissolving, going.

What is there left?

... What other ways have Shikastans used to ward off from themselves the knowledge about their situation which is always, always threatening to well up from their depths and overwhelm? What else can they clutch to them, like a blanket on a cold night? (197-98)

Meanwhile, the starvation and below-zero temperatures on Planet Eight continue to strain people's nerves and compassion, causing that "inner friction" which is so necessary for the Sufi Work. Sufis often use the metaphor of thorns and roses; thorns without, they say, account for roses within, and vice versa. In the same vein, they demand to know whether it is easier to push a wheelbarrow up hill or down hill. Without resistance, there is no "Work," and without "Work," neither one's mind, nor heart, nor muscles can remain alive, let alone thrive. While Doeg and the other workers finally shovel up sparse loads of sea creatures out of the boats, their will is challenged: they must abstain from eating the food in
order to carry it to those who are half unconscious deep in their caves. And in this toil of will more than of muscle, they are given the opportunity to evolve. Doeg describes this inner conflict thus:

Very thin supplies these were—the last of our food from our ocean. I ... was filled with a knawing painful need for this food, and I felt myself being drawn across the ice to the edges of the pond, my hands out, my mouth filled with need already tasting the crunching salty freshness—but I was brought to a halt before I took one up off the ice and bit into it. And others too, like myself, stumbled towards the food, but stopped, and we were all thinking of those starving in their ice houses, or going about their work, starving. (103)

As the cold weather and starvation continue on Planet Eight, those who don't have enough self-control turn to crime and murder. Doeg remembers that not long ago they used to have only one Representative for the Law, whereas now there are several, because the tensions and difficulties make people quarrel more readily. He reports that "It had been, before The Ice, a rare thing to have a killing. Now we expected murder. We had not thieved from each other: now it was common" (21). Within, Doeg remembers the purpose of this catastrophe, and accepts the cross he has to bear. While the wars and arguments among his countrymen leave him alone in his mission, he quietly knows that "argument does not teach children or the immature. Only time and experience does that" (21). He observes,
We were learning, we old ones, that in times when a species, a race, is under threat, drives and necessities built into the very substance of our flesh speak out in ways that we need never have known about if extremities had not come to squeeze these truths out of us. (24)

Doeg knows that what happens to the people and the rest of the creatures on Planet Eight is not really important, but how they cope with this dilemma is that which will make a significant difference in their future existence in another form and another place. What matters is not that they will die, but how they live until they die. However, only Doeg and the other Representatives seem to understand this, while most of the inhabitants begin to give in to the freezing of their bodies and the numbing of their minds. In between occasional bursts of rebellion and refusal to go on, Doeg works hard to keep the others alive. He knows that whatever fate Planet Eight is experiencing is in fact proper and even necessary for its development and for its ultimate purpose in the universe. He says, "The hardest thing for any one of us to realize,—everyone of us, no matter how high in the levels of functioning—is that we are all subject to an overall plan. A general Necessity" (16), which words express the central thought in Sufism.

Accepting this "general Necessity," Doeg works, as more and more inhabitants simply give in to the freezing temperatures and resign themselves to die. At times he finds himself longing to go to sleep as much as the rest, feeling unable to withstand the intense physical pain of cold and hunger. Along with the other Representatives, Doeg's daily activity consists of going from cave
to cave, striding about among the half dead, still "trying to impress on them that vigorous movement [is] indeed still possible" (46). He describes the dwellings:

Oh it was so stuffy and unpleasant in our dwellings now! How I disliked having to make my way into them, and stand there, trying to look alert and awake, when the foetid atmosphere, the general torpor, the cold, dulled my mind and made me want to lie down with them and sleep away my life. . . . (46)

And at such times of forgetfulness and despair, Doeg asks Johor why they must prolong their death. In his misery, he goes in and out of sleeping and waking states where sometimes he knows the meaning of Johor's words and sometimes he cannot comprehend them. Johor's answers are as vague as always: "You will be rescued from this freezing death "when you earn it" (59), he tells Doeg, and impresses upon him that "there is more than one way of dying" (64). The Sufis' purpose in asking the inhabitants of Planet Eight to remain alive for as long as they can would be that a new self (roses) could be born out of inner friction (thorns). Johor, the possible Sufi master, tries to impress on Doeg and the others that they belong to a shared pool of thoughts and dreams, and that they cannot be wrong in sensing that a day will come when the snows will melt. How else could anyone even dream of such a day if it weren't a truth already offered by Canopus? he asks. This truth, which is hard to imagine in the midst of his suffering, angers Doeg. He reproaches Johor saying,
You will say, Johor, that this charm, this delightfulfulness, will vanish here and reappear elsewhere—on some place or planet that we have never heard of... yes, they will be gone soon, the little creatures will be dead, all of them, all—but we are not to mourn them, no, for their qualities will be reborn—somewhere. (80)

Yet by these very words Doeg admits that he partially understands the idea which he appears to be so violently rejecting. Canopus' attitude toward annihilation recalls the Sufi Parable about the river that must give itself up to the sands in order to cross the desert, while in essence it remains the same as it comes down in the form of rain on the other side of the desert and forms another river (Shah, Tales of Dervishes 23). Thus Johor continues to encourage people to remain awake, despite the fact that the wall built for protection against the ice falls down, and it is clear that there simply is no protection against the cold.

The Shikastans experience a similar fate in Shikasta: All the old supports going, gone, this man reaches out a hand to steady himself on a ledge of rough brick that is warm in the sun: his hand feeds him messages of solidity, but his mind messages of destruction, for this breathing substance, made of earth, will be a dance of atoms, he knows it, his intelligence tells him so: there will soon be war, he is in the middle of war, where he stands will be a waste, mounds of rubble, and this solid earthy substance will be a film of dust on ruins. (198)
And again, Johor works with the help of a handful of enlightened Shikastans in his mission against atrophy. One of the techniques he uses to awaken people is "the Signature" from Canopus which he carries with him on a tablet. When he shows it to the people, he observes that "They were remembering a little of what they had been: the Signature induced this in them. Nothing much, but they did remember something splendid and right" (13). He also uses chants which he orders the Shikastans to repeat to themselves like a prayer: "Canopus says we must not waste or spoil, Canopus tells us not to use violence on each other" (73).

Lessing lets us take a closer look at Taufiq, an individual who is struggling to wake up. Taufiq's name in Persian, when spelled "Tawfiq," means "grace, divine favor, success, and good luck," suggesting Lessing's faith in the salvation of the Shikastans, despite their broken down (shikasta) state—(assuming Lessing used this name intentionally). Reminiscent of the Sufis' metaphorical awakening in the "dungeons" as opposed to waking in the "rosegardens," Lessing's narrator in Shikasta demonstrates what torture it is for Taufiq to accept his own faults, to recognize his own pathetic situation, and in short, to confront his embarrassing obliviousness to his incompleteness; i.e., to awaken in the dungeons. A Canopean reincarnated as a Shikastan, he experiences the pain of self-remembering—the necessary step to enlightenment: "He smiled as he slept. He wept, tears soaking his face, as he walked and talked in his dream with us, with himself" (82). Exasperated by his observations of hopeless people like Taufiq, Johor concludes that these people are self-condemned—that
they are in fact given a chance to help themselves, yet they choose sleep. Again if Johor were to be read as a Christ figure, his impatience with the people might recall Christ's fury and intolerance of the money lenders at the temple. Johor maintains only a detached compassion for the inhabitants of Shikasta, and, in the long run, unlike Jesus, is able to resign himself to the fact that he cannot save everyone: "I have known more than once what it is to accept the failure, final and irreversible, of an effort or experiment to do with creatures who have within themselves the potential of development dreamed of, planned for . . . and then--Finis! The end! The drum pattering out into silence . . . " (3). And having done everything he could to save as many as he could, he resigns himself to the destruction of the rest of the multitudes.

Meanwhile, a sad and rebellious Doeg in The Making of the Representative still asks, "but what for? In our hearts now we all knew, everyone, that they would be roused and stimulated . . . to no end" (98). Yet he works despite his own reluctance to awaken the sleeping. He describes the suffering:

most showed signs of wanting to stumble back under the snow into their sleep again. How strong is that deep, dark drive towards sleep, towards death, towards annihilation. . . . To get them to move then, and to stand long enough for the active principle of the liquid to sting all their tissues awake--this is what we had to do, and we did, though we were using all our strength, physical and moral to keep them from going back and down into the dark. (99)
When the people are awakened, they are instructed by Doeg to build themselves shelters out of snowhuts with piles of hides inside them for warmth and stores of dried meats for sustenance. In each such house, four or five people are sheltered, alive and safe for a time. And out of these people, one is chosen to remain awake and to make sure the others do not slide back into lethargy.

The act of building these huts is an allegorical act, recalling the idea behind the Masonic order, (or "the builders,")) said to be associated with Sufism: "[one must] detach from fixed ideas and preconceptions, and face what is to be [his] lot" (Shah, Sufis 205). This is precisely what Doeg and the others do. They accept their lot and build a new system which can accommodate the new circumstances, slowly giving up the old ways of being and behaving. Lessing uses the word "Mason" or "builder" which she spells "Masson," as both a proper name and as a title for someone who has achieved a higher level of being. When Doeg recalls how he happened to become a representative, he remembers having been apprenticed to Masson as a youngster to dig out the earth for the foundation of the protective wall. He remembers the series of chances that caused him to eventually become a Representative, and he does consider that he could have been called "Masson" instead of "Doeg" by still another series of chances. Hence the name "Doeg," like all other names in the novel, is not only a proper name for one person, but also the title for someone who has achieved a certain degree of perfection. As a result of this act of "building" against atrophy and death, Doeg becomes conscious of a newness in himself and in the other representatives:
everything in us was new, being new-made, new-worked, changed. While we laboured and fought and exhorted and forced the doomed wretches up and out of their saving kindly lethargy, we were being changed, molecule by molecule, atom by atom. (101)

A similar "saving" of souls also takes place in Shikasta, in which, after millions are destroyed at the end of the "Great War," Lessing establishes a new cosmology where the one percent who survived live by following orders from Canopus; they no longer have selves, individuality, or will, as did Anna Wulf or Martha Quest, but are in fact more free and more responsible for their actions. The new cosmology operates through an intergalactic exchange between Canopus and its various colonies, which, in Lessing's words, furthers "the prime object and aim of the galaxy . . . --the creation of ever-evolving Sons and Daughters of the Purpose" (35). In the Sufi context, this "Purpose" implies evolution and enlightenment through "Work" on the self in The Sufi Way. Kassim Sherban is one of the survivors of Shikasta who has completed this "Work." Now an enlightened being in Lessing's new cosmology, he recalls the not-so-distant past with great curiosity and asks, "How did we live then? How did we bear it? . . . not knowing anything, fumbling and stumbling and longing for something different but not knowing what had happened to [us] or what [we] longed for" (364).

On Planet Eight, too, the joint effort of the representatives and the represented result in the death of those who had made no efforts to awaken and evolve and the rebirth of the representatives who struggled to rise above their ordinary states of being. Lessing
offers their experience to her readers as successful results of "Work" on the self in The Sufi Way. In Shikasta Kassim Sherban writes to two other survivors, "And this will go on for us, as if we were slowly being lifted and filled and washed by a soft singing wind that clears our sad muddled minds and holds us safe and heals us and feeds us with lessons we never imagined" (Sh 364). Similarly in Making of the Representative Doeg reports how

for the last time with our old eyes, we sat close and looked into each other's faces, until, one after another, our faces shuttered themselves in death, and our bundles of bones settled inside the heaps of our shag-skin coats. . . . we slid away from that scene, and saw it with eyes we had not known we possessed . . . . (116)

Ultimately, the Representatives' and the Shikastans' efforts to survive the catastrophe on their planet do not save them from physical death but rescue them from spiritual death, transforming them into higher beings. When these two novels are read as allegories, the snow and ice, or the blasting of cities by space-fleets, are only symbolic of spiritual starvation.

Lessing's urgent prophecy\(^\text{10}\) then, is for her readers to shake themselves out of lethargy and into conscious work in order to manifest their full potentials and thereby fulfill their destinies. As she has already stated in a 1973 lecture on Sufism, "Man's capacities are woefully underused and undervalued, and he doesn't know his own capacities" ("Writers' Encounter"). And she has acknowledged that the fact that this idea is central to Sufism is what attracted her to a serious study of The Sufi Way. Moreover,
like the Sufis, while she is concerned about humankind, her real interest lies in the larger scheme where the whole carpet, or the whole universe is what matters, and individuals are only important to the degree of their contribution to this big picture. She feels that "the petty fates of planets, let alone individuals, are only aspects of cosmic evolution" (Hazleton 25), which she advocates in all of Canopus in Argos series. For her, as for the Sufis, catastrophes such as famine, war, plague or other holocausts are unavoidable aspects of life, necessary for keeping the balance of nature, similar in purpose to forest fires ignited by natural causes that must be allowed to burn. Again, interested in the larger scheme, Lessing considers the fact that the human race as a species has survived all calamities thus far in spite of the millions of individuals who have been annihilated, and she concludes, "We [the human race] can survive anything you care to mention. We are supremely equipped to survive, to adapt and even in the long run to start thinking" (Hazleton 26). She believes, as do the Sufis, that mankind evolves through stress. Because of this belief, she accepts even the threat of nuclear war or another ice age as an opportunity through which humans may evolve, as do her allegorical characters.
Sufi Parables in Lessing

As chapter four demonstrates, the contents of Lessing's novels written after her introduction to Sufi mysticism naturally lend themselves to Sufic interpretation; in chapter five I would like to look closely at the way in which this is done. How does Lessing invite a Sufi reading of her novels? Are there direct signs or changes in her choices of genre, mode, and style that may suggest a new worldview and a changed outlook?

It is possible to read most of Lessing's post-Golden Notebook novels in light of Sufi mysticism, although it may not be possible to prove that Lessing intends these novels to be read exclusively through Sufi lenses. For instance The Four-Gated City and The Diary of a Good Neighbor include some remnants of Sufi material, while at the same time they remain not so radically different in mode and style from novels written before Sufi influence on Lessing to suggest a completely new train of thought. Aside from a few direct quotes from and allusions to Sufi sources they are traditional in their characterization, plot, and genre. On the other hand, the Canopus in Argos series written in what Lessing has termed the "space-fiction" genre demonstrate a definite break from the traditional novel, and raise questions regarding
Lessing's revised purpose. But even in the space fiction, one would have to be already acquainted with Sufism in order to see a connection to Sufi thought in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, or other novels in the series.

In *The Four-Gated City* Lessing includes direct quotes from various Sufi sources: a dervish teaching story from *The Way of the Sufi* by Idries Shah in the dedication; a quotation from Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the Master of the Whirling Dervishes, in the opening to Part Four; and another quotation from Idries Shah, the modern proponent of Sufism in the West, also before Part Four. The dervish story in the dedication sets the tone for the whole work and explicitly asks that characters in the novel be regarded as kindred spirits to the fool in the story:

"Once upon a time there was a fool who was sent to buy flour and salt. He took a dish to carry his purchases.

"Make sure," said the man who sent him, "not to mix the two things—I want them separate."

When the shopkeeper had filled the dish with flour and was measuring out the salt, the fool said: "Do not mix it with the flour; here, I will show you where to put it."

And he inverted the dish, to provide, from its upturned bottom, a surface upon which the salt could be laid.

The flour, of course, fell to the floor.

But the salt was safe.

When the fool got back to the man who had sent him, he said: "Here is the salt."
"Very well," said the other man, "but where is the flour?"

"It should be here," said the fool, turning the dish over.

As soon as he did that, the salt fell to the ground, and the flour, of course, was seen to be gone.

Lessing makes direct use of this tale to demonstrate the equally futile and senseless human endeavors described in Parts One, Two, and Three of The Four-Gated City, which fail from a similar lack of integration to that between the flour and the salt. Characters suffer from the separation of their knowledge from their experiences, and of their thoughts from their feelings, so that each is affected by the various results and side effects of that segregation. Most have done away with their feelings when they turned solely to their reason, and all, save for the few who have gone "insane," have lost the ability to bridge the gap between their knowledge and their daily experiences. For instance, Jimmy Wood, an associate of Mark Coldridge, remains a fool despite the books he owns on Rosicrucianism, Buddhism, Yoga, Zoroastrianism, the I Ching, Zen, and Sufism. He has read these, but has never internalized them to make them his own. Consequently, he is unable to exercise any of the wisdom of these books when his prudence and discretion are called for: when Mark's Communist brother flees to Soviet Russia, upon which the wife commits suicide and their young son is left behind to be raised by Mark and Martha, Jimmy is asked to keep quiet and not expose the family to the press, and not to give the family's new unlisted
phone number to anyone; however, he gives it anyway and explains that the news reporter sounded "as if he really wanted it" (159). When the number is changed again, he again gives it out, because, he explains, he thought "that the man asking for it was an electronics expert" (159). Despite all pleas to him to use discretion with news-hungry journalists, he tells them everything he knows whenever he is asked, his actions being as separate from his learning as the salt the fool in the parable buys at the market is from the spilled flour that was on the reverse side of the dish.

Likewise, other characters in The Four-Gated City, too, find that they have very little or no control over their crumbling lives. Life simply happens to them. What starts out as a temporary arrangement for Martha Quest, the protagonist, determines the course of her life for the next twenty years, and her indecision about staying in or leaving the Coldridge household tightly intermingles her life with the lives of the Coldridge family members. She works in the Coldridge household in London in the nineteen fifties, yet she accomplishes nothing palpable to show for her efforts and is thus like the fool who goes to the market and returns empty-handed. She untiringly strives for integration and wholeness between her inner self and her relationships to the external world; yet her world consists of turmoil within and political unrest, economic difficulties and the personal difficulties of individuals around her.

Lessing's primary interest in the various characters she has created in this novel is mimetic. Characters serve as real people
rather than as constructs in a text or as themes in an allegory. Dorothy, one of the lodgers in the house, demonstrates her own lack of integration and wholeness when she ineptly tries to hire help to repair a leaking faucet:

I rang five plumbers. Three didn't answer. . . . The fourth said he would come at nine. He never came at all. The fifth said he would come on Saturday morning at ten. Saturday morning: We waited for the plumber. When he had not turned up by twelve, I went out shopping. Lynda went to sleep. The man came while I was out. I telephoned him. His wife answered. . . . (191)

Dorothy's story continues until she has to turn off the water at the main valve because the leak has gotten worse, and she herself is in a state of frenzy and has to go to bed to hide from the world. She and her friend Lynda live on tranquilizers to ward off the helpless irritation they too frequently feel. Lynda reasons, "If I were asleep now, you wouldn't have to say anything, would you? That's why I like sleeping. I wish I could sleep all my life. But they won't give me enough pills. . . . I'm no use to anyone, so I might as well be asleep" (123). Indeed, Lynda does spend most of her days in sleep; it is not until Lessing destroys the old order with an apocalyptic disaster that Lynda awakens to find her "madness" of use in the new world order.

The other Sufi quotations in the opening to Part Four of The Four-Gated City are placed at precisely the point in the novel when the old order as it had been established in the first three parts begins to disintegrate, and the necessity of a new order
becomes apparent. The quotation from Rumi declares the pressing need for a revolution of minds:

From realm to realm man went, reaching his present reasoning, knowledgeable, robust state—forgetting earlier forms of intelligence. So, too, shall he pass beyond the current forms of perception... There are a thousand other forms of Mind...

But he has fallen asleep. He will say: "I had forgotten my fulfillment, ignorant that sleep and fancy were the cause of my sufferings."

He says: "My sleeping experiences do not matter."

Come, leave such asses to their meadow.

Because of a necessity, man acquires organs. So, necessitous one, increase your need.... (448)

The events in Part Four that unfold following this opening demonstrate a profound change in the environment, a consequence of the fact that the fools who make up the novel and their contemporaries have been asleep all their lives: the atmosphere is polluted by toxic fumes with disastrous effects; yet this catastrophe is accompanied by the birth of a new breed of human beings who have indeed acquired new "organs" of perception with which they can see, hear, and intuit better than their ancestors of the old order. These beings are born knowing the past of the human race as though they contained all of history within themselves. Even as young children, they command authority by the mere fact that they are wise and knowledgeable beyond their years.
The quotation from Idries Shah also reinforces this idea of new organs coming into being as a result of need, and it, too, signals the change that is about to take place in the protagonist's world and in the people around her:

Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving towards a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result of a need for specific organs. The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. In this age of the transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic and prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the past ten thousand years or so we have been given the possibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends on it. (448)

Lessing clearly asks us to read the development of new powers in the children born on the uncontaminated island in light of this quotation from Shah and the previous one from Rumi, and to recognize the birth of the special children as a sign of that "rarefied evolution" upon which "our future depends" (448). In one of his poems already cited Rumi speaks of the unbearable experience of awakening in a dungeon as opposed to the joy of
waking up in the rose gardens. Lessing knows that ordinary individuals in their physically defective and spiritually sterile states live in Rumi's "dungeon" and cannot inhabit the same world as conscious beings. Therefore in the end of the novel she guides her readers out of the special island back to the dungeon. One of the miracle children described earlier is sent from the "rosegarden" to this dungeon to give advice in various fields of activity. The official, a man with ordinary faculties who is to receive this emissary, asks in a letter: "I take it that your statement that he is ten years old is a misprint?" (654). Lessing ends her novel here with this question. Of course, in the eyes of ordinary "fools," this miracle child is only misprinted information—he cannot really exist. Lessing urges her readers to see that unless ordinary beings heighten their sensitivity so that they are able to recognize the light when it begins to flicker, they will remain in the dungeon no matter how many Christ figures or Sufi masters may appear on earth to rescue them.

There are a number of passages in The Four-Gated City in addition to the direct quotations from Sufis that explicitly echo Sufi truths. For instance the idea of developing new organs is first introduced in Part Two: "One hadn't heard before, because one had nothing to 'hear' with. Living was simply a process of developing different 'ears,' senses, with which one 'heard,' experienced, what one couldn't before" (236). When this idea is repeated two-hundred pages later in the form of quoted passages from Rumi and Shah, a Sufi reading of this and other similar passages becomes unmistakably justified. Yet another fifty pages
into Part Four, the desperate need for new organs is demonstrated as Martha observes the defective human beings around her: "their eyes were half useless--many wore bits of corrective glass over these spoiled or ill-grown organs; their ears were defective--many wore machines to help them hear even as much as the sounds made by their fellows; and their mouths were full of metal" (506).

Another instance of Sufi fragments in The Four-Gated City appears in the novel Mark Coldridge writes in which he describes a dream city with an inner and an outer layer. The inner layer has harmony, order, joy. Outside are power-hungry people fighting for money and recognition. Naturally, the inhabitants of the outer city wish to "buy" the secret wisdom of the inner city that makes one happy. And when told that they cannot buy but must earn the secret, they overrun and destroy the inner city only to find that knowledge is indeed nothing material that can be carried away, but can only be acquired through experience (141). In Sufi terms, this story can be read as the destruction of the inner circle of humanity by the outer circle who cannot understand or tolerate it. Most Sufis today would claim that their own particular brotherhood was similarly attacked and forced to go underground at some point in history, as many indeed were at the end of the nineteenth century when a wave of secularism swept the Middle East (See Appendix). The Sufi poet Omar Khayyam (d. 1132) expresses the necessity for discretion and secrecy in the following lines:

The secret must be kept from all non-people:
The mystery must be hidden from all idiots.
See what you do to people--
The Eye has to be hidden from all men.

(Shah, Way of Sufi 59)
Coexistent with this secrecy is the Sufi aim that always remains the same: to transmit knowledge to the ordinary people of the outer circle, i.e., to philosophers, scientists, sociologists, historians, economists and politicians who practice solely in the domains of fact and value, not in the domains of the unknown and the unpredictable, the timeless. Lessing’s inclusion of Mark’s novel about the inner city within her novel strengthens the claim that her primary interest in her art is didactic, and that, like Sufis who continue to teach those in the outer circle of humanity, Lessing teaches Sufi truths whenever and wherever she can.

Paralleling the concept of secrecy and discretion with regard to real knowledge, Lynda tells Martha to "be careful, Martha, careful, you mustn’t say what you know, they’ll lock you up, they want machines, they don’t want people" (503). Martha’s response to her own awakening is horror; for now, in Rumi’s dungeon, she SEES all deformities and defects in those around herself. She thinks, "The price you paid for being awake, for being received into that grace, was this, that when you walked among your kind you had to see them, and yourself, as they, we are. She did not want it again, not so soon—" (509).

A parallel set up to the "dream city" in Mark’s novel exists in his own household, but remains undetected by him: his mad/wise wife Lynda lives in the basement with her friend Dorothy from the psychiatric ward; Mark, Martha, and the two boys live upstairs, or in the outer layer, from where each pays visits downstairs to Lynda’s inner domain for friendship and advice. Whenever Martha feels close to a breakdown she feels that there is no one else who
can understand her but Lynda. The visits are also occasionally reversed; yet whenever Lynda and Dorothy come up for dinner, the results are disastrous. This disjunction between what happens above and what happens below is best explained by the parallel with the underground Sufi circles and the secular societies with which they find themselves surrounded today. Lynda and Dorothy's friends from the psychiatric ward congregate in the Coldridge basement to share their perceptions that are more acute and almost dangerously too honest to be uttered in the outer city. Just as the inner city in Mark's book contained a hidden octagonal white room under the library, the basement in his own home serves as the inaccessible recesses of the mind.

Potentially, a Sufi reading is also in order in the character of Mark Coldrige's wife Lynda who is cast in the role of the renowned fool and Sufi teacher, Nasreddin Hodja or Mulla Nasrudin, who is discussed in chapter four of this work. The following interaction between Lynda and Martha demonstrates this similarity:

"Lynda, do you know who you are?"
"Me," said Lynda.
"Do you see that when you look in the mirror?"
"No. Not often. Sometimes."
"When?"
"Oh, I don't know. There are times, you know." (226)

The explicit parallel between this passage and the following Sufi anecdote is impossible to overlook not only in content but also in its cryptic style:
The Mulla walked into a shop one day.
The owner came forward to serve him.

"First things first," said Nasrudin; "did you see me walk into your shop?"

"Of course."

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"Never in my life."

"Then how do you know it is me?" (Shah, Sufis 79)

As in this example, whether consciously or not, Lessing occasionally emulates the countless anecdotes about Nasrudin that have been translated into English for the Western public in several new collections by Idries Shah. This emulation is repeated even more overtly in the character of Maudie Fowler in a later novel, The Diary of a Good Neighbor (1983), which is otherwise traditional in its style. Here too, anecdotes resembling Sufi tales are created and attributed to Maudie as though experienced and performed by her. These anecdotes are unmistakably of the spirit of Nasreddin Hodja. Like Nasreddin, Maudie, too, is both helpless and powerful, both foolish and wise, and always utterly and rightfully honest with her words.

Before looking into Maudie's character and the stories about her, it would be instructive to define a character as James Phelan does in his theory of narratology in which his purpose is "to consider how the reader's experience is directed by the text" (107). In Reading People, Reading Plots, Phelan divides a character into three dimensions, the mimetic, synthetic, and thematic, which in turn are sometimes converted into three
distinctive functions that characters may perform to varying degrees in the narrative. The mimetic dimension reminds us that characters are images of possible, growing people with traits such as beauty, maleness, or shyness, and the way and degree to which these traits coalesce to create a plausible person results in the mimetic function (11). A reader who fully participates in this mimetic illusion belongs to the narrative audience. The synthetic dimension is the artificially constructed component that remains covert in realistic texts, although fundamentally, all characters are synthetic constructs. As such, they serve as devices that act as protagonist, antagonist, or minor character who carry out various roles to further the plot. Whenever characters perform their plot functions they are carrying out their synthetic function. Usually, the more we become aware of the synthetic component, the more the reality of a character as mimetic diminishes, and vice versa. A reader who remains doubly conscious of the mimetic and synthetic components belongs to the authorial audience. Finally, the thematic dimension of a character refers to his/her sometimes being ideational and/or representative of a class such as bigots, revolutionaries, or individualists. For Phelan, "progression" is the key term throughout, because it directs the readers' interests toward the relation among the components of character.

In The Diary of a Good Neighbor, where traces of Sufism are rare and mostly occur near the end of the novel, the progression is not directed toward teaching Sufism, but rather Sufism underlies the conception and creation of at least one character,
Maudie Fowler, thematically and mimetically. When we apply Phelan's divisions of character to this work, we see that the diary is kept by Janna (Jane) Somers in her mimetic dimension and function as a single, successful middle-aged career woman with various strengths and weaknesses, friends, family and memories, who lives and records her life in her diary. She befriends Maudie Fowler, mimetically a poor, lonely, sick woman past ninety who refuses to go to a Home and who opts to fend for herself. The novel also depicts Janna in her synthetic dimension and function as the narrator. While Janna narrates the majority of the novel, the novel is also narrated directly by Maudie herself whenever the stories are about Maudie's past rather than shared events in the present. At these instances the mimetic dimension of Maudie's character is foregrounded: she is portrayed as an old crone who has nothing left but her reminiscences and who enjoys indulging in her nostalgia for the past. At the same time she also functions synthetically as a narrator of old people's stories. When, rather than allowing Maudie to speak directly, Lessing uses the character of Janna in her synthetic role as narrator to retell Maudie's memories, it is because Maudie is either too sick to speak for herself, or she is dead. At these points in the novel Lessing-the-Sufi takes over for brief intervals, casting an aura of mystery around the character of Maudie who becomes a greater-than-life heroine embodying ideas such as suffering and survival. Then, having become a "theme with legs" (9) in Phelan's words, Maudie functions as a Sufi master who teaches through demonstration and through direct contact with her medium. As in
her mimetic role, in this thematic role too, she behaves in a
cuttingly truthful manner, always telling it like it is. In her
honesty and curness she instantly reminds any reader,
particularly one who has grown up in the Middle East, of Nasreddin
Hodja or Mulla Nasrudin.

The progression of *The Diary* moves by Janna’s visits to Maudie
that are sometimes pleasant and sometimes trying for Janna, and by
numerous flashbacks to Maudie’s past that detail the kind of
person Maudie used to be, and to a great extent, still is. From
the beginning of the novel, Lessing establishes an instability
within Janna regarding her undertaking Maudie’s welfare when she
herself is already too busy with her work at Lilith, the women’s
magazine she publishes, and her own daily life in general. She
rightfully wonders, ”What is the use of Maudie Fowler?” to which
her answer is, ”By the yardsticks and measurements I’ve been
taught, none” (25). Given this conclusion only twenty-five pages
into the narrative, Janna’s returns to Maudie’s house to look
after her are a surprise to the narrative audience that believes
and sympathises with her inner struggle, as well as with her
disgust at the pungent and sweet smell of urine and sickness in
which she always finds Maudie soaked. At the same time, the
narrative audience also knows full well that this is a novel about
Janna’s being a Good Neighbor to Maudie, and expects Janna to
continue returning to Maudie’s often much against her own
repulsion. In this sense the novel is about the breakdown of
Janna’s resistance to and disgust for ”old people” and their stale
and useless lives, also given Janna’s guilt about her inability in
the past to have been there for her own mother when she was sick and dying. Throughout the novel Janna moves by degrees to a place within herself where she does not identify with her disgust but develops sincere love and compassion for Maudie that overcome the natural human responses to the decay of old age and to her earlier automatic judgment of Maudie's uselessness.

The narrative also progresses as a result of a second instability that is established in the opening pages between Janna and Maudie. Upon every visit by Janna, Maudie reproaches her with remarks about not having come the day before, or for having come late, maintaining the basic assumption that Janna comes only out of pity and a sense of obligation and therefore need not have come at all. Thus we read to discover the degree of Janna's willingness to visit Maudie, and the result of the arguments that ensue between the two women as a prelude to many visits. The outcome of these two instabilities is already apparent early in the narrative, as the two women always settle down to an exchange of stories about their lives, Maudie's past and Janna's present. But we read further to discover the ultimate extent of Janna's transformation through her experience as a Good Neighbor.

A third point of interest to both the narrative and authorial audiences is the contrast between the stench and depravity of Maudie's existence and the luxury in which Janna lives, which includes hot bubble baths, scented dressing gowns, and time to do her nails. Janna is completely aware of and somewhat disconcerted by this contrast, and frequently brings it up in her diary for us to view and to judge for ourselves. Although the instability
within Janna and that between her and Maudie carry the action forward mimetically, the narrative also progresses synthetically by the mere changes of scenery between Maudie's dreadful poverty and sickness on the one hand, and Janna's glamorous life on the other. These blatant switches between Maudie's wretched quarters and Janna's immaculate flat are impossible to overlook, and they serve as shocks that propel the narrative forward to its obvious conclusion—Maudie's eventual death and Janna's inevitable transformation.

In chapter one of Reading People, Reading Plots, Phelan argues that thematizing alone in reading a novel results in our selection of one theme over another without regard to the development of character or to the progression of events in the narrative, thus amounting to a partial reading. For instance, in Pride and Prejudice it is not enough to isolate Elizabeth as "pride," just as it is not correct to regard Winston Smith in 1984 only as "the last man in Europe," when their mimetic functions are also significant, though, especially in Winston's case, they are subordinated to their thematic functions. However, in Lessing's novels written after the mid-sixties, the mystical and didactic elements are so strong, and Sufi material is so liberally integrated in the narratives that thematizing in the Sufi Way is not only naturally suggested, but self-consciously invited in passages such as when Maudie is in the hospital with stomach cancer and Janna tells us,
The family have already been, the tribe, admitted to her presence in twos and threes.

"Are you coming to see if there's anything for you when I'm dead?" [Maudie] inquires. "You should know better than that, you've had everything off me years ago."

"Oh Auntie!" say nieces, nephews, and, "What sort of talk is that, Maudie?" inquires the matriarch [her sister].

"You know what kind of talk," says Maudie, and turns her face to stare away from them; and she does not reply to their Goodbye, Auntie, Goodbye, Maudie. (215)

Maudie is not only being honest about how she feels about the relatives, but she is also right about their motives. Our favorite Sufi master and trickster Nasreddin Hodja is caught in the grips of a similar bout with honesty when a neighbor comes to borrow his clothesline: "I am sorry, but I am drying flour on it," says Hodja. And when his neighbor asks, "But how can you dry flour on a line?" Hodja retorts, "It is less difficult than you think, when you don't want to lend it" (Shah, Sufis 70).

On a rare occasion, Lessing also makes use of a minor character in the novel to comment on Maudie's uniqueness: Vera Rogers fulfills the mimetic role of a social worker who looks after the needs of the old who choose to live on their own. She takes care of their Home Help, Meals on Wheels, Good Neighbors, and medical needs. When Janna calls Vera to tell her that Maudie has died, Vera bursts into tears and says, "Oh, I don't know why [I'm crying], there was something about her, what was it?" (249).
This "something about her" sees Maudie through her life and her death. At the funeral, the son of Maudie's nephew, another minor character in the novel, comments that "Auntie Maudie had her sense of humour all right, oh she liked her little joke . . . " (251). These comments serve to add further credence both to Maudie's mimetic dimension as a lovable old witch and her thematic dimension as a spirited survivor of life's miseries--i.e., a potential Sufi, as illustrated in the following examples.

In her synthetic role as record keeper and mimetic role as Maudie's only friend, Janna retells a story about Maudie that she hears from the son of Maudie's nephew:

People [Maudie] cleaned house for had a fruit and vegetable shop, and the woman said to her, "Would you like to taste this season's new strawberries?" And set in front of the expectant Maudie a single strawberry on a good plate, with the sugar bowl and the cream. Maudie ate the strawberry, and then said to the woman, "Perhaps you'd like to sample the cherries on the tree in my back garden?" Brought the woman a single luscious cherry in a large brown-paper bag, and gave her notice there and then. (251)

Countless collections about Nasreddin Hodja in English and other languages as well as in the oral tradition abound with jokes that are variants of the same model in which the antagonist deserves what s/he gets, and the protagonist is avenged. It is impossible to resist including two of the variants here, as they not only demonstrate that the above story emulates a Sufi anecdote, but are also witty and entertaining:
Nasrudin visited a Turkish bath. Because he was dressed in rags, he was cavalierly treated by the attendants, who gave him an old towel and a scrap of soap. When he left, he handed the amazed bath men a gold coin. The next day he appeared again, magnificently attired, and was naturally given the best possible attention and deference.

When the bath was over, he presented the bath keepers with the smallest copper coin available.

"This," he said, "was for the attendance last time. The gold coin was for your treatment of me this time."

(Shah, Sufis 85)

The justice of Nasrudin's payments at the bath equals the justness of Maudie's act in bringing a single cherry for sampling. In a similar story, Hodja again demonstrates the inhuman behavior and judgment of the antagonists whom he brings to justice in his own way:

Nasrudin made a wager that he could spend a night on a near-by mountain and survive, in spite of ice and snow. Several wags in the teahouse agreed to adjudicate.

Nasrudin took a book and a candle and sat through the coldest night he had ever known. In the morning, half-dead, he claimed his money.

"Did you have nothing at all to keep you warm?" asked the villagers.

"Nothing."

"Not even a candle?"
"Yes, I had a candle."

"Then the bet is off."

Nasrudin did not argue.

Some months later he invited the same people to a feast at his house. They sat down in his reception room, waiting for the food. Hours passed.

They started to mutter about food.

"Let's go and see how it is getting on," said Nasrudin.

Everyone trooped into the kitchen. They found an enormous pot of water, under which a candle was burning. The water was not even tepid.

"It is not ready yet," said the Mulla. "I don't know why—it has been there since yesterday."

(Shah, Exploits 29)

Nasrudin and Maudie both are thematic figures who are victimized and laughed at, but who rise above their circumstances simply by the strength of their spirits. Janna tells Maudie's relatives another story, which once again demonstrates Maudie's utter sense of justice and fairness and her unwavering faith in God who can work miracles, even if, in Maudie's case, they are rather small miracles:

[Maudie] was out of work, because she had flu and had lost her cleaning job. She was walking home with no money at all in her purse and she was praying, God help me, God please help me... And she looked down and saw a half-crown on the pavement. And she said, Thank you, God. She went into the first shop and bought a currant
bun, and ate it standing there, she was so hungry. Then she bought bread, butter, jam, and some milk. There was sixpence over. On her way home she went into the church and put the sixpence in the box, and said to God, You've helped me, and now I'll help You. (252)

Nasreddin Hodja behaves in similar ways in an infinite number of situations and in his case he is even more of a knave than Maudie, such as the time he is out in his garden, praying for a hundred gold pieces, shouting at the top of his lungs. A miser who lives next door hears this, and to play a trick on Hodja, throws down a bag full of gold. "Thank you," says Hodja to God. When the miser appears at the door to expose his trick and to reclaim his money Hodja tells him, "You may have been the instrument, but the gold did not come as a result of my asking you for it!" (Shah, Sufis 106). In this story the miser's presence complicates Nasreddin's experience. He must deal with not only Allah but the miser, whose mockery he turns against the miser before he proceeds to praise Allah. In Maudie's case, in contrast, the exchange with God is a lot simpler.

This faith in God's or Allah's help above that of humans is demonstrated again and again in anecdotes about Nasreddin Hodja in which he is always rewarded by a twist of fate that blurs the distinction between God's help and a chance accident or human intervention. Another time, Nasreddin is again convinced that Allah will provide when a man complains to him that he has been robbed. To prove Allah's power, Nasreddin takes the man to the mosque where he rolls on the ground and calls loudly upon Allah to
restore the man's silver coins. Annoyed by the commotion, the congregation makes a collection and hands the sum to the surprised loser. "You may not understand the means which operate in this world," [says Hodja,] "but I trust that you understand the end when it is handed to you in such a concrete form" (Shah, Pleasantries 132).

When Janna concludes her diary and Lessing the novel with the two jokes about Maudie, their similarity to Nasreddin Hodja cannot elude one who has grown up with Nasreddin tales. Given this fact, it would be safe to conclude that this resemblance is not a mere accident on Lessing's part, for she not only has acknowledged having read Idries Shah's collections of Sufi tales, but also has promoted them in various lectures, reviews, and essays. Lessing wants at least to introduce Sufi ideas at a surface level as jokes, without regard to whether the average western reader is familiar specifically with Nasreddin Hodja or Sufism. Given her commitment to the work of Idries Shah and her acceptance of Sufi thought as valid and relevant, it is not too far fetched to assume that Lessing wants to use her novels as instruments to expose the western public to Sufism in any way she can. Sufism is meant to be contemporary and fresh, not to be treated as an ancient wisdom only to be studied by antiquarians; therefore Lessing's way of introducing the spirit of Sufi doctrine through Maudie's exploits while relegating the letter of Sufic law to a secondary position becomes precisely the proper thing to do.

The Diary of a Good Neighbor remains one of Lessing's less self-consciously didactic and less overtly Sufic works when
contrasted to her Space Fiction, even though the novel does make a
definite point about self-work, self-sacrifice, service, and the
inevitability of old age. It especially focuses thematically on
Maudie’s spirit, which is her saving grace, and Janna’s altruism,
which two characteristics bring these predominantly mimetic
figures together in a bond of friendship that occasions the
writing of The Diary.

For Lessing, the introduction of Sufi material into her work
is almost a reflex. Having read and ingested Sufi thought in
earnest, she brings in fragments of Sufism intermittently and most
naturally, in the same manner that she might write about being
British and the British point of view. Therefore, traces of
Sufism emerge in different forms in different novels, sometimes
too subtly for even Lessing herself to be conscious of them, and
other times quite overtly with her full knowledge and didactic
intent. In appropriating Sufi material in this way Lessing
removes Sufi teachings from their original Islamic context and
dramatizes them through characters and instabilities that are
readily understood by her primarily western audience. Hence
Islamic materials that are apparently ‘other’ to a western
audience help Lessing to reinterpret the familiar. The Four-Gated
City and The Diary of Jane Somers are two of many Lessing novels
that illustrate how Sufi ideas have worked their way into
Lessing’s texts and how they have infiltrated her works in many
big and small ways, claiming new ground for themselves as
transplants among modern western narratives where they can take
fresh new root.
In the *Canopus in Argos* series Lessing's way changes more radically and much more consciously in order to accommodate her didactic purposes. Each novel in the series is labeled either "Archives" or "Chronicles," and each is distinctly written as though it were a historical account of a civilization whose existence and reality must be preserved for posterity, which preservation the narrator of *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* calls "maintaining Memory" (99). In *The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight*, Doeg, one of the narrators, is referred to as a "Memory Maker" and Klin, as a "Keeper of Records" (22). The narrators of every novel (each novel has more than one narrator) in the series call themselves "chroniclers" and they diligently tell the story of their particular planet as though the events being conveyed really took place. The chroniclers in *Marriages* comment on how a particular event turned into folk stories and legend in the retelling. Often, following the depiction of a particular event, they remark, "This scene is known as 'Jarnti's Walk,' and gives much opportunity for humour to our artists and tellers" (19); or "This scene, too, is one much depicted" (16), stressing the fact that these episodes really did happen once, and that they now have become legend.

*Marriages* as well as *Making of the Representative* also recalls Sufi parables. The chroniclers of *The Representative* call the novel a "tale": "You ask us how the Canopean Agents seemed to us in the days of The Ice. / This tale is our answer" (121), they tell us. As it is not surprising to find Sufi parables cast in an actual historical time and place, neither does Lessing's combination of history and tale violate the requirements for a true Sufi parable.
In The Representative the reader is asked to take in the novel as though it were an objective historical account of what happened to Planet Eight during the time of "The Ice," but also to learn from it as though it were a teaching tale. This combination of "history" and "story" is poignantly demonstrated in the novel when Doeg, the chronicler and representative of Planet Eight says, "It was then I first noticed that always when one is telling of something done or seen or experienced, it becomes a story, a tale... at any rate, our people listened as if to some tale or legend" (54). Lessing, like Doeg, in turn suggests to her readers to listen as if her novel were a tale or a legend, but to remember that it is also fact. Again combining history and story, Doeg tells us how "We listened—the eyes of every one of us had in them always a look of waiting to hear or receive some news, or message or information" (33).

In addition to emulating historical texts and Sufi parables, the novels in the Canopus in Argos series also share the qualities of space fiction, which, when combined with the objectivity of a chronicle, equip Lessing with the ideal tools with which to illustrate her perception of the reality of foreign lands beyond the earth that ultimately correspond to the inner worlds in which we live in our minds, fantasies, and dreams. In The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five, these worlds are clearly "zoned" off to correspond to the various levels of being in Sufism. By using the genre of space fiction, Lessing is able to escape the limitations of the known world and to explore spheres and Zones never encountered in ordinary life. In addition, her claim to be writing a historical
text adds further legitimacy to the reality of these otherwise unrecognizable Zones or levels of being only known to other Sufis. In Sufism it is clearly accepted that several levels of being exist simultaneously in the world as we know it. Therefore the same event might be experienced and perceived to differing degrees by different individuals. This inequality is apparent in the marriage of Al Ith to Ben Ata in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five: Al Ith is capable of experiencing, feeling, and perceiving more deeply than Ben Ata because she belongs to Zone Three. The chroniclers of Zone Three tell us, "Her ways seemed too difficult for him, or at least unfamiliar, or out of his reach just then. And his were striking him as crude . . ." (46).

Lessing encourages an allegorical reading of The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five⁴ by allowing the thematic functions of the characters to overshadow their mimetic functions. In order to understand how Lessing uses the synthetic dimension of characters to achieve this, it will be instructive to turn to James Phelan's study of characters once again. In part two of Reading People, Reading Plots, James Phelan studies "the effects created when the mimetic illusion is broken and the authorial audience's usually covert awareness that character is an artificial construct becomes overt" (133) in works ranging from John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman and Charles Dickens's Great Expectations to an extreme case such as Italo Calvino's If on a winter's night a traveler.

Phelan observes that in The French Lieutenant’s Woman the narrator is firmly rooted in the twentieth century while he appears
to write a Victorian novel. This dual perspective allows Fowles to move between the modern view of the novel as fiction and characters as constructs, and the Victorian view of the story as real and characters, mimetic. The fact that the narrator distinctly places himself in 1967 and looks back at the nineteenth century aligns us with the narrator, and encourages our engagement with the thematic aspects of the characters, i.e., conflicts of the Victorian age. In chapters 13 and 55 the modern perspective, and with it, the synthetic component of characters are foregrounded. This introduces a tension between the narrator and the authorial audience, and, along with the treatment of Sarah, sets up the narrative for the two endings. The authorial audience’s attention on the thematic is strengthened by the occasional foregrounding of the synthetic component of characters, even while the narrator promises and attempts to reveal the inner world of, for instance, the mimetic Sarah, and insists on engaging the authorial audience on the mimetic level. Yet Sarah Woodruff never fully functions mimetically. In fact the first mention of her refers to her as "it," a figure in the distance, and later, as "Tragedy." We never get an inside view of her, which makes the two endings possible.

The character of Sarah functions both mimetically and thematically as a complicator of the instabilities in Charles’s life established in chapters 2-12: Charles is engaged to Ernestina, a Victorian woman, while he remains uncertain about embracing Victorian values. Meeting Sarah offers him an alternative: loving the mimetic Sarah, an independent woman of the lower class, would also mean choosing the thematic Sarah, or the modern age, the
anti-Victorian lover, and freedom. This choice is rewarded by the first ending that resolves the major instability in Charles's life, while the second ending in which Sarah rejects Charles hints at Charles's further growth into the free "modern man."

The way in which John Fowles foregrounds the synthetic aspect of Sarah's character to draw attention to the theme of the Victorian conflict is similar to Lessing's treatment of Al Ith in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* and of Doeg in *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*. In *The Marriages* Al Ith's synthetic dimension is somewhat qualified by the emphasis on her to act as a person with certain traits would act in order to illustrate and advance Sufi teachings in the novel. On the other hand, in *The Representative* Doeg is more overtly and consistently a synthetic character who fulfills the role of "student" or "disciple," and who diverts the attention of the authorial audience inevitably from the mimetic to the thematic component of his character, and to the theme of transformation in the whole narrative.

In *The Marriages* the character of Al Ith is hardly a real person, despite the chroniclers' claim to the historical verity of her experiences. She functions more as a set of characteristics embodying the nature of Zone Three than she does as a woman with a mind and a body of her own, making her own decisions, feeling pain or joy. Like Al Ith, Ben Ata, too, is more often a two-dimensional figure: he is a king, embodying barbarism and crudity, while Al Ith is a princess and later queen, embodying independence, sensitivity, and lightheartedness. Both function more often as fixed puppets fulfilling "the Order" of "the Providers" and acting out the traits
assigned to them by the master puppeteer, Lessing. The clash between the traits that they embody is evident in their first lovemaking: "as he held her still so that he could enter her, she shrank from him and tightened as if everything in her repudiated him" (46).

Throughout the novel Al Ith always behaves according to what would bring about a balance between the Zones, simply fulfilling her thematic role as the sacrificial bride, there to offer herself for the sake of an equilibrium in the Cosmos. And likewise, the character of Ben Ata is there to act out the theme of brute force and violence. His plot functions include taking Al Ith at his will and by force, yet also becoming somewhat hewn and changed by Al Ith's grace. Meanwhile, the words the couple exchange always underscore their irreconcilable differences. Al Ith tells Ben Ata, "If you were set down in the middle of our land you would not understand anything that was going on. Do you know that as soon as I cross into your land I cease to be my real self? Everything I say comes out distorted and different. Or if I manage to be as I am then it is so hard, that in itself makes everything different" (99).

From the very beginning of the narrative the chroniclers make it clear that what happens to Al Ith is decided by "the Providers," and it is always "they" that direct her. For instance, we are told that Al Ith was "taken" to Zone Four. She did not go of her own volition, but submitted to a higher will (as a Sufi would), "surrender" being the definition of the word "islam." While Al Ith, as a synthetic character, submits to Lessing-the-author's will, Al Ith in her mimetic and thematic dimension submits to the will
from "Above." The chroniclers note that the inhabitants of Zone Three see

what was in store for her—and they were about to raise their voices in lament, keening, but she lifted her hand and stopped them.

"There is no help for it" she said in a low voice, her lips trembling. "We have our orders. And it is clear [that] down in Zone Four they don't like it any more than we do." (16)

Lessing accomplishes her purpose to demonstrate different levels of being not only by narrating the unequal and incompatible experiences of Al Ith and Ben Ata, but also by translating these invisible layers into geographical space. In the novel, the Zones have actual frontiers where one ends and the other begins, denoting a change in the quality of the atmosphere when a person moves from one Zone to another: "The inhabitants of Zone Three, straying near the frontier, found themselves afflicted with repugnance, or at the least by an antipathy to foreign airs and atmospheres that showed itself in a cold lethargy, like boredom" (4). While Zone Three is marked by a purity, innocence, and lighthearted friendliness, Zone Four is the space allotted for war, violence, and barbarism, and Zone Two "is as if you looked at blue mists—or waters or—but it is blue, blue, you've never seen such a blue . . . " (74). Al Ith's goal is to grow into Zone Two, even purer than Zone Three. She tells Ben Ata, "All I can say is that you stand and gaze and look, and never have enough of it" (74).
Once the Zones have been thus defined, the narrative progresses by the major instability of Al Ith, a refined creature’s position in Zone Four, a crude place relative to her own level of being. Both the narrative audience and the authorial audience know that Al Ith must arrive ultimately at Zone Two, but also that first she and Ben Ata must work out their differences. While the outcome of the narrative is not hard to guess, we read anyway to discover just how the characters evolve to the higher Zones (with lower numbers) and exactly what effects their evolution will have on the Zones to which they belong.

Al Ith must first remember Zone Four, where she used to live before she evolved to Zone Three. At present, Zone Four is at war with Zone Five. The chroniclers explain that the war is the reason Zone Four has become so barbaric: "A realm at war did not need the courtesies" (5). And naturally, it goes against the grain for Zone Three to mingle with Zone Four. When Ben Ata sends a curt message to Zone Three, the chroniclers note, "Here was proof of the rightness of our reluctance to be brought low by Zone Four" (5).

This is also the reason why Al Ith, in her thematic role as peacemaker, must go to Zone Four and marry Ben Ata; only after she has been integrated into Zone Four can she truly grow beyond her present environment in Zone Three, and in turn can there be more free movement between the Zones. She believes "that this great lump of a man so newly introduced in her life must balance in some way those far blue heights of Zone Two" (61). The chroniclers know that "Zone Three [is] only one of the realms administered generally from Above," and they are aware of the necessity of integration between
the Zones. They explain, "We did think, when we thought in these lines [about integration] at all, of ourselves in interaction with these other realms, but it was in an abstract way. We had perhaps grown insular? Self-sufficing?" (6). And it is precisely because "the Zones [can] not mingle, [are] inimical by nature" (4) that "the Order" comes from "Above" for Al Ith to sacrifice herself to a higher cause and accept Ben Ata in marriage. She explains to Ben Ata, "We are here for a purpose—to heal our two countries and to discover where it is we have gone wrong, and what it is that we should be doing, really doing" (76).

Ultimately, Lessing is interested to demonstrate the breakdown of boundaries and barriers when beings at all levels commit themselves to undertaking sincere interactions with one another. This recalls the same necessity for integration in The Four-Gated City as illustrated so concisely by the opening Sufi parable about the fool who is sent to buy flour and salt, both of which he loses while trying to keep them separate.

The simultaneously-existing worlds in The Marriages also bring to mind C.S. Lewis' book, The Great Divorce in which Lewis presents an image of the hereafter: a group of people depart on a bus from a smog-polluted city, arguing and fighting about everything, and arrive in another world where the light is so strong it hurts their eyes, and the blades of grass are so substantial they pierce their feet. The higher beings who come to meet them there explain how this is only an intermediary world for them, and that it is as low as they themselves could possibly come in order to meet the newcomers. They explain that this for them is darkness; to them, everything
here appears ghost-like. It is in this manner that C.S. Lewis contrasts the levels of being: darkness and a mere blade of grass to a higher being appears as brilliant light and as sharp as steel to a lower being.

The progression of The Marriages depends on that same instability between the levels of being or Zones. Furthermore, the thematic dimensions of both Al Ith and Ben Ata are essential to our grasp of the progression. For instance, in so far as Al Ith, in her function as a theme, represents the whole of Zone Three, her actions and her suffering in her function as a mimetic figure reflect on and directly affect Zone Three. This direct correlation between Al Ith and Zone Three mimetically affects the people, plants, and animals who live on Zone Three; when Al Ith suffers, they suffer, and some even die. Al Ith’s marriage to Ben Ata, a lower being, is such a step backwards for her that its initially destructive effects are felt in all of Zone Three, the Zone Al Ith abandons to marry Ben Ata.

This tight bond between Al Ith and Zone Three is best understood when the novel is read as an allegory in which Al Ith functions as the embodiment of all of Zone Three, there to fulfill her thematic role of scapegoat. When she suffers Ben Ata’s embrace, which represents the crudity of Zone Four, the whole of Zone Three experiences her suffering: animals ail and lose their fertility; people lose their cheer and vitality. All are "sad enough to die." It is reported that "They have lost the zest for living" (17) since Al Ith left—a state that Al Ith hopes to ameliorate by conceiving Ben Ata’s child, i.e., uniting the Zones. Meanwhile, Al Ith and Ben Ata’s "differences [are] so great that they [are] both always being
overtaken by feelings of astonishment that they [can] be there together at all. And so they [are] to feel until the very end" (75). At the end when Al Ith does evolve as expected, Zone Three rejoices and evolves with her. Thematically, the change in her reflects a profound change in her level of being as a result of her suffering and of her efforts at overcoming that suffering.

The episodes in *Marriages* not only suggest Islamic influence by Al Ith's act of surrender, which defines the word *islam*, but also suggest non-western influence by the names Lessing chooses for her characters, such as Kunzor, Jarnti, and Ben Ata, that are clearly foreign to the western ear. It could be that Lessing uses the word "Ben" to serve as the Arabic prefix "bin" meaning "son of" and "Ata" to mean "father" or "forefather" and "ancestor" so that "Ben Ata" or "Bin Ata" means "father's son." Supposing that Lessing intentionally endowed him with an Arabic name, "Ben Ata" by definition stands for anonymity and Ben Ata embodies all of his heritage and ancestry in Zone Four. Now that Zone Three wishes to unite with Zone Four, Al Ith is chosen to be sacrificed to the cause by marrying a man who can sire children to bridge the gap between the past, or Zone Four, and the future, or Zone Two. Considering the earlier resistance to such a fusion of Zones, Al Ith and Ben Ata's sexual union can be interpreted as a Sufi symbol. The idea of this union as a thematic function is simulated in Al Ith and Ben Ata's love-making at the mimetic level as well:

She held him as if she were drowning and could only be saved by his driving body. She felt as if he did not do this, extinguish her, knock her out, sink her deep, drive
out of her all the tensions and the electricity, that she would go crazy, explode. Why? she had no idea. This was Zone Four! This was how it was. (181)

It is impossible to separate time and space in Marriages because the characters function more as two-legged themes than mimetic people, and these themes are easily spirited past the frontiers of Zones and beyond the limitations of time. Al Ith has only to ride her horse some distance for her character to enter another Zone. Considering the restrictions that would have to be placed on a well-rounded character with mimetic traits, the idea of the synchronicity and simultaneity of events in Marriages is best expressed by Lessing's use of the two techniques demonstrated in the previous pages: 1) enabling characters to transcend barriers between Zones by using allegory that affords a character in his/her thematic function the freedom to behave in ways unlike a primarily mimetic character could; and 2) depicting different levels of consciousness on the Sufi ladder to enlightenment by means of geographical time/space Zones which exist simultaneously.

Lessing's use of such techniques to break ordinary thought-patterns recalls the Sufi story from the sixteenth-century manuscript entitled Hu-Nama (Book of Hu), written by Nawab of Sardhana and translated by Idries Shah. In this story, considerably longer than the Nasreddin tales encountered earlier in this work, unknown and invisible worlds are demonstrated in terms of what is accepted to be the "known" by ordinary organs of perception. The synchronicity of events and thought-patterns are illustrated by the use of an elaborate frame structure within the narrative. To
understand the story, some relevant background in Islamic history is necessary: in the sixth century CE when Islam was first introduced to the Arabian peninsula, there was much controversy among the first Muslims in reference to the occasion when the Prophet Muhammad said he was taken from his bed directly up to heaven where he saw Abraham, Moses, Jesus, many angels, hell, and the beautiful gardens of paradise, all of which he could describe in detail upon his return to earth. He was able to give accurate descriptions of the people he saw on his way who could verify his account. And yet while all of this had taken place, Muhammad's bed was still warm when he returned, and a pot of water which he had overturned and spilled was still not empty. Naturally, this account led to much controversy over the issue of whether Muhammad ascended to heaven corporeally or only spiritually.

In the eighth century, four different viewpoints on the reality of Muhammad's ascent were reported by the Muslim historian Ibn Ishaq in his account of Muhammad's career as a messenger of God, called sirat. In these four accounts, the following conclusions were reached: (1) according to several narrators, the ascent was the way God chose to reveal Himself to Muhammad; (2) according to al-Hasan, Muhammad really went to heaven (Jerusalem), because he said so upon his return; (3) according to Muhammad's young wife Aisha, only Muhammad's spirit was transported; his body remained in Mecca; and (4) according to Mu'awiya b. Abu Sufyan, it is immaterial whether the experience is real or visionary, because it came from God! A saying of Muhammad's supports this argument: "My eyes sleep while my heart is awake" (Guillaume 181).
These versions provided the fertile environment for a teaching story which was written down in the sixteenth century, called The Sultan who Became an Exile, similar to Lessing's Al Ith, the queen who became an exile. This story is about a Sufi shaikh who tries to show a skeptical king that a different time-frame must be used to understand what really happened to Muhammad the night that he ascended to heaven. The story stresses the dictum of Muhammad to "Speak to everyone in accordance with the degree of his understanding," and aims to "demonstrate the unknown in terms of what is called 'known' by the audience" (Shah, Tales of Dervishes 38).

If this story were to be analyzed by frames that recall the Zones in Marriages, the first and outermost frame would describe the Sultan of Egypt holding a conference of learned men. In this conference, a controversy arises over Muhammad's Night Journey. Some say it is possible that Muhammad really ascended to heaven, but the Sultan is skeptical. Hence a Sufi shaikh attempts to demonstrate to the Sultan how Muhammad's ascent to heaven could have taken place.

In a second frame parallel to the first, a quick reference to the Night Journey is made, following which the Sufi shaikh opens a third frame within the first frame, hoping to "show" his wisdom to the Sultan instead of using words to explain. To do this, the narrator makes use of the framing device not only synthetically in the discourse, but also mimetically within the narrative by allowing the shaikh to open each of the four windows in the court-chamber and bid the Sultan to look out. As the Sultan looks, so do we.
Out of the first window (or in the fourth frame), the Sultan and we see an invading army bearing down on the palace. Shutting and opening the window again, we see not a soul in sight. Opening another of the windows (or a fifth frame which is parallel to the fourth), we look out to see the city in flames. Upon shutting and opening that window, we see no more fire. Similarly, the third window (a sixth frame parallel to four and five) reveals a flood, then no flood, and the fourth window (a seventh frame which is parallel to four, five and six), reveals a garden of paradise, then it, too, vanishes.

In the third frame, the Sufi shaikh orders a vessel of water to be brought, and asks the Sultan to immerse his head in it for a moment. Here, an eighth frame is opened: the Sultan, upon putting his head in the water, finds himself alone on a seashore. When asked who he is, he says he has been shipwrecked, and after a series of inconceivable experiences, he marries a woman of significant wealth. After seven years, this wealth is squandered, and he has to work as a porter to provide for his wife and seven sons. One day when taking ablutions before prayer at the same spot where he had arrived at this land, he is suddenly transported back to the palace.

Now, we are once again back in the third frame. The shaikh tells the Sultan that it has only been a moment since he immersed his head in the water. Indeed, the basin of water is still standing there. However the still disbelieving and now furious Sultan returns to the first frame, i.e., the court where the dispute had originally started, and orders the shaikh to be beheaded, upon which the wise shaikh escapes to the second frame, thus closing the third
frame. In the second frame, i.e., the digression to Muhammad's ascent to heaven, the shaikh transports himself corporeally to Damascus and to safety. From there he writes a letter to the Sultan, i.e., to the first frame, and to us. This is where the moral of the story is given: it is not important whether something has happened; what is important is the significance of an event. "In your case," writes the shaikh, "there was no significance. In the case of the Prophet, [however,] there was significance in the happening" (Shah, Tales of Dervishes 38).

At the end of the discourse each of the frames is closed except for the first two. These must remain simultaneously open, and they must be left to the individual who hears the story to resolve in accordance with his/her own level of comprehension of the events that took place in frames three through eight. Interpretations from one extreme, i.e., that of the skeptical Sultan, to the other, i.e., that of the shaikh, are thus inoffensively offered to those in the audience, while the depth to which this and any other tale succeeds in touching its hearer and the degree to which the frame structure can be decoded depends completely upon the audience's level of being. One can comprehend a narrative only to the extent that one is able, and at any one telling, only the received portion of the tale can be considered the "real" story. Therefore the transmitter of Sufi tales is aware that for every single telling of a tale, there instantly emerge as many "real" tales as the number of hearers in the audience. Knowing this, the Sufi teacher does not only expect multiple interpretations but intentionally creates tales so as to evoke them.
Similarly, Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, too, can be read as a teaching tale with layers of meaning for the reader to extract for him/herself. While *Marriages* is much longer than even the longest Sufi tale, it still gives enough signals to be read as a teaching tale. The subtlety with which a Sufi tale teaches is inherent in its structure: what appears "on the surface as tales or jokes . . . are in fact *structures*—formulated to bring into cognition patterns which the mind finds difficult or impossible to render and receive in any other way" (Courtland 88). Through the frame structure, Sufi stories teach on different levels and demonstrate the interconnectedness and synchronicity of events; likewise, *Marriages* teaches through the use of the space-fiction genre that breaks down our ordinary barriers of perception and allows Lessing to convey the synchronous experiences of people in different Zones as well as the simultaneity of Zones or levels of being in a single individual. In Al Ith's nature, for instance, we see traits of primarily Zone Three behavior, but also traces of Zones Two and Four. Too, she and Ben Ata coexist while Al Ith manifests primarily Zone Three traits, and Ben Ata expresses the crudity of Zones Four and Five.

A Sufi tale is said to stimulate the right half of the brain, which is often ignored by formal education. Modern scientific research has shown that the brain is divided into two hemispheres: the left half is the source of logical, rational thought; and the right half deals with nonverbal, nonsequential, nonlogical information. It is where creativity is located, and it has an "all at once" approach to data that it encounters. The didactic Sufi tale requires exactly this type of "all at once" approach in order
to be grasped properly (Courtland 88). Likewise, Lessing's *Marriages* invites the reader to abandon traditional expectations about a novel and to make him/herself receptive to new ideas as demonstrated through allegorical Zones or depths of consciousness. The left half of the brain that reasons is inevitably required to suspend disbelief as Lessing's characters are swiftly spirited between levels of being that are zoned into geographical regions.

Pianists who play Bach know the impossibility of allowing formative thinking of the left brain to interfere with the independent intelligence of each hand. Bach's nonlinear melody-line requires and demands that his composition be internalized through more creative means, i.e., the right brain, and not through reason. The frame stories, too, operate like a Bach composition. Their aim is to break up rational thinking and to disallow the interference of logical thought-patterns. By forcing the audience to depart from formative thinking, the Sufi tale requires a less inhibited and a more open audience. By the time the third or fourth frame has unfolded, the audience enters an altered state and listens not for the logical, but for the intuitive sense of the story.

Similarly, whether she fully succeeds or not, Lessing wants to teach something fresh by breaking away from formatory thinking. At the conclusion of *Marriages* her characters within the realm of space fiction acquire the ability to allow themselves to be spirited to a higher Zone than that in which they found themselves in the opening of the novel: "There was a continuous movement now, from Zone Five to Zone Four. And from Zone Four to Zone Three--and from us up the pass [to Zone Two]" (245). In a traditional novel with mimetic characters there never could have been such free movement in time
and space; neither would Al Ith have endured the abuses of her barbaric husband so patiently and for so long had she not served primarily a thematic function in the allegorical realm of the narrative. Consequently, it does not trouble us when she simply disappears one day, never fully having been a mimetic character to begin with: "One day when Al Ith climbed the road to visit the other Zone, she did not come back. Others of her friends disappeared in the same way—[past the frontiers and into Zone Two]" (244).

At the end of the novel Al Ith's mimetic sacrifice is rewarded by a thematic comingling of Zones: "There was a lightness, a freshness, and an enquiry and a remaking and an inspiration where there had been only stagnation. And closed frontiers" (245). Once she fulfills her thematic role, Al Ith is no longer needed and can recede into the watery blueness of Zone Two, presumably a Sufic plane. Having submitted to the higher will of the "Providers" and endured the consequent suffering, she earns the right to reside in heavenly Zone Two forever.

Although Lessing sacrifices her style to didacticism in giving us this story about Al Ith, she is successful in Marriages to the degree that she communicates something new about spiritual levels of being or psychological levels of consciousness to the layperson who might not otherwise have taken an interest in Sufi mysticism. If an allegorical reading of Marriages indeed helps us to understand the novel in more depth and to internalize its message, then perhaps Lessing's sacrifice of art to didacticism can be forgiven. Clearly, Lessing's is a consciousness interested in a revolution and an awakening of minds and hearts that may be induced through exemplary fiction.
In *The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight*, the fourth novel in the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series, Lessing subordinates the mimetic characteristics of Doeg, Johor and others to their synthetic and thematic functions even more than she does in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, the second novel in the same series. The mimetic function is restricted to such a degree in *The Representative* that even the names of characters periodically change. There are many Doegs. In fact, anyone who is a story teller is called "Doeg." Doeg tells us, "when we three came back from Planet 10, we were all Doeg, for then we travelled everywhere over our planet and told what we had seen" (54). As soon as anyone takes on a different occupation in the community, his name, too, changes to reflect his new social function on the planet. Thus there is Masson, the builder, Zdanye who shelters and protects, and Bratch, the physician, among others (102). Doeg explains, "I have remained Doeg nearly all the time, though Klin and Marl have not. Though I have been Klin and Marl and Pedug and Masson, when needed. But Doeg is my nature, I suppose" (55). The narrative foregrounds the synthetic component of a specter of such characters, whose synthetic dimension recedes into the background whenever the thematic dimension requires attention. Alternating thus between their synthetic and thematic dimensions, characters seem even more puppet-like than Al Ith or Ben Ata of *Marriages*. They do not act out a plot but rather recite and perform a lesson much like in a medieval morality play.

In his synthetic dimension, Doeg, who is properly labeled "Memory Maker" (22), serves as Lessing's agent. He tells Lessing's
tale for her, and teaches many morals by means of learning and practicing them himself in his limited mimetic capacity as one of the victims of The Ice. He is also a thematic character who embodies the idea of selflessness or of having no identity: "Here I am!" he says, "—and add to it the thought: But the "I" of me is not my own, cannot be, must be a general and shared consciousness—"

(65). Acting as Lessing’s message bearer he reassures his compatriots on Planet Eight that "It does not matter that they are [dying], the individual does not matter, the species does not matter—Alsi does not matter, nor does Doeg, nor Klin and Masson, nor Marl and Fedug and the rest" (80). What does matter is the fact that their "qualities will be reborn somewhere" (80). These words recall the message in the Sufi teaching story "The Tale of the Sands" in which a stream is challenged to give itself up to the wind in order to cross the desert. When it does so, it is not annihilated but rewarded by rain on the other side of the desert which forms into a new river, in essence containing the same water.

A STREAM, from its source in far-off mountains, passing through every kind and description of countryside, at last reached the sands of the desert. Just as it had crossed every other barrier, the stream tried to cross this one, but it found that as fast as it ran into the sand, its waters disappeared.

It was convinced, however, that its destiny was to cross this desert, and yet there was no way. Now a hidden voice, coming from the desert itself, whispered: 'The Wind crosses the desert, and so can the stream.'
The stream objected that it was dashing itself against the sand, and only getting absorbed: that the wind could fly, and this was why it could cross a desert.

'By hurtling in your own accustomed way you cannot get across. You will either disappear or become a marsh. You must allow the wind to carry you over, to your destination.'

But how could this happen? 'By allowing yourself to be absorbed in the wind.'

This idea was not acceptable to the stream. After all, it had never been absorbed before. It did not want to lose its individuality. And, once having lost it, how was one to know that it could ever be regained?

'The wind,' said the sand, 'performs this function. It takes up water, carries it over the desert, and then lets it fall again. Falling as rain, the water again becomes a river.'

'How can I know that this is true?'

'It is so, and if you do not believe it, you cannot become more than a quagmire, and even that could take many, many years; and it certainly is not the same as a stream.'

'But can I not remain the same stream that I am today?'

'You cannot in either case remain so,' the whisper said. 'Your essential part is carried away and forms a stream again. You are called what you are even today because you do not know which part of you is the essential one.'
When he heard this, certain echoes began to arise in the thoughts of the stream. Dimly, he remembered a state in which he—or some part of him, was it?—had been held in the arms of a wind. He also remembered—or did he?—that this was the real thing, not necessarily the obvious thing, to do.

And the stream raised his vapour into the welcoming arms of the wind, which gently and easily bore it upwards and along, letting it fall softly as soon as they reached the roof of a mountain, many, many miles away. And because he had had his doubts, the stream was able to remember and record more strongly in his mind the details of the experience. He reflected, 'Yes, now I have learned my true identity.'

The stream was learning. But the sands whispered: 'We know, because we see it happen day after day: and because we, the sands, extend from the riverside all the way to the mountain.'

And that is why it is said that the way in which the Stream of Life is to continue on its journey is written in the Sands.

(Shah, Tales of the Dervishes 23-24)

Lessing makes little pretense to disguise her own didacticism in The Representative. As the stream in the tale is made to act out the role of selflessness, so too are Lessing's characters required to behave in limited ways to display only those specific traits that are relevant to the teaching. In both "The Tale of the Sands" and
The Representative, the necessary behavior to be learned and evaluated by the audience is a sacrificing of self and identity in order to gain a higher, more evolved Self or one's true identity. Doeg’s description of himself is very much reminiscent of the selfless stream that allows itself to be absorbed by the wind: "I imagined as I stood there looking at my face, my body, how stretching behind me, to each side of me, in every direction away from me, stood slight modifications of me, some very similar indeed, some hardly at all. I filled a town with these variations of myself, then a city, in my mind, whole landscapes. Doeg, Doeg, Doeg again" (81). As the desert teaches the stream in the Sufi version of this lesson, so does Johor, the agent from mainland Canopus (a potential heaven), teach Doeg in Lessing's version of the same lesson. In both versions one can easily identify the Sufi teacher (the wind/Johor), his disciple (the stream/Doeg), and the external strife that the disciple must face (the desert/The Ice). In both cases the struggle inevitably becomes an internal struggle to hold onto one's identity for fear of losing one's self in death. The allegory in both teaches that selflessness is rewarded in the end, that in fact ego is not one's anchor in life, but, on the contrary, one's primary obstacle. Both cases require a surrender (Islam) on the part of the disciple or would-be Sufi with no promise of a particular personal gain.

Lessing depicts Doeg as hardly any more mimetic a character than the stream in the Sufi tale. Doeg is given no real traits to make him more human than, say, a stream or rain, and he has no feelings except a curiosity, which serves the author's purpose to tell her
tale. The more questions Doeg's curious mind can throw at his teacher Johor, the further the narrative can progress in the form of questions and answers that allow both Doeg and Johor to fulfill their synthetic functions as mouthpieces for Lessing's version of the Sufi doctrine. At fleeting moments Doeg protests this lack of identity and asks: "And I ask myself more and more, is this why we need Doeg? What is Doeg but an attempt, and even a desperate and perhaps a tragic attempt, to make the faint coloured shadow, memory, stronger? Give our memories more substance? Is that what Doeg is--" (90) At such times the answer Johor gives is even more shocking: "I am not sure what your name is, when you ask these questions, but it is not Doeg!" (90). I.e., being Doeg involves surrender to his synthetic role as Representative and Memory Maker, and to his thematic role as someone with no ego, which parallel the necessary subordination of his character to the allegorist's design. In order to serve the higher aim of the Planet as dictated by Canopus and the greater aim of the author, both the thematic Doeg (the ego-less representative) and the synthetic Doeg (the puppet/player) must remain a humble servant until the end. By serving Canopus he can survive The Ice; conversely by serving Lessing he can demonstrate to readers how to survive physical death.

It would be a mistake to oversimplify Lessing's work by labeling it only "Sufic" in nature, as it would also be a mistake to overlook the obvious: that Lessing has clearly made use of Sufi ideas to enhance her own perception of human beings on earth and on other planets, in life and in an afterlife. Sufi ideas clearly afford her the opportunity to tap other spheres of consciousness that in turn
force her to experiment with new fictive techniques in order better to convey her messages, among them, the fact that not all beings live on the same level of consciousness, as taught in *The Marriages*, but that all beings are given equal opportunity to rise above the level to which they are born, as taught in *The Representative*. In *The Four-Gated City* the opening parable teaches Lessing’s message in a nutshell: that all beings are fools to think they can survive compartmentalizing their lives or isolating parts of themselves in neatly divided quarters. Lessing also demonstrates that people like Maudie in *The Diary of a Good Neighbor* are not useless to society; on the contrary, it is often the seemingly helpless Maudies of the world, like Nasreddin Hodja, who are the stronger and the more powerful in the inner realm, the only place where life promises to have any real meaning.

Contrasted to Martha Quest’s life in *The Four-Gated City* or Janna Somers’ life in *The Diary of a Good Neighbor*, the lives of the protagonists in Lessing’s space fiction require a change in fictive technique. Lessing herself would agree that it was characters such as Al Ith or Johor themselves who made demands on her choices of genre, mode, and style in order to enable them to exercise the fullest freedom within their fictional worlds. Al Ith, a limited mimetic figure, cannot function in the traditional world of *The Diary of a Good Neighbor* any more than Doeg or Johor, who are even less mimetic than Al Ith, can ever belong to the post-war London of *The Four-Gated City*.

When we stand back and look at Lessing’s works as a whole, Lessing’s vision stretches to include more than the planet earth and
its inhabitants. She believes with certainty that there are worlds beyond that which we can see, and wants her readers at least to entertain the possibility of these worlds and of other living beings whose reality deserves our consideration and acknowledgment. In order to communicate even the slightest hint of these worlds in her novels, it was necessary for Lessing to break out of the conventional fictional modes and to experiment with styles and genres more conducive to giving free reign to her expansive vision. Appropriately, in the afterword of The Representative Lessing writes, "It seems to me that we do not know nearly enough about ourselves; that we do not often enough wonder if our lives, or some events and times in our lives, may not be analogues or metaphors or echoes of evolvements and happenings going on in other people?—or animals?—even forests or oceans or rocks?—in this world of ours or even in worlds or dimensions elsewhere" (145). Since we know of her direct interest in and knowledge of Sufism, it is safe to conclude that Lessing did not utter these words merely as a shot in the dark, but that she not only wonders but is convinced of the reality of other beings in other dimensions. Accordingly, she incarnates them in her fiction for us to recognize and, perhaps, to accept.
"Is it correct [Mr. Fielding,] that most are atheists in England now?"

"The educated thoughtful people? I should say so, though they don't like the name. The truth is that the West doesn't bother much over belief and disbelief in these days. Fifty years ago, or even when you and I were young, much more fuss was made."

From *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster, 1924

Come again, come whoever you are,
An unbeliever, a fire-worshipper, a pagan, come.
Whether you've repented a hundred times,
or a hundred times broken your vow, come.

This is not the door of desperation;
come as you are, come.

From *Mathnawi*² by Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi (1207-1273)
VI

Conclusion: Lessing’s Place Between East and West

In the introduction to this work, I argued that Doris Lessing has absorbed some Sufi ideas and outlooks but has not been transformed by them. The subsequent analysis of her novels has demonstrated the extent to which Sufism added a new layer of thought, a new set of stories, images, and new blood to Lessing’s work. However, when measured against literature produced by Sufis themselves, Lessing’s novels are still quite western in outlook, spirit, and style. The difference between Sufi literature and Lessing’s work is still far greater than the difference between Lessing’s work and other western literature, which is not to say that Lessing even claimed to produce Sufi literature; but the comparison becomes useful in diagnosing the nature of the influence of Sufism on Lessing, and the nature of the West-based filter through which Lessing absorbed Sufism.

In order to evaluate Lessing’s role as prophetess and message-bearer to the West, we need to recognize the filter through which she received the Sufi message, which includes the western literary traditions that Lessing shares with her contemporaries, and the western intellectual approach to God, i.e., the cessation of even questioning the idea of God and accepting his nonexistence in the twentieth century. Only then can we properly appreciate the
balance between the Sufi-like faith in a higher power and in
revelation on the one hand, and trust in the material world and art
on the other that characterizes Lessing's novels. Lessing may write
of Sufi truths and teach Islam or active surrender to the higher
will of God or Canopus, but she also demands of her characters
uncompromising independence and twentieth-century style disbelief
that brings her closer to Karl Marx, who regarded religion as the
opiate of the people, than to Mevlana Jalalu’ddin Rumi (d. 1280),
the unmistakable Sufi saint and poet who all but grew wings as a
result of his lifelong devotion to Allah. Ironically, Lessing
avoided formal education in her own life in order to resist the
absorption of western (or any) values and indoctrination. However,
the western filter seems to be an outlook she internalized even
though she avoided formal education and lived outside of England
until she was thirty. In the following pages I will try to place
her in the western tradition by looking at a group of canonical
authors in the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries, who also
are engaged in religion as a subject of their writing.

Lessing acknowledges the absence of God in her present audience
when she characterizes the twentieth-century reader of literature in
the person of Martha Quest. In The Four-Gated City she writes, "She
was of that generation who, having found nothing in religion, had
formed themselves by literature." And her subsequent novels
illustrate this assumption. She writes metaphors and allegories of
Sufi truths from eastern lands for a predominantly secular western
audience that has evolved out of the Age of Reason and its incessant
probings into the nature of God. She is familiar with the
shortcomings of "the Divine" when it is interrogated by "the moderns" which every century has supplied. Given her position between a world of religiosity and one of disbelief, she writes didactic novels that proselytize, though they lack the substance necessary to bring about a transformation. Nonetheless, she is like the inimitable Nasreddin Hodja who knows that to make yoghurt one must stir a spoonful of yoghurt into warm milk, yet kneels by a large lake and stirs a spoonful of yoghurt into it. When a passerby tells him that that is not the way to make yoghurt he retorts, "I know, I know, but what if it takes?"

The readers in this lake whom Lessing inherited for an audience are survivors of The Enlightenment and its suppressed spirituality. During the Restoration and the eighteenth century most writers conceded that men and women must think, sense, reason, intuit, and seek for themselves, rather than blindly believing in Christianity. Even as they wrote, they were aware that man's collective knowledge was neither final knowledge, nor the limit of knowledge. As a result, many lost their faith and turned to empirical reasoning for comfort.

Among the very few writers whose faith survived such intensive questioning was John Dryden (d. 1700), whose example offers an interesting tie to the origins of Islam and to Muhammad: while new perceptions led most intellectuals and poets to a complete rejection of the traditions of the past, it caused Dryden to employ what Islamicist Marilyn Waldman has termed "transformative conservatism." For example the seventh-century Muhammad, regarded by pious Sufis as the first Sufi, both conserved the Ka'aba, the
shrine where Arab nomads used to worship icons before Islam, and transformed it by destroying all the "idols" and declaring it a mosque in which only Allah could reside from then on. Like the Prophet Muhammad, who conserved such existing customs in the Arabian peninsula by adjusting them to fit the new teachings of Islam, Dryden\(^7\) suggested in "Religio Laici" (1682) that we keep what is good in Christianity as well as in the British monarchy, while transforming parts of both that were proved to be corrupt or obsolete. This is also what Lessing did to the western tradition (in reverse) following her encounter with Sufism. Likewise, Dryden's transformative conservatism led him to make a leap of faith and to believe in Christian mysteries. He saw that reason could be applied to the Scriptures to determine any faults in them, such as Father Simon's\(^8\) discovery that parts of the sacred text were missing, while also recognizing that there was still enough truth in the Scriptures to guide mankind rightly.

However, most thinkers of the West did not follow Dryden and Muhammad's example to use transformative conservatism, but dismissed or manipulated\(^9\) religious expression in order to accommodate their doubts. The mystical poet William Blake (d. 1827) was an exception. He was the heir of the entire classical tradition and revelation, including Hobbes',\(^10\) Locke's\(^11\) and Hume's\(^12\) skepticism, and yet his poetry of vision is more in line with the Sufi Masters of the East than with the rationalist thinkers of the West. Lessing's work cannot be compared to Blake's mystical poetry; however, Blake becomes important to our understanding of western Sufism, for his poetry provides one of the few touchstones in
western literature that is mystical in outlook; with the questioning "I" and "eye" which he inherited, Blake looked closely at life—a leaf, a grain of sand, a small child—and saw in them both the objective, empirical information that they yield to a scientifically-oriented, careful observer, and also the whole of infinity that they disclose to a spiritually-inclined ardent seeker. With his poetry full of mystical insights, Blake at the same time combined the Puritans' assertion to live up to one's Inner Light and Francis Bacon's (d. 1626) invitation to study nature since studying nature is really studying the works of God.

In "There is No Natural Religion"¹³ (1788) Blake warned his readers to be alert to the entire process of life, and the entire heritage, because our finite senses alone cannot acquire a knowledge of God and of the natural world. In addition to the conclusions of his predecessors, which included Natural Religion and empirical reasoning, Blake insisted on man's godlike capacity for imagination and for vision to enable him to grasp reality and infinity directly. In this insistence on direct communion with God, Blake was among the few western thinkers who came the closest to The Sufi Way, and his poetry is testament to the Christian and Sufi ideal of being totally in the world, but not of it. Like The Sufi Way, Blake's way bypassed, transformed and replaced reason with visionary powers which grasped the mysteries that had so disturbed Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and others.

Blake was in the minority, however. Rather than pose questions about God, his contemporaries asked the question, "What are we to make of human life?" They found their answers in a combination of
the sublime in nature, the ordinariness of everyday life, and the 
wealth of the human imagination. Poets became nightingales in 
Shelley's (d. 1822) mind, and occultists in Coleridge's (d. 1834) 
estimation, but not visionaries like Blake, nor mystics like the 
Sufis. That Blake was in the minority among the Romantics meant the 
chances of Lessing's finding satisfactory answers to her own 
probings in the West were very slim. The war among Christian faith, 
miracles, and skepticism had resulted in the coexistence of the two 
sides, with a heavier, this-worldly emphasis on secular, rational 
thought. Consequently, Lessing sought compensation for the 
sublimated spirituality of the European tradition in Sufi thought 
and literature that, in contrast to the West, emphasized faith and 
the reality of the ineffable. For instance, in one of many Sufi 
orders in the East, in the order of the "Whirling Dervishes" that 
has its origins in thirteenth-century Central Anatolia, members to 
this day learn to reach heightened levels of perception by way of 
turning with the right arm and palm reaching upwards to God, and the 
left arm and hand curved downwards. With their right hand they 
harness the truth and receive God's grace, which they pass with 
their left hand down to the earth while levitating in the frenzy and 
passion of the act—a feat that continues to astound spectators 
today.

Many of Lessing's later characters are indeed closer in spirit 
and experience to these and other Sufis than they are to their more 
limited western counterparts. Yet even as her characters and 
stories demonstrate an affinity to Sufi truths, Lessing is too 
imbued with competing ideologies to be completely absorbed into Sufi
ideology as a single and primary focus. Given her inheritance of western values from the Enlightenment, Sufism for her is an external graft that compensates for the suppressed side of the European tradition and provides an outlet for her not-so-western insights. Sufism helps her to bring out an element of her own tradition that had been subordinated, enabling her to solve problems in the European tradition while still keeping intact the western filter. Sufi thought does not transform her worldview, but helps her to stretch the boundaries of human capacity, and to mitigate the West's insistence on the rational mind to the exclusion of other pathways to knowledge.

When we scan the last few centuries in terms of scientific breakthroughs, it becomes clear why the foundations of faith were so irreversibly shaken by the findings of researchers to the degree of discrediting and even completely discarding the religious side of the western tradition: studies in geology expanded the beginning of time back millions of years; studies in astronomy expanded space beyond the mere earth of the Bible; studies in biology and Darwin's discoveries reduced humans into one of many mutable species in the animal kingdom; studies in archeology extended the Europeans' myopic awareness to include civilizations beyond the West; studies in anthropology and sociology forced the "white man" to consider other cultures not as inferior and savage but viable and equal—a tough task for many; the uncovering of ancient civilizations by anthropologists and geologists, coupled by textual criticism of the Bible as just another text that had evolved in time, and therefore included human errors and gaps, eroded the absolute quality of
Christian faith and demystified Jesus: the Bible was obviously not an absolute and holy source of knowledge handed down from Mount Sinai; contextual critics argued that it was one more myth among many mythologies and that the story of the life of Jesus—a dying God being reborn—was not unique to Christianity. There were many sides to every question which western man had been reluctant to acknowledge, and an active imagination refused to settle on absolute truths any more.

By the time the West had lamely reached the Victorian age, advancements in men and women’s knowledge of the world and intense questioning of existing truths had undermined their ability to believe as the past had believed. No new sustaining values were offered in place of the old traditions except painful doubt and atheistic science, two characteristics of the nineteenth-century West that left their indelible imprint on the psyche of the modern seeker such as George Eliot or Charlotte Brontë, among others, who especially challenged the old God of the Christian tradition.

The need of the public to learn how to Be, how to Act, and what to Do prompted George Eliot (d. 1880) to write realistically about people as they were, and to introduce psychological studies of the characters’ inner lives. In Middlemarch, perhaps because of Eliot’s own loss of faith and her private search for truth, it was not the characters’ faith in God that saw them through, as it was their own tenacity, or its lack that determined what became of them and what gave meaning to their lives. In fact, Eliot’s central image in Middlemarch, Dorothea Brooke, was a frustrated modern-day St. Theresa who lacked a frame of reference and whose goodness and
efforts were undermined by the lack of faith in a despiritualized, industrialized world.

Likewise in Jane Eyre (1847) Charlotte Brontë (d. 1855) did not only bemoan the loss of faith and true spirituality, but openly attacked Evangelism for its joyless and loveless atmosphere, and its lack of compassion that was opposed to anything that smacked of creature comforts, closeeness, and warmth. She exposed the church’s hypocrisy in the figure of Brocklehurst who distorted Christian values in the name of Christianity. She also subverted the Christian love of Christ and God when she sent Jane on a secular Pilgrim’s Progress and made her resist St. John Rivers’ (or Christ’s) calling, to respond instead to Rochester’s telepathic cry from afar—hence rejecting God for man.

In addition to the emphasis on reason which was passed down to Lessing and her contemporaries from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the emphasis on imagination bequeathed by the Romantics of the early nineteenth century, western twentieth-century writers received the despair, sense of loneliness, isolation, and the longing for serenity and joy from the Victorians who lived in a fragmented industrial society—a rather stark contrast to the steadfast faith expressed in Sufi poetry in all ages.

In John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath (1939) Casy the ex-preacher sums up the issue of faith in Lessing’s time when he tells Tom Joad, "There ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do. It’s all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain’t nice, but that’s as far as any man got a right to say" (24). Like Karl Marx (d.
1883), the prophet of the Industrial Age, Casey believes that one does not have a soul of his own, but "[m]aybe all men got one big soul everybody's a part of" (24). "I figgered about the Holy Spirit and the Jesus road," he continues, "I figgered, Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? I figgered, maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Spirit--the human spirit--the whole shebang" (24). This approach may have comforted Casey, Steinbeck, and some readers, but, unlike Sufism, it does not comfort the seeker of a universal reality, but falters under the scrutiny of someone like Lessing, who is concerned with establishing finer distinctions between the higher power of God and humans, as well as distinguishing true salvation from existential rationalization. In so far as Marxism offered an ardent love of the people as a solution for writers, and recognized art as political of necessity, it provided Steinbeck, Lessing, and others with a new ideology, but only for a time.

In the absence of a strong religious impetus, twentieth-century writers continued to bemoan the emptiness and alienation in the contemporary world, and wrote to explain and to redefine the godless universe in which they lived: novelists wrote of the death of God and poets offered themselves as prophets of the secular age; all writers preached liberation and self exploration. Lessing, on the other hand, constructed her redefinition by turning to Sufi truths which she encountered through the works of Idries Shah in London. Her prophetic side drew into prose what is usually done in poetry as prophesy. Today, in so far as she writes of an apocalypse, Lessing is in the twentieth-century mainstream; and to the extent that she imports the Sufi faith, she remains in the minority in the West.
Twentieth-century poetry, in contrast, aspired to replace sacred texts, in turn bestowing on critics the position of priests. William Butler Yeats (d. 1939) saw himself as a prophet of the religion of art, and felt himself to be an intercessor between humanity and the universal order. Unlike Lessing, he surrendered to the impossibility of seeking meaning in life, and instead upheld art as superior to life, and as much more dependable and everlasting. Christianity had lost its power to command the complete faith and devotion of the multitudes, and Yeats created his own mystical mythology based on concepts of the occult and religious literatures. Yeats's works reflected his search for a lost religion, as do Lessing's novels; but instead of Sufi paradigms, they embodied a metaphysical system of symbols, which Yeats put forth as a replacement for orthodox religion, although his religion of art could not really suffice as a substitute for God.

Very much in the same spirit as Lessing today, Yeats was a prophet of doom in the pre World War II years, when he wrote "The Second Coming" (1920), expressing his sense of the dissolution of the existing European civilization, and the approach of destruction and chaos brought about by the birth of the "rough beast"--or anti-Christ. Predicting nothing positive but the impending awful "[slouching] towards Bethlehem to be born," Yeats tried to warn his readers about the inevitable end awaiting them in much the same way that Noah foretold the flood, or Lessing, the various apocalypses. However, Yeats offered no form of salvation other than static art, in which the modern reader could find something to believe in in this world only, while Lessing drew upon Sufi ideology to also extend hope for a "Way" out for her readers.
Like Yeats, Wallace Stevens (d. 1955) saw that old mythologies were outdated and no longer satisfactory, and there was a need for new mythologies. "If one no longer believes in God (as truth)," he wrote in a letter, "it is not possible merely to disbelieve; it becomes necessary to believe in something else." For him, this "something else" was poetry, words, and ideas. While Lessing turned to Sufism to recover what had been lost in the West when scientific explanations displaced religious faith, Stevens found compensation in the arts. He offered twentieth-century poetry as the "Supreme Fiction" to replace God, and indeed, poetry began to replace sacred texts as well. To the modern seeker in search of God’s replacement in literature, Stevens offered the "idea of order" in his art, because art could help people to live and could offer them order upon disorder—such as a glass jar out in the wilderness. The modern poet’s task was to rediscover the earth and to celebrate an earthly paradise.

While on the one hand Lessing radically departed from this twentieth-century approach to find in Sufism another way to bring faith and hope back into the western tradition, she never completely abandoned the outlook of her contemporaries, which by now was steeped in half a millennium of criticism, debate, and even ridicule where faith was concerned. As a result, Sufism only added another language, another point of view, and another set of stories and images to her resources, but it did not cause her to discard the ideologies and literary traditions that had already become a part of her consciousness, including the reverence for art reflected in works by poets such as William Butler Yeats, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Sylvia Plath, among others.
Instead of turning to old myths and religions or to another religion as Lessing did, William Carlos Williams (d. 1963) found strangeness and beauty in objects around him, and affirmed the power of an object to penetrate space. He dealt unceasingly with life's everydayness, and believed that one can make a poem out of anything. He did not feel Lessing's urgency to transport his subjects to a safe haven, but concerned himself with awakening the reader to this world, and with celebrating the earth in all its concreteness and spectacular reality because, he believed, spiritual elements were products of everyday reality—all things in themselves were sacred.

In complete contrast to Lessing, Sylvia Plath (d. 1963) offered an even more impotent solution to the godless universe of the twentieth century than had Stevens, Williams, or Yeats. Feeling herself ensnared in constricting religious archetypes and having internalized the kind of patriarchal history that her father had come to represent for her, Plath could not escape the world she renounced, nor find peace within. Her only real solution to her sense of entrapment was to remove herself from the hate-riddled godless universe of the twentieth-century through suicide—a way out against which the Sufi figure Jehor in Lessing's Making of the Representative for Planet 8 strongly urges his would-be disciple Doeg and his fellow travelers.

If "religion" were defined in worldly terms as a discipline and practice that helps humans to perceive the universe as a meaningful whole and to place themselves within that whole, and if "God" were defined as the sense of rightness that humans experience when they
have found their place in the universe, then Yeats's, Stevens's, Williams's, and Plath's poetry is a new "religion." Lessing partly assumes this definition when she writes of a generation forming itself by literature after having found nothing in religion. Too, Stevens must have had this definition in mind when he proposed that poets create "Supreme Fictions" to replace God.

However, more dominant in Lessing's mind must be the other, spiritually-based definition of religion as a system of belief in higher powers that guides humans to develop and transform themselves and transcend death by overcoming imperfections and fighting the limitations of human capacity. In this case, the poetry of Yeats, Stevens, Williams, and Plath would remain unsatisfactory for Lessing as guidebooks to transformation, or as literary models to emulate, propelling her to look elsewhere for answers. It must have been clear to Lessing when she turned to Sufism that twentieth-century western literature had failed to replace sacred texts, since it celebrated strictly an earthly paradise, and had nothing to do with God. However, even as Lessing subsequently turned eastward, it was also impossible for her to avoid completely the hallmark of the long-standing western tradition that had broken off from God.

The absence of a believable and trustworthy god had left the moderns with a profound sense of being totally ALONE and condemned to free will, to the absurd, and to death, all of which, according to the existentialists, one had to accept with heroism in order to live life with passion and commitment. Men and women were burdened with the responsibility to be totally accountable to themselves, and not to any gods. As Meursault in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* tells
the priest who offers to absolve him of his sins before he is executed, "I'd very little time left and I wasn't going to waste it on God." 26

Such spiritual sterility and the impending doom that is felt in the twentieth-century West are expressed in countless instances in modern fiction, which include Benjy's wailing in William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* or Nadia's howl and Kolya's scream in D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel*. Dilsey, one of the few remaining sincere religious characters in modern fiction, recognizes Benjy's bellowing as something greater than the wailing of an idiot. In her opinion it symbolizes the cry of all humanity for its lost past, lost tradition, lost faith, and lost compassion. Faulkner's narrator in the Dilsey section of *The Sound and The Fury* says, "It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets. . . . he bellowed slowly, abjectly, without tears; the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun" (172). Similarly, D. M. Thomas writes in *The White Hotel* that during the massacre of a quarter million Jews, Ukrainians, gypsies and Russians at Babi Yar, "The mouth of the three-year-old [Nadia] was open wide in a soundless howl" (286), and the eleven-year-old Kolya's scream "was only one strand in a universal scream, mixed with the happy shouts of the soldiers and the barking of dogs, but it was the one that stood out . . . ." (283).

Lessing's European and American contemporaries have not given comforting solutions to these collective cries of humanity for some kind of meaning in the godless western hemisphere. Virginia Woolf (d. 1941) symbolizes Christian faith in *The Waves* by the "sad figure
of Christ" (179), which recalls Margaret Atwood's "alien god," or "dead man in the sky watching everything [we] do" (84) in Surfacing. Woolf's solution to the absence of God, who could have offered a cohesiveness to the multiplicity, is to turn to one's friends for spiritual affirmation and guidance. Bernard in The Waves feels "so imperfect, so weak, so unspeakably lonely" (267) without his friends that he is lost at the end of the novel, but for the comforting memories of his dead friends. He says, "Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends, I to my own heart, I to seek among phrases and fragments something unbroken... the touch of one person with another is all..." (266).

Atwood's solution (in Surfacing) to the absence of a satisfactory religion is for her protagonist to convert to an ancient Indian religion inspired by the underwater cave paintings. However, these Indian gods who had "marked the sacred places, the places where you could learn the truth" (171), are as illusory as Christ. The protagonist's new-found gods serve more as an aid in this life on earth, than offering her salvation in any other life after death. Hers is a secular god, as her immersion and rebirth have been "psychological, not religious" experiences (Rigney 50-51). In the end, she comprehends more of herself, and not of Christ's or God's mysteries.

Before she turned to Sufism, Lessing shared in the various secular solutions offered by Woolf, Yeats, Williams, Stevens, Plath, Steinbeck, Thomas, or Atwood, among others, by offering a few of her own secular solutions, such as suicide in "To Room 19," friendships among women in The Golden Notebook, and divorce and
abandonment of one's baby for the sake of one's sanity, in *A Proper Marriage*. However for her, these remained unsatisfying solutions. While her contemporaries were redefining God and man and reducing God to an earthly power such as Beckett's Godot, Pinter's dumbwaiter, Faulkner's player, or Steinbeck's and Marx's masses, Lessing sought and found a new faith, new perspective, and new vocabulary in the wealth of Sufi literature and ideology, creating a spiritual gap between her work and the work of her contemporaries.

Through the mitigation of Sufism, Lessing is able to write happy endings such as Emily's salvation at the end of *Memoirs of a Survivor*, Doeg's transformation and rebirth after the freezing of Planet 8, and Al Ith's evolution to a higher plane in *Marriages Between Zones 3, 4, and 5*; in contrast, her contemporaries resort to murder, assassination, suicide, or, at the most, affirmation of the self in this world as resolutions to their plots. In Lessing's space fiction, commands come from the Planet Canopus, while those living on subordinate planets surrender (*islam*) to the will of Canopus; in contrast, commands in the novels and plays of Lessing's western contemporaries do not come from a Judeo-Christian, or a Muslim God, but from earthbound figures. Like Faulkner's player, who makes Joe Christmas murder, flee, and get caught, and who makes Percy Grimm chase Joe, castrate, and execute him, the god of the moderns is a landlord like Godot, and has the power to keep Vladimir and Estragon waiting; or he is a ring leader who makes Pinter's assassins carry out the orders that he sends down to them by means of the dumbwaiter. He even has servants, such as the messenger boy Godot sends to Vladimir and Estragon; and he knows how
to operate modern machinery as in Pinter’s "Dumbwaiter." In most cases, he is an unreasonable and inconsiderate absentee slumlord and gangster, not a savior. This is the god Lessing rejects by turning to the God of the Muslim mystics.

Flannery O’Connor offers a contrasting view to all of the writers discussed above, including Lessing, when she suggests in Wise Blood that Christianity is inevitable, and that her characters, like ourselves in the West, are Christians (or Jews or Muslims,) in spite of themselves. Hazel Motes is haunted by Christ no matter how far he flees; his response to the fact that Jesus died for him is to say, "I never ast him"! He ultimately blinds himself with quicklime and fills the bottoms of his shoes with small rocks and glass, on which he walks daily to mark the fact that he has stopped running from Jesus—behavior that provokes readers to question the god O’Connor advocates for the twentieth century.

Unlike the kind of religiosity suggested by O’Connor, religion as it was known in the previous centuries is reintroduced in Forster’s A Passage to India, one of a few works in modern fiction that does not use euphemisms to discuss the failure as well as the existence of religion in the twentieth century. The novel is divided into three sections, entitled "Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple," respectively symbolizing Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. When Mrs. Moore, one of the last true believers in Christianity, who necessarily dies in the end of the novel, is reproached for entering the mosque without taking off her shoes, she replies that she indeed removed her shoes even though there was no one else to see, because "God is here" (20).
Mrs. Moore believes that "God has put us on earth to love our neighbors, and to show it," but, she wonders, "like all older people," that perhaps we are all "merely passing figures in a Godless universe." She is disappointed that in spite of "Century after century of carnal embracement, . . . we are still no nearer understanding one another." When she encounters the strange echo in the dark, featureless, and empty Marabar caves that reduce all sounds to "boum," she wonders "with the cynicism of a withered priestess," whether all of the divine words of "poor little talkative Christianity," from "Let there be Light" to "It is finished," also do not only amount to "boum" (150). No character in any of Lessing's novels even comes close to the sincere religiosity of Mrs. Moore, who, after her departure from India and her death on the boat bound for home, is even travestied into a Hindu goddess. Forster writes, "At one period, two distinct tombs containing Esmiess Esmoor's remains were reported: signs of the beginning of a cult -earthenware saucers and so on" (256-57).

On the other hand, Mrs. Moore's son Ronny, whose religion is commonplace, is representative of Lessing's generation. Forster's narrator tells us, "Ronny's religion was of the sterilized Public School brand, which never goes bad, even in the tropics. Wherever he entered, mosque, cave, or temple, he retained the spiritual outlook of the Fifth Form, and condemned as 'weakening' any attempt to understand them" (210). He approves of religion only when it endorses the National Anthem, but objects when it attempts to touch his life. He is a believer in Christianity to the degree that God saves the King and supports the British police. He believes
religion is "a symptom of bad health" (212), much like Hobbes for whom the word God was "little but a philosopher's fatigue" (Willey). The "religious strain," Ronny believes, appears only when one is aging and approaching death. For him, conversation becomes unreal whenever Christianity enters it, and he breaks it off by retorting, "I don't think it does to talk about these things, every fellow has to work out his own religion"—a very western sentiment regarding spiritual matters.

The Brahmin professor Godbole's religion is perhaps the most positive of the religions we encounter in all of twentieth-century western literature, and it is essential to note that these models are not Westerners at all; nor do they look to the West. The Brahmins reenact the birth of a new "Lord of the Universe" every year during the Hindu festival, and with the symbolic birth of the child god "Shri Krishna," manifested as a silk baby, they bear witness to the Lord's salvation, which strengthens their faith yearly. To the degree that this is about a real event and that real people partake in the celebration, Forster's depiction of Hinduism far surpasses all testaments of faith expressed in Lessing's novels under the influence of Sufism.

In contrast to the lost traditional and religious values of the Westerners, the Indian doctor Aziz feels himself deeply "rooted in society and Islam" (266). Whether he genuinely believes in Islam or not, he feels that "He belong[s] to a tradition which [binds] him, and he [has] brought children into the world, the society of the future" (267). His identification with Islam allows him to feel "placed" unlike the various Western protagonists we have looked at,
who dangle, like Adela Quested, "at the end of [their] spiritual tether[s]." The basic conclusion Aziz derives from the difference between East and West is, "So this was why Mr. Fielding and a few others were so fearless! They had nothing to lose" (117). In contrast, Islam for Aziz is "an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and his thoughts [find] their home." Muslim poets offer him "The secret understanding of the heart" (268), and his greatest desire during the excursion to the Marabar caves is, "We shall be all Moslems together now" (131).

Although Aziz too writes poems "about the decay of Islam and the brevity of love" (268), he is not disillusioned in his God in the same manner that his western counterparts are. He knows that Islam offers its adherents more than a body of thought; it supplies them with a way of life and a body of knowledge that accompanies those who are willing to practice Islam, or active surrender to the will of God, and to "seek wisdom from the cradle to the grave,"28 as the Prophet Muhammad says. In a letter to Roberta Rubenstein, Lessing herself expresses the eastern tradition's superior insights into the question of God and the human psyche when she compares Carl Jung, one of the more mystically-oriented figures in the West, to thinkers in Islam who did much to further psychological philosophy in the Islamic world, including study of dream states, inspiration through dreaming, and complicated notions about cognition and consciousness. She writes, "I think Jung's views are good as far as they go, but he took them from Eastern philosophers who go much further. Ibn El Arabi and El Ghazzali in the middle ages had more developed ideas about the unconscious, collective or otherwise, than
Jung, among others. He was limited. But useful as far as he went" (Rubenstein 230-231).

Dr. Jung would have in fact agreed with Lessing on this point, though perhaps for a different reason: at the conclusion of his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he writes, "When people say I am wise, or a sage, I cannot accept it. A man once dipped a hatful of water from a stream. What did that amount to? I am not that stream. I am at the stream, but I do nothing... The difference between most people and myself is that for me the "dividing walls" are transparent. That is my peculiarity... To some extent I perceive the processes going on in the background, and that gives me an inner certainty. People who see nothing have no certainties and can draw no conclusions..." (355-356) Jung was conscious of the stream of knowledge—or God—that is greater than any human achievement. Therefore for him, perhaps Ibn El Arabi or Ghazali, too, (whom Lessing upholds as superior to Jung,) were mere mortals like himself, who only dipped their hats in the stream of knowledge but did not become that stream.

On the other hand, Jung would have agreed completely with Lessing's reasons for looking outside the European tradition for answers, since he regarded Europe to be the "mother of all demons" ("Wisdom"), and looked elsewhere, himself. As Lessing wrote in "Learning How to Learn" in 1982,

I could no longer accept the contemporary "package." This consists of materialism, socialism or an association with one of the many churches of Marxism and atheism—belief in material progress and that the betterment of society can
come only through political action. Now I see this package as pitifully meager and empty, but it was hard to jettison because I did not know how to look elsewhere. I read and read: the various kinds of Buddhism, the yogas, Christian mysticism, Hinduism, Islam. (12)

And in 1964, she read *The Sufis* by Idries Shah.

Lessing clearly includes Dr. Jung among those who left her dissatisfied with what the western tradition had to offer. Jung himself expresses the same discontent in a letter to his friend Mountainlake, the Pueblo-chief in Taos, New Mexico: "My Dear Friend, Mountainlake-- All you tell me about religion is good news to me. There are no interesting religious things over here, only remnants of old things" ("Wisdom"). Indeed, Dr. Jung was much impressed with his American Indian friend's belief that it was he and his tribe's daily morning rituals and meditation that assured the sun's rising every morning: Mountainlake, like all of the Pueblo, believed that if they stopped their daily prayers, within a few years the sun would stop rising and the world would come to an end--a faith that Jung did not dismiss as silly, but respected and admired with awe.

In contrast to such purity of faith that he encountered among the American Indians and among the people he met in Africa, Jung saw that the western culture had departed from the instinctual life and from God. For him all things were richly spiritual, all things on earth had a soul and a psyche, including places. He stands out in the West for stating the kinds of things that Sufis, or members of American Indian or African tribes, would consider "obvious." He "intuited an imbalance in western culture in favor of one whole
style of analysis, logic, external achievement, social hierarchicalism, and he asked [like Lessing,] "What happened to the other side?" ("Wisdom"). In his attempt to answer this question, he went to Africa "to seek that part of himself that had become invisible in the European tradition" ("Wisdom") and brought dreams and the unconscious to the foreground in the West.

Dr. Jung's agreement with Lessing that the twentieth-century Christian West has no soul appeased Lessing for a time, in the knowledge that she was not alone. One of Dr. Jung's earliest childhood visions, when he was a school boy, sums up the source of the void and alienation Lessing and her contemporaries felt in the West: "I saw before me the cathedral, the blue sky. God sits on His golden throne, high above the world—and from under the throne an enormous turd falls upon the sparkling new roof, shatters it, and breaks the walls of the cathedral asunder" (Memories 39). Allowing himself to recognize this vision freed Jung from his entrapment in Christianity. He continues, "So that was it! I felt an enormous, an indescribable relief. Instead of the expected damnation, grace had come upon me, and with it an unutterable bliss such as I had never known. I wept for happiness and gratitude" (Memories 40). Jung recognized that Christian myth was deficient and no longer satisfactory because it did not include the feminine, it excluded matter, treating it as the devil, and ignored and denied evil ("Matter"). By acknowledging the imperfection of Christianity, Jung won half the battle; by seeking to compensate for that shortcoming, he fought the other half, as did Lessing, when she looked for answers within non-Christian traditions.
Since the West never totally recovered its faith in the Christian religion after the challenges posed to it by the various scientific explorations, science became the new authority and reality in the West, the "New Religion." It is fascinating that until Francis Bacon's (d. 1626) "New Science" in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the word "science" used to refer to all learning, all knowledge, all truths, with no distinction between the "spiritual" and the "material" components. However, starting with Bacon's arguments in Advancement of Learning\(^29\) (1605), an unprecedented distinction emerged between divinity, which Bacon called "inspired theology," and science or philosophy, which he called "natural theology." He stressed the excellency of the latter, which produces "profane and human" knowledge, and which is practical and useful for everyday life, such as a knowledge of "artillery, sailing, printing, and the like."\(^30\) Bacon promoted secular learning because he mistrusted deductive reasoning from given "truths," disapproved of equating knowledge with virtue, recognized the impossibility of making theology rational, and saw the need for a pragmatic approach which could improve the standards of daily life in seventeenth-century England.

However, after four-hundred years of studying the second causes and abandoning the search for first causes as Bacon had suggested, we are finding today that the separation between the study of God and Nature that was so necessary for Bacon's time has gradually produced an irreparable schism between religion and science, including a dismissal of the reason Bacon had proposed for studying Nature: "God worketh nothing in Nature but by second causes."\(^31\) For
Bacon, undertaking scientific study did not have to exclude God. Today, however, we have turned completely to science, but for reasons that have very little to do with discovering God's mysteries. Rather, we find ourselves placing complete faith in science, and making it our present myth, as is reflected even in our language when we speak of getting something "down to a science" and so forth.

In turn, as a direct result of this "changing of the gods," science fiction has become our modern mythology in art. As Dr. Jung rightly identified it, most science-fiction plots have a basic theme of extraterrestrial intelligence ("Wisdom"). A Jungian analysis of "Star Wars," for instance, discloses loose Jungian archetypes such as "lady in distress," "young hero," "superhuman powers," and "a battle of good and evil," confirming Jung's assertion that myths are repeated throughout time, and new ones are being made all the time. Battles that are fought in science fiction, like that between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker in "Star Wars," are hardly any different than the battle that Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord of Zoroastrianism, fought with Ahriman, the forces of evil.32

Like "Star Wars," the appeal of most science fiction is that in spite of its action-packed plot and technological gadgetry, it has an underlying vision that is still old fashioned and simple, which allows its audience to sit back and enjoy, without feeling challenged to act any differently or to change their ways. This is unlike Lessing, whose primary purpose is didactic.

Dr. Jung's purpose in defining science as our latest religion in the West and in drawing parallels between science fiction and mythology was to emphasize that "myth is not only something people
dance to naked or tell around the camp fire" ("Wisdom"); he was interested in exposing the "narrow-mindedness of rationalism" ("Wisdom") and the imbalance of favoring science at the expense of spirituality. When Francis Bacon promoted science, he explained that God has revealed Himself to man by means of two scriptures: the written work (Bible) and creation (Nature) and studying Nature (Note that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries writers often capitalized "N" in "Nature") was really studying (the works of) God. While Bacon stressed the scientific study of Nature for the goal of making knowledge useful and practical, he never intended to take God out of the formula altogether, or to discard "God's other revelation," the Bible. In the seventeenth century, religion was the towering power over people's lives, and it was in no danger of being overshadowed. Consequently, the idea of studying Nature was a novelty then, and was called "The New Science." Today, four hundred years later, the reverse is true: as science and technology tower over the twentieth-century West, various spiritual paths, including Sufism, are called "New Age Religions"; and Bacon's "New Science" has now become the "New Religion." We continue to give our tacit consent to discarding religion and welcoming science.

When Doris Lessing writes space fiction, on the other hand, her themes tend to follow an order that is other than that we witness in the genre of science fiction. Her works make statements beyond the basic theme of extraterrestrial lives on earth and in space. Given her immersion in Sufi teachings, her "archetypes" are not accidentally or loosely woven but are more consciously calculated to exemplify a Sufi truth. Her characters are in outer space only because they have exhausted their possibilities on earth, which,
Lessing warns us, can become our fate, if we do not take heed. In Lessing's space fiction, extraterrestrial characters are spiritually superior to their counterparts in other science-fiction plots. Lessing implies that they are either Sufi masters or seekers on The Sufi Path, though she never overtly states this. I.e., while in most science-fiction science is the frame of reference, in Lessing's fiction Sufism is the guiding standard that determines the plot, theme, nature of characters, and the outcome of each story (as analyzed in chapters four and five of this work). Consequently, Lessing's fiction constitutes a whole new division within the genre of science fiction, for, unlike all science fiction, which is based on a combination of fantasy and scientific knowledge, Lessing's version embraces an authentic religion, Sufism, which is definitely older than Bacon's "New Science." Hence her novels are not "science" fiction, but "Sufi" fiction, so to speak.35

Lessing's novels are more concerned with meaning and psychology than is the majority of science fiction. It would be difficult to call Lessing's novels "entertaining," for they are too obsessed with didacticism to provide light-hearted escape. Any commentary she makes is not concerned with identifiable politics of any particular nation but with universal issues. She also does not use empiricism as must a science-fiction writer; she instead offers a developed theology. In short, there is a method to her madness. While much science fiction is overtly anti-religion, and more specifically anti-Christian, Lessing promotes a sophisticated and an ancient school of thought competitive with Christianity. (Like the Christian religion, Sufism promotes absolute values that fly in the
face of empirical reasoning.) Lessing's characters, like characters in science fiction, are flat, but toward a different end: in science fiction characters remain flat and mostly synthetic so that action can be foregrounded; in Lessing's space fiction characters are flat and mostly thematic so that the Sufi message is foregrounded.

When Mary Shelley wrote perhaps the original science-fiction novel, Frankenstein, she did so to combine the New Scientific discoveries and empirical learning with art. Her resulting character, as if warning future scientists, got out of hand to the horror of his creator and of the readers. In Lessing's fiction, on the other hand, there are no scientists, no laboratories, no R2D2s nor Dr. Frankenstein, but only humans and some unspecified guides who are presumably Sufi masters. Fantastic events and creatures are not brought about by advanced scientists but by a higher power that is closer to a spiritual force than to the technological gadgetry created by the human brain. Lessing is more concerned with educating the human heart and saving people by way of getting them to think with their hearts, than with stretching the capacity of the human brain.

When science fiction writers turn to outer space, to science, and to technological inventions, they do so to extend human knowledge by extrapolating what we know about the laws of physics today in order to guess at what we could know and do in time. Much of serious science fiction has a much greater sense of the contingencies of history. It offers an investigation of technological developments, explores physics, and the real—not imaginary—possibilities between time and motion and the human
ability to control the future by means that are accessible to the human mind and that fall within the limits of human potential. Outer space, science, and technology provide them fresh artistic possibilities and a brand new stage within which to stretch the human potential. For example, the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem, "the best-known representative of European science fiction" (Baranczak 150), is a medical doctor; Ursula Le Guin is an anthropologist. Science fiction offers them a way to combine all that they have learned, as it was so clearly the case with Mary Shelley in the previous century. When Lessing turned to outer space, she did not to test the laws of physics or to escape modern life on earth, but to increase the spiritual and psychological possibilities of her characters; science-fiction writers, readers, and viewers turned to it partly because they were giving up on life on earth and plunging into cosmic distances rather than fighting against the disintegration they felt around them, and partly to solve problems posed by human limitations on earth. In science fiction, the world that had satisfied Shakespeare for a stage became crowded and restricted, and outer space opened up the whole cosmos as a new stage for the artist and for the characters—or as a brand new laboratory where the artist/scientist could carry out untried experiments. Yet these offered potential solutions to problems that were created by humans in the first place, such as environmental issues, political dilemmas, and the consequences of scientific breakthroughs; they did not imagine new human beings that were created in God's image, but new scenarios under circumstances that could be predicted, given the laws of Nature. This did not free
humans from their fate: characters still loved, suffered, fought, and died, "bound by the same laws of pain, love, and death, no matter what space suits [they wore] or what utopias [they built]" (Baranczak 155).

For Lessing, the use of outer space is not for aesthetic and stylistic reasons, nor a sign of her abandoning ship. Rather, she can envision—not fantasize—psychological levels of being or Sufi states of consciousness in outer space, and she can give these levels and states actual geographical and spatial locations. For example Al Ith of Marriages Between Zone Three, Four, and Five must live in outer space so that Lessing can expand Al Ith's (and our) spiritual possibilities beyond the limits of ordinary human existence on earth.36

When Lessing writes of a new human species that rises out of the ashes of the apocalypse at the end of The Four-Gated City, she does not create fantastic plots, but again envisions the Sufi ideal. She in fact names the wise black child who is born with the collective knowledge of mankind and with higher powers of perception, "Joseph," the Biblical and Qur'anic character who overcomes the evil jealousy of his brothers and becomes a king according to all of the three Abrahamic traditions and also a prophet in the Islamic tradition. In Lessing’s version too he is a prophet. And like the Joseph of Judaism, who is a descendant of Adam through the line of Jacob, Isaiah, and Abraham, and heir to the Jews' covenant with God, he is a carrier of the genealogical line of the "chosen" human race at the end of The Four-Gated City. Just as the Biblical and Qur'anic Joseph could tap into God's mind through dreaming and through his
ability to interpret dreams, Lessing's Joseph is born with the knowledge and consciousness of all of humanity already in him, as though he has read God's mind. He is the new Adam who will work as a gardener to cultivate the post-apocalyptic earth. There are other children like Joseph who are born after the world cataclysm, who can both "see" and "hear" and, as Lessing's narrator tells us, these children "don't have to be shielded from the knowledge of what the human race is in this century--they know it... they are beings who include that history in themselves and who have transcended it" (647).

If Joseph in the Qur'an represented the active surrender of Muslims to God's plan, Lessing's Joseph represents the moderns' last resort in him to facilitate a new beginning on earth. Martha Quest writes to Francis Coldridge at the conclusion of The Four-Gated City, Joseph, the black child, will come to your settlement near Nairobi, and you will look after him. So he says. He says more like them are being born now in hidden places in the world and one day all the human race will be like them. People like you and me are a sort of experimental model and Nature has had enough of us.

Well, my dear Francis--after all these years, I am able to send you this marvelous child... (648).

The fact that this Joseph has nothing to do with the usual science-fiction super heros and has much in common with the Joseph in scriptures, supports my argument that Lessing moves to incorporate superhuman and supernatural phenomena in her fiction directed toward spirituality and religious faith rather than toward
empiricism and materialism, a distinction that is crucial in locating her novels between the literatures of the East and those of the West, and in evaluating them by standards other than those applied to strictly eastern or strictly western literatures.

But making this claim begs the question, "What standards ought we to use to judge Lessing's work?" Nasreddin Hodja (Mulla Nasrudin), teacher, judge, and master, who was born, bred, and steeped in the Sufi tradition, provides a parable which may be helpful:

When the townspeople learn that Hodja is cooking duck for a dinner party, they stream to his house claiming to be the friend of a friend of a friend, who invited them to dinner. Hodja graciously welcomes them into his home, and excuses himself to go tend to his duck. Later, in the midst of wonderful smells coming from his kitchen, he emerges with bowls of hot water, which he serves to the uninvited "guests." When they ask him what happened to the duck, "Well," he says, "This is the soup of the soup of the soup of the duck!"

This is one of many readings of Lessing's work, which expects Lessing to follow in the tradition of Sufi tales, and a reader using this standard will clearly be disappointed in Lessing's version of Sufism. However, since Lessing never claimed to have written treatises to enlightenment in The Sufi Way nor spiritual biographies addressing Allah, it is not really fair to judge her appropriation of Sufi thought by Sufi standards, nor to accuse her of serving us Hodja's duck soup. But it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that
there is much more to The Sufi Way and to Sufi literature than that which westerners have done with Sufism. While Sufi literature consists of predominantly autobiographical poetry which expresses the poets' anguish in the absence of their Beloved, or exhilaration at the moment of their enlightenment and union with the Beloved, we are obligated to remember that Lessing is not writing real-life testimonies, but imagined, fictional stories based on a combination of all that she has learned, from Marxist socialism to Islamic mysticism, of which Sufi thought constitutes only a part.

As readers of Lessing, we are not moved in the same way that Rumi describes his own experience in the poem quoted in the opening to this work, in which he feels his soul burning to cinders—because unlike Rumi, Lessing's narrator does not speak from personal experience, and her characters are not Sufis in the strict sense of tasawwuf (The Sufi Way). Mulla Nasrudin knows exactly how such discrepancies come about:

Nasrudin found a weary falcon sitting one day on his window-sill. He had never seen a bird of this kind before.

'You poor thing,' he said, 'How ever were you allowed to get into this state?'

He clipped the falcon's talons and cut its beak straight, and trimmed its feathers.

'Now you look more like a bird,' said Nasrudin.

(Shah, Exploits 100)

*Tasawwuf (The Sufi Way)* has undergone a trimming process similar to that inflicted by Nasreddin on the poor falcon, both intentionally and unintentionally, so that it can be made more
accessible to westerners. As a result, like Nasrudin’s falcon, Sufism as Lessing has received it in the West cannot soar so high, nor plumb the depths of learning so well, without its full attire, its beak, talons, and plumage, i.e., without Sufi praxis to accompany the thought.37

Following is yet another reading of Lessing’s work, which upholds The Sufi Way as an ultimate that must not be compromised:

Someone saw Nasrudin searching for something on the ground. ‘What have you lost, Mulla?’ he asked. ‘My key,’ said the Mulla. So they both went down on their knees and looked for it. After a time the other man asked: ‘Where exactly did you drop it?’ ‘In my own house.’ ‘Then why are you looking here?’ ‘There is more light here than inside my own house!’

(Shah, Exploits 26)

Learning where to look for “the real thing” takes Martha Quest, Lessing’s protagonist in The Four-Gated City, six hundred pages to accomplish: “She thought, with the dove’s voices of her solitude: Where? But where. How? Who? No, but where, where . . . . Then silence and the birth of a repetition: Where? Here. Here? Here, where else you fool, you poor fool, where else has it been, ever . . . (591). Even so, Lessing sometimes still depicts characters who, like Nasreddin Hodja and Martha, search the more popular and well-lit science-based materialism of the West for the truth.

Consequently, if we read Lessing’s novels only as a Sufi would, we will be disappointed by the mingling of western ideologies with Sufi truths. On the other hand if we evaluate Lessing from within
the western culture, without having any knowledge of Sufism, we are bound to be put off by the serious moral and spiritual challenge she poses to her readers; indeed, such a knee-jerk reaction is the most common western response to Lessing's didacticism and to her campaign to look beyond "the contemporary package" ("Learning" 12). But Lessing does not relent. With her characteristic didactic urge, she demonstrates that it is imperative to seek the key to enlightenment not rationally, in the external world of statistical truths, but intuitively, in the dreams and myths of one's own heart, the only place where any one--easterner or westerner--has ever found the Beloved.
Appendix
The Sufi Way in Historical Context

The foreign terms introduced in the following pages are in Arabic.

The faith of Islam, or surrender of one’s will to the will of God, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca beginning in the year 610 CE (Common Era) and continuing until Muhammad’s death in Medina in 632 CE. So long as Muhammad was alive, the first Muslims who made up the community, or the Ummah, were able to rely upon Muhammad’s direct connection with God through the Qur’án, or revelations. However, upon Muhammad’s death, the Muslim community encountered questions that had not been an issue before: what is a good Muslim? What is a good caliph or khalifah (deputy or successor)? What constitutes a true community? What is piety? What is sin? In trying to find answers, several factions developed within Islam, and these questions were fought out for a century and a half. The Sufis offered one of many answers to these questions.

Of the four caliphs who ruled after Muhammad, Abū-Bakr (ruled 632–634), 'Umar (ruled 634–644), 'Uthmān (ruled 644–656) and 'Alī (ruled 656–661), the latter two were assassinated as a direct result
of disagreements over answers to the above questions. Their successors, the Umayyads (ruled 661-692) and the Marwânids (ruled 692-750), were accused of being too worldly and of practicing *bid'ah* or innovation instead of striving to follow the Qur'ân and Muhammad's example to the last detail, and were eventually overthrown by the 'Abbâsids in 750 who claimed *nass*, or authority, from Abû-Hashîm of the Hâshimite line who left his authority, at his death, to Muhammad b. 'Alî of the 'Abbâsid line. The 'Abbâsids claimed direct descent from the prophet Muhammad's uncle 'Abbâs and called themselves the *Abl al-Bayt*, or people of the house [of the prophet]. They were accepted by a majority, or *Jama'î-Sunnî*, as absolute heirs to the caliphate, since like Muhammad in the first century of Islam (6th century CE), they had successfully united the *Ummah*, or the community of Muslims.

However, the original questions that had divided the community at Muhammad's death were still not successfully answered, and unrest continued. A minority of Muslims, the Shi'âh (party [of 'Alî]), believed that only 'Alî (Muhammad's nephew and the fourth caliph) and his line of descendants, or *imâms*, could carry the divine light of God, and therefore, that the "right" ruler could only be chosen from among 'Alî's family.

As a result of the Muslims' search for a precise knowledge of right and wrong in the eyes of God, there appeared the necessity to develop an independent body of sacred law, or *Sharî'ah*, and several schools of thought or *madhhab* came into being. The basic intention of all *madhhab* was to arrive at God's will and from that, at correct behavior: if Muslims were to submit
(islām), they needed an exact law to which to submit. In order
to arrive at such a law, a variety of fiqh, or proper legal
understanding, were devised to understand God's commandments for
correct behavior. For instance, since the Qur'ān said to "fear God
and look to Muhammad," reports of what Muhammad had said or done
during his lifetime, or hadīth, were collected and recorded,
together with a careful recording of isnād, or the chain of
names of all the transmitters of each hadīth report. Muslims
also turned to ijma' or consensus, of how the Muslim community
in Pristine Medina during the first century of Islam behaved, since
in the hadīth, Muhammad was quoted to have said that "Muslims
will never agree on a mistake." Finally, ijtihād, or personal
reasoning, was added onto these three sources, in order to allow the
faqīh, or legal scholars, room to make analogies, or qiyās,
between a circumstance and one of the three sources for guidance.
Within a short time the Sharī'ah and religious scholars, or
'ulamā' (sing. 'ālim ), became very authoritative, having a say
on every aspect of life from personal hygiene to worship.

The ninth century saw a new development: Falsafah, or
philosophy, was devised by an elitist group of philosophers,
Faylasūf, who asserted that God was pure reason, that humans
could achieve that same pure reason through using their rational
capacity, and that the philosophic search was the truest way of
honoring and worshipping God.

Out of the challenge of the Faylasūfs and in reaction to the
zealous followers of the Sharī'ah, there developed a
counter-movement, the Mu'tazilī disputation called Kalam, or
systematic theological discourse. The Mu'tazilites argued that the Qur'ān was not co-eternal with God, and therefore the Shari'ah was not divine; the Qur'ān was created in time, and open to interpretation. Naturally, this position gave the caliphs free rein to interpret "God's commands" as it suited their personal interests best. However, although the Mu'tazili movement became the official position endorsed by a series of 'Abbāsid caliphs, beginning with al-Ma'mūn (ruled 813-833), it lost its popularity after a short time.

The last resort of Muslims wishing to reconcile the nature of God, the nature of the Qur'ān, and their relationship to each other was to exercise bilā kayfah, meaning "without regard to the how," coined by al-Asharī (873-935). With this term, Asharī concluded that some things cannot be explained by human reason, and divine intention is one of them. I.e., God's will was to be accepted, not argued—which, after all, was the meaning of the act of islām: surrender to a higher will. And it was widely agreed that while it was true that God has superior intelligence, it was equally true that humans do not have access to that intelligence. Hence, as in all monotheistic religions, a gap still remained between God and humans.

It is this gap that Sufis claimed to overcome. During the late seventh and early eighth centuries, ascetics such as Hasan al-Basrī (d. 728) emerged in Islamdom. He was a pious Muslim who, influenced by Christian asceticism, practiced zuhd, or rejection of the world, and preached that the life of an ascetic is the only way to achieving God's intimacy while living on earth—an abhorrent and a hateful place in God's eyes. And when, a century later, Muslims
began to refer to themselves as "Sufis," Hasan al-Basrī was dubbed "the first Sufi" in Islam.

Equally important to Sufis in hindsight was Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah (d. 801) who first formulated the Sufi ideal of ecstatic love for God. Also a pious Muslim and an ascetic like al-Basrī, she was a strict vegetarian, trusted and loved by animals. Her ideal of an ecstatic and disinterested love of God soon developed into a major Way of the Sufis, the drunken Way, which welcomed those who were intoxicated in their love for God, and who had lost their earthly senses in this love. Rābi‘ah also became a significant figure in the history of Islam as the first woman mystic to be recognized by Sufis.

Sufi practice allowed a place for women and offered the only religious sphere where they could find a voice. Although Sufi associations (tariqas) were by definition male-clubs, women could enroll as associates and could be appointed as leaders to organize women’s circles, even though female circles never developed into independent tariqas or orders. On Fridays in many locales, the contrast between male and female religious practices became obvious: while the men went to pray at the mosque, the women visited the local saint’s tomb and made offerings and petitions to the spirit of the saint.

The fluidity of the early Muslim population must be kept in mind when considering the lives of the various Sufis during the eighth century. In this century there appeared retreats or hospices which accommodated wanderers seeking a master. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, these gatherings at rest-houses focused around a
particular master or *shaykh* and looked to the master in a new way, which resulted in a shift in orientation: now mystics were not simply gathering at rest-houses, but were gathering around a master. The hostel (and later school) building consisted of a central courtyard with cloisters along two sides, within which were situated cells where Sufis slept. On one side was the main hall where devotional exercises took place, and where the *shaykh* usually sat on a sheepskin, observing the exercises. A separate mosque contained the kitchens and offices, and sometimes a bath-house. These retreats were (and are) called *zawiyah* in Arabic, *khānaqāh* in Persian, and *tekke* in Turkish, and their evolution into spiritual schools was a major step in the institutionalization of Sufism in Islam.

As the nature of the retreats changed, they became *tariqas* or schools which were handed down from one master through *silsilah*, or a spiritual pedigree, to another. In this manner, the spiritual heirs and successors, or *khālífahs*, who claimed to have inherited the *baraḵah* (blessedness) of the great *shaykh*, could theoretically keep a mystical school or *tariqa* alive for centuries after the original master had died. The step toward congregating at retreats also required a change in the nature of the adherents of Sufism. Whereas earlier Sufis might have been hermits, isolating themselves from the world, now Sufis constituted a large body of visible people in Islamdom. Consequently, later Sufis lived quite ordinary lives and became active members of society, including occupying positions in politics.
During the late ninth century, Abû Yazîd al-Bistâmi (d. 874) was regarded as an important figure whose Way, like Râbi`ah’s, was rapture, ecstasy and intoxication. He pursued unity with God through being "drunk" with love. In contrast, Abu'l Qâsim al-Junayd (d. 910), during approximately the same time period, taught sobriety, self-possession and control. This sober Way, since it was less conflicting with the Sharî'ah, was more widely adopted by Sufi shaykhs, and even those Orders which were heterodox in their Ways claimed Junayd as their ancestor.

At the end of the eleventh century, Muhammad al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111) somewhat reconciled the differences between orthodox Muslims and Sufis by carefully and skeptically studying fiqh (discipline of elucidating the Sharî'ah), kalâm (theological discourse), falsafah (philosophy), Ismâ'îlî Shî'î thought (believing in an absent imâm or leader), natural sciences, and tasawwuf. The conclusion which al-Ghazâlî reached in his great compendium, Ihya' 'ulum al-dîn (The Revival of Religious Sciences) was that the Sufis' intimacy and deep love for God had to be combined with Sharî'ah. Reflection and meditation could become a part of the religious life of Muslims without threatening their practices. This conclusion helped to legitimate the Sufi path, so that, by the twelfth century, mysticism was fully recognized by the 'ulamâ', the legal and religious scholars.

When the Sufi Way was thus legitimized, there evolved an important division of labor in Islam: the Sharî'ah, and the ‘ulamâ’ who enforced it, directed the outward activities of Muslims, while the Sufis assumed responsibility for the inner life.
And although both groups looked to Muhammad, the former stressed his role as revealer, concerning outward law, while the latter stressed his role as friend and intimate (wali) of God, concerning inner grace. Furthermore, while the 'ulamā taught islām, or submission to God, Sufis taught ishq, or love of God.

With the recognition of the Sufi Way as a legitimate form of Islamic piety, manuals of "the Way" were written by various theorists. These manuals showed how the Sufi ritual was "now a traced-out Way, a rule of life, by following which the novice [could] attain union with God, founded upon a series of observances additional to the common ritual and duties of Islam" (Trimingham 29). The earliest such manuals, which appeared during the eleventh century, were treatises on manners and guides for the shaykh and his pupils. While they were instructive, however, these manuals were very tedious to read.

The earliest formally organized tariqa that is known to us is the Qādiriyyah order which gathered around the figure of 'Abdulqādir Gîlânî (d. 1166). While the earlier groups were very loose organizations held together only by enthusiasm and a common devotion, the silsila-tariqas were more formally organized and united by a structured director-disciple relationship. In this relationship, all members clearly consented to following the Way, or tariqa, of the founder and his spiritual ancestry as listed in the silsila (pedigree).

During the time of the Seljuqs in Anatolia (12th century), Sufis took over the Shī'ite custom of bai'a, or initiation with oath of allegiance to the shaykh. A simple bai'a used in the Shādhilī tariqa, for instance, would run thus:
O God, I have repented before Thee, and accept as my teacher Shaikh X as my shaikh in this world and in the next, as guide and leader to Thy Presence, and as director (murshid) in Thy Path. I will disobey him neither in word nor in deed, neither overtly nor covertly. Confirm me, 0 God, in obedience to him and his tarīgā in this world and the next, and in the tarīgā of the shaikh of shaikhs and imām or imāms, the Qutb [pole] of the community, my Lord Abu'l-Hasan ash-Shādhili, God be pleased with him! (Trimingham 186-87)

Also during the twelfth century, an association between the Sufis and the futūwah orders became apparent. The futūwah were groups of chivalrous young men who modeled themselves after the figure of ‘Alī. ‘Alī was Muhammad’s nephew who later also became Muhammad’s son-in-law and the fourth caliph. Especially in the eyes of his partisans, the Shi‘ah, he was believed to embody the characteristics of courage, generosity, endurance of suffering, love of truth, hospitality, and aiding the weak. The young men who looked to ‘Alī as their ideal gathered in groups, or futūwah, that substituted for lack of official institutions of protection in Islamdom. They resembled certain men’s voluntary organizations or even urban gangs in the United States. Sufi orders were also connected with occupational guild organizations which were involved with craftsmanship or trade, such as the Masons. They in fact styled themselves after the hierarchical structure of the guilds which had a grand-master, master-craftsmen and apprentices. Similarly, the religious orders established a hierarchy of masters,
initiates and novices. The members of a particular tarīqa often were also members of a certain futūwah and/or a guild. Hence with the more formal arrangement of the orders, Sufism became not only a legitimate spiritual activity, but a vocation.

The second formally organized order after the Qadiriyyah was the Suhrawardiyyah which claimed its beginnings with Diyā' ad-dīn Abū Najīb as-Suhrawardi (d. 1168); however it was really organized after as-Suhrawardi's death, during the thirteenth century by Shihāb ad-dīn Abū Hafs (d. 1234). This is a typical example of the way in which most Sufi orders were formed. Their founders were recognized as founders retroactively when a group of men had gathered around a shaykh and devised a silsilah (pedigree) of their spiritual ancestry going back to the designated founder. Furthermore, any silsila was also always connected back to either al-Bistāmī or al-Junayd of the tenth century, who were credited with establishing the two main Ways among the Sufis: 1) the drunken and 2) the sober Way, respectively.

Other Sufi orders which emerged during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were the Rifā'iyya, the Yasaviyya, the Kubrawiyya, the Chishtiyya, the Shādhiliyya, the Mawlawiyya (known in the West as the Whirling Dervishes), and the Naqshbandiyya. Once these Ways or tarīqas had been formed, all subsequent tarīqas claimed to be derivatives of one or more of them. The forming of the derivatives depended on disciples who returned to their own countries after their training and founded daughter institutions. Once established, they usually developed in their own Ways and broke ties with the mother institution. Thus by the
fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a traveler would be certain to come upon one or another tarīqa anywhere he went.

The experiences of a newcomer at a tarīqa would basically require his complete faith in the shaikh's knowledge and guidance. The master's task was to open the eyes of the adept (murid), and to act as a physician of the soul. Although different Sufi orders had their own distinctive Ways for initiating and training a newcomer, they basically followed a similar succession of events: first, the master tested the adept to determine his willingness to undergo the hardships that awaited him. There were numerous methods for humiliating the future Sufis: usually, this took the form of three years of service, at the end of which it was decided whether one could be accepted for tutelage—"one year in the service of the people, one in the service of God, and one year in watching over his own heart" (Schimmel 101). These years were spent doing such tasks as begging, cleaning latrines, carrying water, etc., the aim of which was to develop humility and discipline.

After these three years, the adept could receive the patched robe (khīrqa) as a badge of admission into the particular Sufi order. This was a dark blue robe formerly worn or touched by the blessed master or shaikh. After receiving this robe, the novice was called an aspirant or an initiate. By being in contact with an object belonging to the master, he was said to acquire some of his master's mystical blessed power (baraka). At this point the initiate was required to go into a forty-day seclusion in a dark room which simulated a tomb, and his robe, a shroud, the experience aiming to help the initiate to deeply change his consciousness.
There were also special cases of Sufis who were said to be initiated not by a human guide or *shaikh*, but to be touched spiritually by the prophet Muhammad or rescued from the wilderness by *Khidr*, a pre-Islamic servant of God and companion of Moses, said to have drunk from the water of life. *Khidr* is still the eternal patron saint of travellers, always cloaked in green, the color being symbolic of the life force in him.

After being initiated either through a *shaikh* or through more mystical means, the student followed three basic steps which led him to God: the first was Islamic law (*Sharī'ah*). Since "no path [could] exist without a main road from which it branched out, no mystical experience [could] be realized if the binding injunctions of the *Sharī'ah* [were] not followed faithfully first" (Schimmel 98). Sufi thought did not abolish the external laws, but rather followed an inner consciousness which was an internalization of external rites and commands. Hence Sufis performed the ritual prayer, fasting, recitation of the Qur'ān, giving of alms to the poor and pilgrimage to Mecca which the Islamic law or *Sharī'ah* commanded, and they often added even more laws to the *Sharī'ah*, making even more exacting demands on themselves.

The second step the initiate took to reach God was the path (*tariqa*), less concretely defined, more difficult to follow: one wandered through different levels of being or stations (*magām*), and experienced various states of consciousness (*ḥal*), which are gifts of God (or insights) that come unbidden after much work and suffering on the path (Schimmel 98). After this, the third step was taken, which was the ability to see the truth (*haqiqa*) that God
is One. It was at this stage that many Sufis were accused of committing heresy by declaring that they were one with God, which was misinterpreted to mean they were God. For example Mansur al-Hallâj (d. 922), the most visible and powerful exponent of Sufism during the tenth century, was perceived to be a threat to the authority of the 'Abbâsid caliphate and to orthodoxy for exclaiming "I am God" and for preaching his faith publicly. He was arrested and brutally put to death, his martyrdom thus becoming a symbol of the conflict between legalistic Muslims who chose to follow the Sharî'ah, and Sufis who chose to subordinate the Sharî'ah to a more individualistic inner source.

By the thirteenth century the Sufi schools were forming not only around a master or a rest house, but around the barakah, or blessedness of a place, person, or tomb, so that blessedness itself began to be institutionalized. A result of this transition was that when a great shaykh died, and sometimes even while he was alive, he was venerated as a saint or wâli, and members began building shrines around saints’ tombs, starting a new trend of pilgrimage. This activity further incorporated the belief that the material of which the tomb was built must be holy too, and people began chipping away at the concrete gravestones, or picking at the cloth coverings over a tomb in order to carry away some barakah (blessedness) with them.

It was in connection with the institutionalization of barakah and the belief in Sufi saints that the Sufis declared the Prophet Muhammad to have been the first Sufi in Islam. They reasoned that a true wâli or saint does not necessarily know
that he is one. Therefore, just as they were assigning sainthood to their dead *shaykhs*, so they also nurtured a reverence for Muhammad’s sainthood and made sure that their *silsilas* (or spiritual pedigrees) were traced back to Muhammad. This naturally added further legitimacy to *tasawwuf* (mysticism) in Islam.

Sufis also varied in terms of the degree to which they adhered to the *Sharif’ah*. While some of them followed it closely, others ignored it, and still others carried out its commands to an excess: for instance, if required to pray five times a day, they did it ten times, the result being equally antinomian to not praying at all. They differed considerably in type of worship and direction: sobriety, dream world, ecstatic intoxication, asceticism, retreat, austerity, worldliness, use of drugs, dance, fasting, self-mutilation, prayer and various breathing exercises were tried and practiced in order to induce perfect union with God. A common trait of the Sufis was their ability to believe in and to perform supernatural feats. These included eating live snakes, extinguishing flames in their mouths, entering blazing ovens, walking barefoot on hot coals, or mutilating themselves with knives without suffering physical harm. This demonstrated their victory of spiritual command over their flesh.

During the fifteenth century, along with the growth of the Ottoman Empire, the Sufi *tarqas* had become very influential in the arts. They were the inspiration for a vast and rich tradition of poetry and music, written in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu, both in the educated and sophisticated circles and in the simpler spheres. When the Ottoman Empire divided into the men of the sword
and men of learning in the fifteen hundreds, the Sufis were the only reconciling factor between these two contrasting groups of citizens. During this time it was they, and not the 'ulams' (religious and legal scholars) who were the significant representatives of religion, and it was the shrine, not the mosque, that was the symbol of Islam (Trimingham 67).

By the eighteenth century, every Muslim male may have been a member of at least one brotherhood whose intent was to spread the message, recruit more members, and to engage in social service. These members were usually more involved in the practical rather than the spiritual activities of the orders, and they were interested in attaining ecstasy for its own sake only, and not as the means to achieving God's intimacy. Popularization of the brotherhoods was accompanied by a decline in the authenticity of mystical feeling. The tarīqas were resented for fettering the creative freedom of the mystic (Trimingham 103), binding him to a series of mystical terminology, disciplines and exercises. There were many writings of hagiographies and collections of saints which took away from genuine inner life, and it became in general too easy to establish an order and to claim the rights to its leadership. Some even claimed to have been commanded in a dream by Muhammad to found a new tarīqa.

The nineteenth century saw several revival movements among the Sufi brotherhoods in an attempt to rekindle the extinguishing flame of authentic mysticism. At the same time, the secularization of Muslim nations was causing the immediate disappearance of the Sufi orders from the popular scene. In Istanbul, for instance, the
declaration of the Turkish Republic resulted in the disappearance of seventeen tarıfs which were housed in 258 tekkes or hostels and many more smaller groups which used to meet in private homes (Trimingham 253), and by 1925, all orders in Istanbul either dissipated, or went underground. About the same time, similar changes also took place in the rest of Islamdom, although today, there is still much genuine activity in the surviving Sufi orders, despite their necessarily underground nature and the unceasing ridicule and rejection of them by the predominantly secularized public.

In studying these changes, it is important to note that the development of Sufi thought and practice has been very much in character with its inner nature—that is, its metaphysical orientation toward time, and its dependence on the inner life of each individual. As a result, what has come to be called "Sufism" today derives from much retroactive labeling and reshaping of past persons and events throughout the history of the Sufis. This process of revision contributed to the limitless varieties which continue to manifest themselves in an infinite number of Sufi guides and orders. Thus even though "Sufism" as an abstraction used by modern practitioners implies a degree of coherence, there still persists diversity and individualization of the Ways of Sufis. Therein lies the resistance to definition of a teaching that is alive.
Notes

Epigram

1 Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi, Mathnawi, trans. R. A. Nicholson
(London: Lizac & Co., 1925-40)

Preface

1 The term "Islamicate" was introduced by Marshall Hodgson in The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History In a World Civilization, Vol I (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1974) to distinguish aspects and products that are associated with the world of Islam, or even just with Muslims, but not necessarily with the religion of Islam--i.e., not "Islamic."

2 The term "Islamdom" was introduced by Marshall Hodgson in The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History In a World Civilization, Vol I (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1974) to refer to the parts of the world where Muslim peoples predominate.

3 According to Britannica Book of the Year (1991), there are approximately 996 million Catholics, 935 million Muslims, and 17.5 million Jews in the world today.

4 Especially since the number of Muslims in the United States today is growing at such a fast rate largely due to immigration and birth-rate, with conversion being a distant third cause.
There are only thirty-five higher level academic units that offer Turkish in the United States, and only two in Canada. In a good year, each institution averages at the most ten students, including all levels (undergraduate and graduate). Realistically, five students really stay with the language. Of these five, perhaps one learns the language well enough to appreciate the literature. Of the thirty-five institutions, one third does not have the funds to hire a full-time professor of Turkish or to offer graduate study, but offers Turkish off and on as staff becomes available. Only a handful are in a position to offer a PhD in Turkish studies which frequently means the study of Turkish history (not literature) in English (not in Turkish). The case is similar in Persian, and better in Arabic.
Chapter One

Opening: The Unreal City

In *Open Secret: Versions of Rumi* (Vermont: Threshold, 1984) Coleman Barks and John Moyne explain that this was a collaborative translation. It is a reworking by Barks of a translation done by A. J. Arberry. Furthermore, when we refer to Arberry's *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1979), we learn that Arberry's translation was completed when his health was failing, and that the present publication was made possible postmortem by the labor of Dr. Hasan Javadi and Dr. Ehsan Yarshater, who had to decipher Dr. Arberry's handwriting. Consequently the poem we have is not only twice removed, but possibly three or four times removed from the original in the *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, ed. Foruzanfar, vol 54, p. 661, by Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi. In the process it loses quite a bit not only in length, but especially in depth.

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In *Mystical Poems of Rumi* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1979), A. J. Arberry notes that "In Persian poetry the abode of Jesus after his ascension is usually said to be in the Fourth Heaven (the sphere of the sun)" (p. 150, #218).


6 Ibid.

7 See note 4.

8 Lessing emulates Rumi's technique in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five in the form of "Zones" that correspond to various stages of being.

9 See note 4.

10 See note 3.

11 See note 4.
Chapter Two

Lessing's "Sufism"


2 Used by Sufis as well as Christians.


4 This small paragraph is the result of endless conversations over the span of several years with Dr. Marilyn Waldman, professor of Islamic History at The Ohio State University, who painstakingly defended, defined, and distinguished historical Sufism from western Sufism, against my ignorance.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


9 Fritjof Capra makes this observation in relation to Zen Buddhist tales in *The Tao of Physics* (Toronto: Bantam, 1984).

10 Nasreddin Hodja or Mulla Nasrudin is equally well-known in other Islamic countries, including Greece and the Soviet Union, where Muslims do not necessarily predominate.
Chapter Three
Lessing's "Work"

1 In The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1979), Roberta Rubenstein also holds this position: "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 antitheses of perceived experience in favor of a synthesizing vision of wholeness" (122).


3 In Substance Under Pressure (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983) Betsy Draine, too, recognizes Lessing's tendency to commit to the role of a spiritual guide who will move the reader to the "correct" state of consciousness (p. 181).

5 Ibid. On p. 121, Roberta Rubenstein observes a similar connection in *Landlocked* between Thomas Sterne's madness and his potential for "a higher synthesis of being" as taught in Sufism.

6 Ibid. On p. 184 Rubenstein quotes Lessing at length on the subject of ESP.

7 On p. 167 of *Substance Under Pressure* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983), Betsy Draine recognizes the "enormous scope for [Lessing's] moralizing urge in *Shikasta* and *The Sirian Experiments*, two novels "that provide the context for *Marriages [between Zones Three, Four,* and Fivel]."

8 This is a central theme in Sufism and in many of Lessing's novels as will be discussed in Chapter Four of this work. See also *Substance Under Pressure* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983) on p. 102 for Betsy Draine's discussion of the Sufi theme of "remembering" in *Briefer for a Descent into Hell.*
Chapter Four

Sufi Allegories in Lessing's Vision

1 On pp. 122-123 of The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1979) Roberta Rubenstein also 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.

2 However, when Lessing illustrates Anna Wulf's state of incompletion and spiritual depravity in the 567 long and drawn-out pages of The Golden Notebook, not all critics were happy. Roderick Nordell wrote in The Christian Science Monitor 5 July 1962: 11 that "The occasional satisfactions of seeing how bits of the puzzle fit together are not enough." Not enough, that is, unless one is inclined to value a study of the breakdown and reconstruction of the human psyche. Ernest Buckler of The New York Times Book Review 1 July 1962: 4, on the other hand, praises The Golden Notebook for the same reason that others found it overbearing: its complexity and fragmentation. Buckler writes, "However overwrought Anna's sensibility sometimes is, Mrs. Lessing points such powerful significances therefrom that, in comparison, many other highly touted novels dealing with man's acceptance—or defiance—of his fate seem picayune indeed."
3 For this reason Melvin Maddocks calls Memoirs "a ghost story of the future" and "a panicked intuition turned into a tentative myth," which is a fitting description of the novel. Time 16 June 1975: 105:79. For Lessing, however, there are more than ghosts in this novel; the imaginary rooms behind the wall are more real to Lessing than the "realities" of everyday life.

4 On p. 142 of Substance Under Pressure (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983), Betsy Draine recognizes the dilemma in reading Memoirs: unless the reader has already been transformed and already believes in the existence of the "other world" behind the wall, she cannot appreciate the novel, and it is a rare reader who comes ready to read the novel with total sympathy. Draine sees it as a shortcoming of Lessing that Lessing's vision in Memoirs is not unified. It is my argument that Lessing is doing precisely what a Sufi tale does by not providing all of the means to unraveling her tale, but demanding the reader's faith and abandonment of rational thought patterns when approaching the novel. The Sufi tale is not meant to be an open book, but to work on the reader at a deeper, subconscious level. Draine acknowledges this view when she mentions Nancy Hardin's demonstration of Sufi themes in Memoirs on p. 141, but she still feels that Memoirs falls short of accomplishing this breakdown of the thinking apparatus successfully in the reader.

5 Likewise, on p. 129 of The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1979) Roberta Rubenstein views the theme of evolution in Lessing's fiction as cumulative: "the Martha Quest who emerges 'after' The Golden Notebook carries with her not only the seeds of Thomas Stern's inner
division but echoes of Anna Wulf's." This is rightly so, considering Lessing's deepened and enhanced perception of the human psyche with her introduction to Sufi thought.

6 In The Saturday Review 28 June 1975: 2:23, Malcolm Cowley both acknowledges that Memoirs is about "a catastrophic breakdown of the affluent society" and also expresses his frustration with Lessing's vagueness and abstractness. He is uncomfortable with the visionary and prophetic Lessing, who will not offer a neat conclusion to the catastrophe she foresees: "But what shall we say about the end of the fable? . . . To this stubborn rationalist, it isn't an ending, really, but a cop-out." Indeed, Lessing's solution, to follow the Sufi Path out of the chaos of this life on earth, will not yield satisfactory answers to any rationalist reader.

7 See note 5.

8 If read without the Sufi context, Making of the Representative is a rather puzzling novel. Critics have pronounced it difficult to decipher, and rightfully so. In his review in the Nation 6 March 1982: 234:278 when The Representative first came out A. K. Turner wrote, "Philosophically, it's a puzzler. . . . Even though I know . . . [that Lessing] appears to believe in an afterlife, a sort of reincarnation and a journey toward salvation, I find [her] ending hard to figure out. . . . Despite recent appearances, Doris Lessing really is a major author . . . and perhaps we should indulge her whim. But next time I hope she writes about Shammat. Pirates are a lot more fun than people freezing to death" True, pirates are more fun than victims of cosmic catastrophes, but Lessing is not very interested in "fun," as is clear to everyone. For other critics, acknowledging the Sufi context without understanding it, has been equally futile: Linda
Taylor of the Times Literary Supplement 2 April 1982: 370 writes, "This Sufist regeneration is comforting and believable as far as Planet 8 and Canopus go. But this is where the 'space perspective' is found wanting. . . . It's difficult for the reader . . . to identify with this mystical collectivism."

9 Without access to the Sufi context, critics have been terribly frustrated and unsatisfied with what Shikasta had to offer. When it first came out Lucille de View of the Christian Science Monitor 14 Nov. 1979: B3 described Shikasta as "a jagged, fragmented narrative which requires studious reading and rarely allows for any real feeling about the characters," which is true enough; but those fragments do amount to a whole picture, given the right viewing glasses. Benjamin De Mott of the Saturday Review Dec. 1979: 6:53 rejected Shiasta's "tone of high prophetic solemnity." He wrote, "[I'm afraid] that many novel-readers won't find Shikasta to their taste." Speaking for many critics, Paul Gray of Time magazine 22 Oct. 1979: 114:101 rejected the cosmic order and laws that, as Lessing implies, govern human life: "There is something unsatisfying about a vision of history that suggests humans could not, after all, help making the messes they have, that their blunders were all ordained by a small tic in the cosmos."

10 There is a reason why critics such as Roger Sale of The New York Times Book Review 22 Sept. 1974: 4 have said of Lessing, "Doris Lessing is not a casual person, and has none of the casual virtues. She has no wit, and only a very serious kind of humor. She works terribly hard, at living and at writing, and at her best she reveals the inner logic of human lives with a pain and a joy unmatched among living writers."
Chapter Five

Sufi Parables in Lessing

1 The same is true in Landlocked, the first novel Lessing published following her introduction to Sufi thought. For a discussion of quotations from Sufi teachings in Landlocked, see Roberta Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979) 121.

2 In Substance Under Pressure (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983) Betsy Draine argues that the same is true in Briefing for a Descent into Hell, which is "a kind of mystical teaching-story" (92). She further argues that Lessing is therefore a Sufi teacher who "prod[s] her students into a state of alertness and receptivity to that truth" (94). In Briefing she sees Charles Watkins as a seeker as well as a teacher: he is a man who "has lost sight of his place in this essential harmony" (94) and he is also a man "charged with the role of teaching this lesson to humanity" (94).

3 On p. 156 ff of the work mentioned above, Betsy Draine attempts to apply logic to these Zones, which is impossible, as her analysis ultimately demonstrates. It is definitely not Lessing's intention that the Canopus in Argos series be read scientifically and analytically, but with an abandonment of one's rational thought patterns.
Without an allegorical reading, critics have been inevitably frustrated and dissatisfied with this novel. Robert Towers writes in the *New York Times Book Review* 30 March 1980: 1 "Apart from her visionary side, Doris Lessing's preoccupations are still so much those of her own time . . . that they remain like an unassimilated lump within a narrative mode deriving from a very different epoch . . . . Finally, the fable itself is simply not enthralling or compelling enough on its own terms to carry the weight of significance that Mrs. Lessing has assigned to it."
Chapter Six

Lessing's Place Between East and West

1 E. M. Forster, Passage to India (Sandiego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1924). 111.


4 This is one of many Nasreddin Hodja stories with which I grew up, as do all children in the Muslim world, as well as in parts of the Soviet Union and Greece, in which Hodja is equally popular.

5 Not all thinkers of the Enlightenment necessarily opposed religion and absolutism in government. But all questioned them when they excluded an individual's independent thought—a point with which no Sufi would argue. Much like the Sufis, John Milton (d. 1674) wished to KNOW God, and to the extent that he felt he could approach the divine, he wrote Paradise Lost (1667) to explain his understanding of the ways of God to his readers. Similar to Sufis who believe in direct communion with God, Milton claimed that the muse brought him what he wrote in Paradise Lost directly from God himself. He believed in an internal Scripture, i.e., conscience or Holy Spirit or Inner Light, that gives humans the ability to arrive at the truth when combined with use of one's right reason. (Milton discusses "right
reason at length in a pamphlet, "Areopagitica" 1664, which he wrote to protest the parliament's Ordinance against unlicenced printing.) For Milton, Paradise was within—an idea that parallels the mystic Al Hallaj's exclamation, *Ana’l-Haqq* or "I am God" in the Sufi tradition. Therefore man had to be offered all possible options, both good and evil. In "Areopagitica" Milton called this "Knowing good by evil."

6 Marilyn Waldman, lecture on Islamic History at The Ohio State University, 1988.


8 Father Simon, *Critical History of the Old Testament*, trans. Henry Dickinson, 1682. This text explained the gaps that Father Simon found in the Old Testament, and questioned its accuracy. Until this time the Anglicans and Protestants had looked to the Scriptures for guidance; now, they were naturally disturbed by the rationalist criticism of their holy book. John Dryden wrote "Religio Laici" in response to this criticism.

9 Alexander Pope (d. 1744) attempted to conclude the wars of truth by writing his poem "Essay on Man" (1733) in which he made an effort to say what can be rationally said about a universe which cannot be perceived. In this and other poems, he proceeded not on the basis of divine inspiration (as Milton did), but on rational human discourse, and if he called on any being in an invocation it was not on a muse, but a human being—a friend or a philosopher. He supported
his arguments not by myths or allusions to revelation, but by providing illustrations connected with everyday subjects, and applying his rational faculties to what we can know in our "fallen" condition. In this sense he was closer in thought to Lessing's twentieth-century environment than he was to his own, eighteenth-century England.

Taken as a whole, writers of the Restoration and the eighteenth century conceded to one thing, regardless of their differences: they all perceived the necessity for men and women to ceaselessly think, sense, reason, intuit, and seek for themselves, regardless of their methods, and regardless of their conclusions. Even as they wrote, they were aware that man's collective knowledge was neither final knowledge, nor the limit of knowledge, a fact that Lessing became fully conscious of in her own dissatisfaction with the legacy she had received.

10 In The Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of A Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651) Thomas Hobbes (d. 1679) focuses on the knowable, causal world—that of solid, material objects which cannot occupy the same place at the same time and which we can know by our five senses. For Hobbes ideas and concepts such as God, church, free-will and truth existed only in the mind, and had no physical counterparts in nature. He proposed to use empirical reasoning to arrive at a knowledge of second causes that he believed always disprove or fail to prove first causes—i.e., all mysteries such as those experienced by the Sufis. Hobbes' views were very much in keeping with those of Lessing's contemporaries, when, three centuries before Lessing even began to write, he lay the foundation for the disillusionment Lessing was to feel, by pronouncing
anything supernatural and beyond the reach of our senses, the
invention of "ghostly men" such as the clergy, including the Pope, who
profit from keeping men and women in ignorance and fear, and who take
advantage of their gullibility.

11 Like Hobbes, John Locke (d. 1704) anchored knowledge in
sensation—an idea that Lessing’s readers take for granted today.
According to his empirical psychology which he discussed in his Essay
Concerning Human Understanding (1689), the mind was a blank slate at
birth on which were written experiences in time. Like Hobbes, Locke
demanded proof of God and his mysteries, paving the way for Lessing’s
dissatisfaction with the European tradition. Reason was of utmost
necessity to convince him of a divine revelation. Therefore faith
could not oppose reason. However, unlike Hobbes, Locke’s approach was
more in line with that of Lessing, since he at least allowed for
revelation and a higher intelligence than that of humans, because, he
reasoned, we humans could not have sprouted from nothing. Like other
thinkers of the Age of Reason, Locke believed in right reason to guide
the human mind to the truth or falsity of a particular claim, be it a
miracle or a revelation. However, to this day, Lessing’s
contemporaries are no more certain than Locke was on how to use their
reason "rightly," and Lessing’s characters offer countless testaments
to this.

12 The spectrum would not be complete without the great infidel
David Hume (d. 1776), who reminds us of the extremes to which the wars
of truth were carried by the end of the eighteenth century. Hume
arrived at his anti-Christian skepticism by opposing revelation,
enthusiasm, faith, and Christianity—the absence of all of which is
the primary characteristic of the western filter through which Lessing has absorbed Sufi truths. Like Lessing today, Hume was responding to a need (though the opposite need) in his own time when he wrote *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1758). He felt England was relapsing into ignorance and Christianity, and the talk about miracles contradicted the laws of nature. People in his opinion were ready to delude themselves, and others were glad to invent delusions for them—a theory that would have discarded all Sufi thought and practice in a flash, and that has contributed inevitably to the formation of the filter through which Lessing, a westerner by birth and upbringing, inadvertently receives all nonwestern thought even though she was born in Iran and raised in Southern Rhodesia. Unlike Locke, Hume was suspicious even of reason, and preferred to trust only direct experience and sensory perceptions to guide him to the truth. He dislodged the authority of Christianity which depends on the eyewitnesses of the apostles by dismissing the credibility of resting confidence in another’s testimony more than one’s own senses—an assertion that renders any entertaining of Sufi mysteries a vacuous fancy, and that makes it impossible for any intelligent westerner, including Lessing, to swallow Sufism whole and without question.

13 William Blake, "There is No Natural Religion,"

14 Alfred Lord Tennyson (d. 1892) and Matthew Arnold (d. 1888) were among the Victorian poets who grappled with the uneasiness that comes from the lack of a sound belief system on which to anchor one’s
life. Ironically, it was this dis-ease that provided the backbone of Victorian poetry, excepting the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins (d. 1889), the Jesuit priest whose poetry is equalled only by Blake's and by Sufi poetry in its exquisite expressions of God's Reality. Unlike Hopkins, who wrote of "God's Grandeur" with unwavering faith, Tennyson vacillated between the two voices of faith and doubt in most of his works, and Arnold pleaded for loyalty in human love to replace that lost in God's love. Both longed for the days of fixed religious faith before the Enlightenment and sought meaning through and in their art as Lessing and her contemporaries did in the following century. Both had a keen sense that they were living in a period of transition between a time of certainties and faith, and an indefinite and uncertain future: "wandering between two worlds, one dead,/ the other powerless to be born" (Arnold). As a European writer, thinker, and citizen, Lessing naturally inherited and internalized these doubts, questions, and disappointments, as well.

17 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (d. 1834) tried to show the wonder in life besides the rationally-perceived events set in motion by second causes, by presenting the supernatural, strange, and uncanny in nature, while Percy Bysshe Shelley (d. 1822) was awestruck with the invisible endless motion in the universe and the spirit of everything in nature. Unlike Sufi mysticism, their form of mystery had to do with the sublime in nature rather than with God or heaven. Shelley was mystified by the thought of unheard winds and unseen snowfall. He
felt this not as a pantheist or a mystic, but as an artist inspired by the miracle of life around him. He believed, like the wind that rises from complete stillness or the snow that melts after a long winter, the human mind has the capacity to rise from sterility to a burst of imaginative and creative power.

William Wordsworth (d. 1850) was even more this-worldly than Shelley or Coleridge, and therefore even further removed from Blake's or the Sufis' Way. He loved nature for its own sake and wrote poetry that remembered and recalled every corner of the English landscape where he had travelled. Having inherited the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tradition of placing importance on sense impressions, he believed that the only way to achieve truth was by dealing boldly and directly with the visible world, which dismissed and discouraged one's innate affinity to the feeling for the invisible and the formless.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (d. 1889) is an exception: he was probably the only Victorian poet we know of who matched the certainty of the Sufis. He was aware of the monotony of the daily world that blots God and divinity out of human consciousness. He believed that words and sounds, like objects, had flesh, sensual power, and divinity which he called "thisness," much like the power that Hindus, Buddhists and Sufis attribute to mantras such as the word "Om" or "Allah." Therefore in his poetry he liked to charge words and phonemes with alliterative stress, internal rhyme, repetition, and explosive sounds. But like William Blake, Hopkins was in the minority in the West, as perhaps Lessing is becoming herself, in our time.
Even though within the European tradition there are ideologies similar to the mystical approach of the Sufis such as the works of Blake and Hopkins, these never became part of the dominant ideology of their time. While Lessing does not write overtly devotional texts that bear witness to her faith, she is still in the minority like Blake or Hopkins simply because, like them, she has dared introduce a spiritual mystery into her novels, an act that has become taboo according to some, and obsolete according to others in twentieth-century western literature.


21 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.


27 In Hinduism gods and goddesses are sometimes created on the spot, as a result of a natural phenomena such as lightning that strikes down a tree but spares the lives of those around, or a car accident at a particularly dangerous bend in the road, from which the passengers miraculously come out alive. From then on the tree will be
a "god of storms," or the bend in the road, a "goddess of travel," etc. Likewise, Mrs. Moore becomes a goddess, one who could have proven Dr. Aziz's innocence had she not refused to testify and left for England before the trial.

28 This is a saying frequently heard as a child when one is growing up in a Muslim country.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Star Wars, videotape, dir. George Lucas, Fox Film Corp., 1977 (121 min.). Zoroaster (Zarathustra) of the sixth century BCE founded his religious teachings on this battle of good and evil, with the promise that in the end, the good will command the evil, or God will triumph over Satan. Only, the sea of light that stood for Ahura Mazda in the Zoroastrian story became "the Force" in "Star Wars," and the battle took place in outer space rather than in ancient Iran or ancient Greece. (In like manner, for instance, Tolkien emulates and makes allusions to the Arthurian legend.)

There are countless other similarities between science fiction and classical mythology and/or religious stories: in "The Empire Strikes Back," the sequel to "Star Wars," characters have telepathic powers; whenever they ("the good guys") part from one another, they say, "May the Force be with you," just like the Christian or Muslim bidding, "May God be with you," only, in their case, "the Force" is rather impersonal, unlike the Christian God—the Father, who is a personal God; some of the "Star Wars" characters are even as wise as Confucius
himself: "You must unlearn what you have learned, they tell our hero Luke, so that "the Force" can enter him; they are well-versed in a kind of pop-wisdom shared by most religions: "Energy surrounds us and binds us," they believe; and "you must feel the Force around you, everywhere, even in a rock"—precisely what Jung was insisting upon, that even the soil we walk on has a spirit and a mood because it literally contains the blood and sweat of those who died on it ("Wisdom").

However, there is a major difference between Jung's (or the Sufis') conviction in the reality of God and the utterings of various science-fiction characters: in the latter case, the wisdom is not founded on a cohesive body of thought such as the Navaho faith or Sufism, but is a grab-bag of religions and philosophies: "I don't believe it," Luke says, when he is told the Force will help his fight; "That is why you fail," he is told, not necessarily by a Sufi master. And, he is ordered, "No, don't [just] try; do, or do not," which is a teaching straight out of Buddhism. When he asks "How do I tell good from evil," he is told, "First you must be calm and quiet." So he stands on his hands for several hours, upside down, as though he were practicing Yoga, in order to receive the Force. However, unlike Lessing's characters who guide and are guided according to a specific body of knowledge, i.e., that of Sufism, science-fiction characters such as R2D2, Luke, Leah, and others are under no particular system of thought, and they have no perceptible spiritual goals beyond gaining physical command over the galaxy.

34 As we grow accustomed to this, we are not surprised by the science-fiction plots in films and literature, nor by the robotic characters and talking animals on television sit-coms, who are members of otherwise "normal" families. Ghostbusters and Mutant Ninja Turtles invade our screens and our consciousness with ease; neither do we have a problem with learning that our poets are now writing poetry using the Ouija board, as James Merrill did in composing many of his poems. We are not disconcerted by the uses of spiritual divination for secular purposes, nor by the emergence of scientific archetypes that define our reality.

35 Lessing's novels that take place in outer space appear to be like science fiction only because, like science fiction, they lack structure, an in-depth development of the story-line, and character development; however, they are not dominated by action as science fiction is. This is not to say that science fiction has no purpose, either. Furthermore, in some cases of science fiction, themes of politics and social issues are woven into the novel, as in Stanislaw Lem's works, or the fiction is influenced by anthropology as well as by science, as in the works of Ursula Le Guin. Some use the futuristic disguise to avoid censorship in their country and to make a social and political commentary as in Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut or Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Le Guin, and all are concerned with saving humans or warning humans on earth. The main difference between these works of science fiction and Lessing's novels is that they do not include religion as a promising solution to the problems they present, while Lessing does; and the solutions that they do propose have to do with this life, always, and do not propose to
help with preparations for an afterlife. In science fiction the orientation is toward this world, and not heaven or an afterlife; and in most cases, the driving force of the writer and reader is entertainment, fantasy, and escapism.

36 This is unlike Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars*, videotape, dir. George Lucas, Fox Film Corp., 1977 (121 min.), who walks the skies because he is a super hero, not because he is a believable evolved soul. Furthermore, although Luke may be oblivious of planet earth, he is still prone to human failures, his lot is still cast with that of the human race, he is still an earthling. I.e., life on earth is unavoidable. He walks the skies and flies in his space ship, only because it is so much fun to do so, fun to fantasize about, and fun for us to watch. "The Force" may be in him, but his travels are not aimed at Nirvana or an union with the Beloved God of the Sufis, while Al Ith's goal can be interpreted to suggest the Sufi Path to God, which is a legitimate Way out of human life on earth.

37 But this is not anybody's fault in particular. In a letter to my friend Nurbiye Kinaci in Izmir, Turkey, dated October 28, 1977, Idries Shah, the man who is responsible for singlehandedly introducing Sufism to the West, explains,

... until recently both the East and the West could not understand the Sufis, since science itself as well as human thinking had not reached the range in which the great Sufis thought ... Our Islamic civilization contains the most important and significant materials for the understanding of man. In the past, ignorant and small-minded people have for
centuries trivialized our heritage: and your Ghazi Mustafa Kamal (my father knew him and wrote a book on him) realized this when he opposed this trivial nonsense. But in recent years we have rediscovered our heritage: which is not the same as saying that we are bound to the narrow-mindedness of the people of the past. Stick to your Turkish and Islamic heritage, but not to the aspects which have been misunderstood by shallow men.

Shah, too, knew that the compromise that The Sufi Way has suffered is not necessarily due to its own shortcomings, but is a direct result of the limitations of human understanding and capacity in both the East and the West.

38 This is the main point that disturbs most Lessing critics. In her review of The Four-Gated City in Newsweek 26 May 1969, 73:117, Annette Grant writes, "this painstaking examination of lives lived in a Chinese puzzle box is so snail-paced as to be virtually inert. . . . And after 360,000 words. Mrs. Lessing's visionary ideology is revealed as science-fiction fantasy. The clue to salvation, to recovering one's 'humanity,' is, of all things, ESP. . . . As the climax of four lengthy works [this] comes as a disappointment."
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