

Nadzieja Monachowicz

The University of Białystok

The Functioning of the CONTAINER Conceptual Metaphor in Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence*

Abstract. This paper is based on the assumption that there is a system to conceptual metaphor and to its conceptualized linguistic expression. Conceptual metaphor is not a matter of arbitrary fixity. Individual basic metaphors and even generic-level metaphors are not isolated. There is a higher unity to metaphor that governs not only all basic and generic-level metaphors, but novel metaphors as well. When we understand a scene, including those described in literary texts, we naturally structure it in terms of conceptual mega-metaphors which may structurally unite the patterns of meaning throughout the whole of the text and find expression in various minor novel metaphors. As the subject matter of this analysis I have chosen the series of novels *Children of Violence* by the famous British writer Doris Lessing (1919-2013), the Nobel Prize winner for literature in 2007.

Key words: metaphor, conceptualizing, container, object, substance, environment, house, room, spaces, landlocked

The image-schema conceptual metaphor of the CONTAINER is an extended or mega metaphor present throughout the novels comprising Doris Lessing's series *Children of Violence*. Before we start analyzing the instances of this metaphor in the text, it is worth mentioning some general notions concerning CONTAINER metaphors. According to Lakoff and Jonsen (1981: 29-30), people, as physical beings, are bounded and set apart from the rest of the world by the surface of their skins, and they experience the rest of the world as outside them. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and outside. Rooms and houses are obvious containers. Moving from room to room is moving from one container to another, that is, moving *out of one room* and *into* another. A clearing in the woods has something we can perceive as a natural physical boundary – the fuzzy area where the trees more or less stop and the clearing more or less begins. But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries – marking off territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface – whether a wall, a fence, or an abstract line or plane. There are few human instincts more basic than territoriality. And such defining of a territory, putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification. Bounded objects, whether human beings, rocks, or land areas, have sizes. This allows them to be qualified in terms of the amount of substance they contain. Substances can themselves be viewed as containers. Take a tub of water, for example. When you get into the tub, you get into the water, both the tub and the water are viewed as containers, but of different sorts. The tub is a CONTAINER OBJECT, while the water is a CONTAINER SUBSTANCE.

We conceptualize our visual field as a container and conceptualize what we see as being inside it. Even the term "visual *field*" suggests this. Given that a bounded physical space is a CONTAINER and that our field of vision correlates with that bounded physical space, the metaphorical concept VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS emerges naturally. Thus we can say: 'The ship is *coming into view*'; 'I *have him in sight*'.

We use ontological metaphors to comprehend events, actions, activities, and states. Events and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, activities and substances; states as containers. Thus we have examples like these: 'He is *in* love'; 'We are *out of* trouble now'; 'He is *coming out of* the coma'; 'I'm *slowly getting into* shape'; 'He *entered* a state of euphoria'; 'He *fell into* a depression'.

The search for logical connections in the extensive use of the CONTAINER metaphor in the novels by Doris Lessing reveals both the constancies and the unique features of literary metaphor, and shows us the way a literary text takes advantage of the brain's ability to reproduce and understand what writers want us to envision. We can follow Stockwell in saying that a mega metaphor is a conceptual feature that runs throughout a text and can contribute to the reader's sense of the general meaning or 'gist' of the work and its significance. Specific realizations of the numerous metaphors that occur in the text and that accumulate into the sense of a **mega metaphor** are, by contrast, **micro metaphors** (Stockwell 2002:111).

Whether the author was aware of the effects the CONTAINER ontological metaphor has on the story is of less importance than the fact that the cognitive approach should more firmly express the view that cognition is a shared condition of writers and readers, and that textual meaning can therefore be considered to exist objectively.

The patterns of meaning in Doris Lessing's fiction interpenetrate in complicated and unexpected ways. The writer's profoundly dialectical consciousness sees multiple forces in constant interaction, and it is consciousness that displays itself in the way characters and narrative patterns are deployed. The characters' consciousness in Lessing's writing is not limited to political or thematic expression, but it has a formal component which describes the way characters and narrative forms are juxtaposed, just as it can describe the specialized kind of juxtapositions between parts of the self. In particular, Lessing frequently uses environments (walls, rooms, houses, cities) as expressions of her characters' inner selves. Roberta Rubenstein comments on the "correspondence between dwellings and interior states" in Lessing's work (1979: 113), and Carey Kaplan rightly defines Lessing's house metaphor as "typologically female" (1988:164). Frederick R. Karl explains the four gates in the title of the last novel in the series, *The Four-Gated City*, as referring to four houses in the novel – a restaurant, Mark's house, Jack's house, and Paul's house. More important than this possible equivalence is Karl's sense of Lessing's dwellings as psychic reflectors (Karl 1986).

The private and the public, the individual and the collective, make a permanent dialectic in Lessing's work. One way she dramatizes that interaction is by making her environments mirrors of the self and psychological reality of the characters. Apart from being a physical reality of their own, walls, and the rooms and houses people inhabit become living extensions of the characters' bodily selves.

The semi-autobiographical series *Children of Violence* comprises five novels¹ - *Martha Quest* (1952), *A Proper Marriage* (1954), *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), *Landlocked* (1965), and *The Four-Gated City* (1969) - and describes Martha Quest's awakening to greater awareness on every level. The novels were pioneering in the depiction of the mind and circumstances of the emancipated woman. The story of Martha is told with the mild despair of someone seeing her younger self from the heavens of an afterlife, unable

¹ All references to *The Children of Violence* novels are to the Granada Publishing House editions and are indicated in the text as *MQ* (*Martha Quest*), *PM* (*A Proper Marriage*), *RS* (*A Ripple from the Storm*), *L* (*Landlocked*), *The Four-Gated City* (FGC).

to intervene. Moreover, Martha's self, seen from the outside, is always located inside a space which is appropriate for a certain period of her life and a certain state of her questing mind. This space, each time different, can be seen as an appropriate container for Martha's self, which otherwise is not fulfilled.

Landlocked, which is the fourth book in the series, definitely takes Lessing from social realism to science fiction. Martha's quest – and the name "Quest" marks her as the prototypical questioning protagonist of contemporary women's fiction – is also Lessing's: both seek "**something new**" against the nightmare repetition which is the burden of history, something oppositional to the culture that has formed them. But the problem Lessing encounters in the two decades she spends writing *The Children of Violence* is how to express "**something new**" when the discourses from which the novelist creates – indeed, all signifying systems, language itself – are inscribed within the culture she would oppose. Even in *Martha Quest* there are tensions between the novel's themes and the realist form which makes such changes inevitable. The possible nature of those tensions is evident in the novel's opening chapter, which draws attention to Martha's less typical aspect. Her visionary daydream lays the foundations for the four-gated city of the last novel in the series. Martha's vision raises questions and introduces concepts which cannot easily be dealt with within the conventions of realist fiction (King 1989: 15). But the paradox of Lessing's example is that her straining against the boundaries of realism has proceeded without modernist strategies, for her experimentations are not formally radical. Although her language is pointedly ordinary, even in the most fantastic of her novels, Lessing usually endows commonplace diction and syntax with unexpected features, one of which is evidently making environments reflections of her characters' interior states.

Landlocked covers the years 1944 to 1949 in Martha Quest's life. In an irrational world of organizational corruption and personal frustrations, Martha enters a love affair and finds a temporary solace. Paradoxically, this relationship becomes both a balm for her troubled soul and the most profound emotional experience of her entire life. The visionary heights that Martha achieves through her sexual expression with her new lover reflect Lessing's view that, from the release of intense feeling and passion, one can achieve a sense of connection and balance in the universe. At the outset Martha is offered a promotion at her law firm. Instead of being happy for the opportunity, she refuses the offer, believing further commitment to a collective that she does not esteem will only detract from her search for self. After refusing the job she dreams that she is a "large house...with half a dozen different rooms in it," but the house is empty, ready to be filled. She accepts the dream as an "image of her position", and reasons that new knowledge is needed to fill her inner space. Martha's choice becomes Thomas Stern, a Polish Jew who escaped from Poland but discovered later that Nazis had murdered all members of the family that he had left behind. Thomas's passionate outrage toward Nazis stirs Martha and alerts her to his potential for filling her empty centre with emotions that could ignite her true self. Nothing much happens to Martha in the course of *Landlocked*; her life is not only without the crises, turning points and resolutions that she had expected, but is almost entirely eventless. The novel's real outcome is the new knowledge Martha starts to acquire through looking for new environments and filling in the empty spaces in her consciousness.

Pattern and meaning in Lessing's fiction interpenetrate in complicated and unexpected ways. Lessing's dramatic projections are a way of questioning and enlarging the singleness and stability of personality – especially for women – and of narrative conventions. Lessing's principle of making environments extensions of her characters' mentality provides a framework for her need to see the individual in constant juxtaposition with the collective. In

one of the first reviews of *The Golden Notebook*, Irving Howe notes the replacement in Lessing's fiction of what he calls "social man" by "psychological man". For him, as for many readers, one of Lessing's strengths is her refusal to accept that replacement, and her powerful grasp of the connection between Anna Wulf's neuroses and the public disorders of the day (Howe 1975: 17). The private and the public, the individual and the collective, make a permanent dialectic in Lessing's work. One way she dramatizes that interaction is to make her environments mirrors of the self. Something unprecedented happens to the character-environment interaction in the novels of the *Children of Violence* series, especially in the last two volumes: the walls, and the rooms and houses people inhabit become living extensions of their bodily selves.

Doris Lessing may be called an architect in a metaphorical sense because she is a builder of imagined cities and has become involved in an architectural pattern. The city Martha dreams about when she is fifteen is a leitmotif in the five novels of the series *Children of Violence*. The earliest image of the ideal city is triggered by Martha's leap from the reality of racism to her dream of a city in which 'black and white and brown' parental figures smile approvingly at "the many-fathered children' who play together (*M Q* 11). Unexpectedly, the city is not in the future but in the past, for it is described as "fabulous and ancient". Other details also suggest an older prehistoric time from which humankind has fallen away: "colonnaded, fountains and flutes", "flower-bordered terraces". Martha's dream of this four-gated city is explicitly described as "Martha's version of the Golden age" (*MQ* 11). Thus, in *Martha Quest*, the very first volume of the *Children of Violence*, Martha's dream of the ideal city is described as nostalgic and therefore implicitly ironic. It is also exclusionary, for "a stern and remorseless Martha" stands at the gate keeping out the unworthy, that is, her parents and other English and Afrikaners in the district.

On the private level, Martha's vision of the city at this stage in her life can be described as an adolescent revenge fantasy or as a "familiar daydream", to use Lessing's own words (*MQ* 10). On the public level, Martha's golden city is remarkable for its nostalgic quality. For a young girl already more than casually interested in the socialist ideal, her dream is notable for its assignment of racial equality to the past instead of the socialist future, where it belongs. What seemed conflated in embryo here are the heavenly past and the utopian future. The location of the golden age in the past as well as the future has often characterized human dreams of the earthly paradise. Indeed, a past utopia has often justified hopes for a radical future. Martha cannot know how archetypal her dream is, how much the nostalgic mode has been an auxiliary of utopia.

A 'new age' begins in *Landlocked*, though it is not the "New Jerusalem" envisioned by the young revolutionaries of the two preceding novels of the series. In contrast to Martha's beautiful dreams, it is, rather, the age of nuclear threat for which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are symbols, and for which the ruined city is an image. The city of Martha's dream in *Landlocked* is no longer the place of harmony, the realm of generous and freely exchanged emotion that Martha once imagined, but a ruin. This sort of imagery is so deep in the imaginative texture of the novel as to anticipate and invoke the end of Martha's and Thomas's affair. The imagery of a ruined city culminates in the passage where Martha tries to envision her own city as "emptied", "desiccated" – "Yes, emptied, this town would stand slowly desiccating, filling with drifts of dust" (*L* 197). What is new in the narrative mode of *Landlocked* is apparent in this surreal description of a city which, shifting shapes as images do in dreams, blends with the ruined cities of Europe.

Martha's early earthly paradise of the first novel is also not the same as the city she dreams of in *The Four-Gated City*, which is the last novel of the series. That later city is an archetypal one, in fact, a rigid, over-ordered city in violent contrast to the living, volatile London that has such different faces in the 1950s and 1960s. That London in all its phases engages authorial and reader sympathy as its equivalents in the Canopus novels do not. The cities in the appendix to *The Four-Gated City* are in a different category; they are closer to the degenerated cities of Shicasta. Between the Canopean cities and those of *The Four-Gated City* fall the cities of *Briefing for a Descent* into hell and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*. In these two novels, Lessing emphasizes the symbolic and the archetypal, rejecting the flawed but living cities of her earlier novels.

"She could have drawn a plan of that city," we are told of the sixteen-year-old Martha. These words are almost exactly repeated when Martha and Mark discuss their city in *The Four-Gated City*. Their shared dream of the "mythical", "hierarchic", "archetypal" city is so detailed it is 'as good as a blueprint to build' (FGC 139). Its four gates, set to point north, south, east and west, become a square containing arcs and circling streets. The shadow city that grows up around it ultimately engulfs the perfect inner city. The over-ordered city breaks down into inner and outer, into inner perfection and outer degeneration, into permanence and change, for while Martha and Mark discuss their mythical city, the real London is growing and changing away from the gracelessness and deprivation of its postwar state. In the late 1950s, "the dirty, ruinous, war-soaked city" (FGC 301-302) is quite changed. Martha keeps "that other" city "in her mind" as she walks through this new London, so that "that other" postwar city exists side by side with the present London of the 1950s (FGC 302).

These two real Londons, the London of the present and that of the past, are contrasted with the mythical four-gated city that is "the ideal city" of Martha's youthful dreams. The capitalized City is changeless, "a solid, slow-moving thing" with known landmarks generations can refer to. But the real city has more vitality, excitement, fluidity. We can feel and watch the real London of the 50s in this description of the actual city: "But London heaved up and down, houses changed shape, collapsed, whole streets were vanishing into rubble, and arrow shapes in cement reached up into the clouds. Even the street surfaces were never level: they were always 'up', being altered, dug into, pitted, while men rooted in them to find tangled pipes in wet earth" (FGC 302). This extraordinary flux makes London "exhilarating" for Martha. It almost erodes her dream of the ordered, hierarchical city: "It seemed as if the idea of a city or town as something slow-changing, almost permanent, belonged to the past when one had not needed so many pipes, cables, runnels, and types of machinery to keep it going. If time were slightly speeded up, then a city may now look like fountains of rubble cascading among great machines, while buildings momentarily form, change colour like vegetation, dissolve, reform" (FGC 302). This new London, explicitly connected with the house on Radiant Street, survives war and other erosions. Its rebuilding is exuberant, energetic. This London does not dissipate the archetypal image for Martha, but "the old city all movement" surely commands the reader's greater loyalty than the hierarchical city at which Mark now laughs. The real city is closer to the process that the novel celebrates. The living, changing London is organic and stimulating. It seems almost like the tree whose organic nature is a celebratory motif throughout the series.

So we cannot say that Lessing's picture of the four-gated city embodies harmony, reconciliation and integration throughout the series. Racial integration is its earliest and most durable, most positive feature. Because it reflects Martha's own changing consciousness, its meaning is variable, even ironic and limited. The ideal city contrasts with the disorder and variety of the Coldridge house in the last novel of the series – *The Four-Gated City*. Martha's

ideal city of the first volume is only a blueprint without the human figure, while real houses and cities contain human beings.

The houses in *The Four-Gated City* are obviously mirrors of psychological reality, but they do, however, have a physical reality of their own. The mud houses of Lessing's earlier fiction come out of the present time and her direct personal experience. For Martha, mud is the African bush, grass, sky, earth. It is sensual; "... this frank embrace between the lifting breast of the land and the deep blue warmth of the sky is what exiles from Africa dream of" (*MQ* 230). Although the critical, rebellious adolescent Martha defines the native-style Quest house "as disgracefully shabby, even sordid" – its roof sags, its walls are patched and spotted – she does call it original (*M Q* 15). For this house, planned in white, settles a style for "bricks and proper roofing" built with "grass and mud and stamped dung" (*MQ* 14). When Martha puts her ear to the central pole, she can hear a "myriad tiny jaws at work".

The Turner house in *The Grass Is Singing*, with its brick walls and corrugated tin roof (destined for a "proper roof" it never gets), is, like Mary the protagonist, out of place in the wilderness. The native houses are very different. Their huts of grass, poles, and mud collapse back into the earth when the workers leave for another job: "So there were always new huts, and always empty ones" (Lessing 1994:152). These huts look "like natural growths from the ground, rather than man-made dwellings". Lessing continues: "It was as though a giant black hand had reached down from the sky, picked up a handful of sticks and grass, and dropped them magically on the earth in the form of huts" (Lessing 1994: 152). Their qualities of spontaneity and naturalness make these mud huts the antipodes of Lessing's magical cities – the four-gated city, the inner city of *Briefing*, and the geometrical cities of *Shikasta*.

Lessing's image of the mud house has a central place in her iconography. The writer's journey from *Martha Quest* to *The Four-Gated City* may be described as a journey from mud to void, and as the abdication of earth for space. It is also Lessing's progressive move toward the remote and the abstract. A parallel mode marks Lessing's architectural journey, but the journey is not a simple one, for the mud house is not a viable reality for Martha Quest or Doris Lessing. Martha, like Lessing, longs for the London in her mind, but accepts the actual London she finds.

In *Landlocked*, the fourth book of the series, the influence of Sufism on Lessing's writing is first to be seen. Martha's mental condition in the novel is epitomized by two recurrent dreams: the dream of the house whose rooms she must keep separate, and the nightmare of being landlocked. The fact that both symbols, house and landlock, can signify internal, psychological states as well as external phenomena breaks down the conventional empiricist/realist distinction between subjective and objective. "Ruin" also has this sort of double significance; as Robert Graves quotes Idries Shah: "In Sufi literature... 'ruin' stands for the mind ruined by unregenerate thought and awaiting reedification" (Graves 1971: XIV-XV). The dream imagery intermingles with Martha's conscious thought and actions in a way that further undermines such distinctions.

The dream of the house in *Landlocked* (14-15) is described in language like that of the "emptied city" passage. The images are hallucinatory and shape-shifting, as the ruin Martha fears will follow from her failure to keep things separate becomes "the house on the kopje, collapsed into a mess of ant-tunneled mud, ant-consumed grass," and then turns to "the burial mound of Martha's soul", the ant tracks becoming "red veins" (*L15*). The ruin looks forward to the disintegration of the Quest house, which is later described as "rotted...in a fierce compost". Though chronologically, it looks back to it, since this dissolution has actually already occurred (*L190-191*). Then Martha's perspective moves "back in time, or perhaps

forward – she did not know”, and the house is “no longer the farm house of grass and mud; but ...tall rather than wide, reached up, stretched down ... built layer, but shadowy above and below” (L15). Whereas in the preceding *Children of Violence* novels, houses like Colonel Brodeshaw’s and the house on the avenues were substantial and real, in *Landlocked* houses are shape-shifting, disintegrating. Time, too, is disrupted: past, present, and future are conflated, as the dream points both forward and backward in time – back to the South London scene of Mrs. Quest’s childhood and forward to Mark’s Bloomsbury house.

The dream instructs Martha to “keep things separate” because allowing them to merge would mean chaos, would incur “disintegration”. But “keeping separate meant defeating, or at least holding at bay, what was best in her... the need to say yes, to comply, to melt into situations” (L 15). She follows the instruction of the dream by saying “no” to several male characters: to Mr Robinson when he offers her a job; to Mr Maynard when he tries to bully her about Maisie; to her husband Anton when he suggests that they remain married. Above all she must separate herself from the pain of her parents and refuse even pity for them lest they “drag her down into this nightmare house like a maze where there could be only one end” (L 76) – a nightmare house that is also an actual house where people “sat around, waiting for an old man to die” (L 197). Houses in the past and in the future, houses present and “a hundred miles away” (L 190), real houses and nightmare houses, blend in a mode that confounds chronology. The effect is similar to that created by the breaking of sequence in *The Golden Notebook*, to the simultaneity produced by the juxtaposition of the four notebooks. In *Landlocked* Martha behaves as if testing out various places “various other shells” (PM 65) to live in. When she feels uncomfortable in the relationship with Anton she perceives it as the necessity “to cut Anton out of her consciousness, to bring down a curtain in herself and shut him out”. Lying in a twin bed every night in a shared bedroom with Thomas, “she was not there” (L 119). Falling in love with Thomas is for Martha like entering new spaces and new rooms through numerous doors in the process of endless exploration of her inner self: “What shall I do when Thomas goes away? And in any case, what was this absolute giving up of herself, **look at each other**, as if **doors were being opened** one after another inside their eyes as they looked – how was it that she was driven by him back and back into regions of herself she had not known existed” (L 105). To feel happy in the new relationship Martha must first find a ‘room’ for this new state of mind inside herself as well as in the real world: she finds the actual room in the shed at the end of the garden by the house where Thomas’s brother lives: “She had complained that her life had consisted of a dozen rooms, each self-contained, that she was wearing into a frazzle of shrill nerves in the effort of carrying herself, each time a whole, from one ‘room’ to the other. But adding a new room to her house had ended the division. From this centre she now lived – a loft of romantic wood from whose crooked window could be seen only sky and the boughs of trees ...” (L 103). “Now she lived from this new centre, the room she shared with Thomas, the room that had in it, apparently, a softly-running dynamo, to which, through him, she was connected. Everything had become easy suddenly” (L 113). Later in *Landlocked*, after Thomas’s death, when Martha sees a new perspective and a new kind of understanding which is evidently the consequence of her changed consciousness after the war, she strives to get back to the room in the loft she occupied together with Thomas: “Nothing fitted, ridiculous facts jostled with important ones, if one only knew which was which... and she wished she was back in the refuge of the loft, reading” (L 168). But this room can no longer save her or give refuge; just like the reading she longs for it is not helpful any more, since the systems it depended on have been swept away by the cataclysms of the century.

Thomas's death leaves Martha feeling "as if some part of me has died (...) Or is it in another room, looking on" (L 224). But the image of "another room", which she uses to signify dislocation, appears in the Sufi tales of Mulla Nasrudin to suggest increased potential: "... they were like children born in a house from which they have never been allowed to stray, doomed to walk from one room to another without knowing that there could be another house, elsewhere (Idries Shah 1971: 151).

The other dream that expresses Martha's condition and acts as her guide is the dream of being landlocked: "On this high dry plateau where Martha was imprisoned, forever, it seemed, everything was dry and brittle, its quality was drought." Like the dream of the house, this both cautions her against a condition and suggests a way of avoiding it: "Far away, a long way below, was water. She dreamed, night after night, of water, of the sea." (L199). This dream is prescient, prefiguring the deaths of Athen and Thomas: "Across the sea, which she could not reach... sailed people she had known... Athen, Thomas (L 128).

The images of both dreams – the house and landlock – are combined in a waking reverie when Martha, visiting the "nightmare house" of her parents, half listens to her daughter Caroline, playing with Mr Quest, taunting the old man with her youth and vitality. The situation – Caroline's teasing, Mrs Quest's engineering the situation as a reproach to Martha – pulls Martha back into "nightmare". But dream imagery infuses her consciousness, as the sound of the sprinklers in the background – "water, water falling water" – recalls to her the possibility of rescue from the sea. "And one day... Martha would stand on a shore and watch a line of waves gather strength and run inwards, piling and gathering high before falling into a burst of white foam... Meanwhile, the old man lay, whimpering in his cage of decaying swelling flesh" (L 238-39).

The "lock" that is the landmass of Africa becomes, in this passage, the prison of mortal life, with the light-illuminated water beyond suggesting a transcendent reality of which Martha's consciousness, instructed by her dreams, has an intimation.

In *Landlocked* the mythical "old Villan", the patterns of the past, die hard. Imagery of cages, nets and webs is nearly as pronounced here as it was in *A Proper Marriage* – though associated not with Martha, but with those around her. Martha's father is locked in his "cage of flesh" (L 239); her mother is "trapped, caged" in her life (L197). It is most poignant in the dream Mrs Quest has of her mother reaching down from heaven to hand her roses that turn to medicine bottles, a symbol of the inadequate parenting that she repeats with Martha. Martha's political career, which she is ready to reject while leaving for England, is associated in her mind with "so many dingy, bench furnished, dust-smelling little offices" (L 284). Thus for Martha the patterns of the past are stripped away, and one by one the illusions that held her in the preceding novels are laid to rest. The relationship with Thomas ends the fantasy that love, even as compelling as this, can provide a rescue. The idea of the family as support is terminated by Mrs Quest's legacy to her daughter, just before Martha leaves for England, of "all the keys she had ever had in her life", "half a century's keys on a key ring" (L 233), "black, rusty, jutting, awkward" (L 232), keys "fit for a dungeon", opening nothing. There were numerous keys to "doors" and "gates" associated in Martha's consciousness with love, marriage, books, and Marxism, which promised a way out, but provided only a way back in to the system Martha was trying to escape. It is worth mentioning that Martha's mother, at the end of the novel, finds herself in the dry mountains on a farm that is even more "landlocked" than the Quest family farm. The political meeting of the last scene represents an end to the fantasy that political action can accomplish anything. Observing the meeting with ironic distance, Martha can now see that "history was repeating itself" and can "foretell the end" (L

275) – an understanding that enables her to step off the repetitive cycle and make a real end – after they sat arguing during a “closed meeting” of the Marxist group which takes place in a “small, stuffy” room, the three members of the group with Martha among them, go out to see “the skies that are swept by storms and by rain” (L 287).

As can be seen from the above analysis of the *Children of Violence* novels, Lessing's sense of cataclysmic destruction increases while her interest in society decreases, to be replaced by a new strain of mysticism. The evolution of Lessing's style coincides with her understanding of a way beyond social determinism, a place outside culture, by positing an “essential self” that is in touch with a “universal consciousness” or transcendent realm. The structure of the novel, beginning with *Landlocked*, is also made in such a way as to comprise a complex, richly allusive system of imagery both pictorial and metaphorical. First and foremost, the imagery involved concerns land-lock² – desert landscapes, ideal and ruined cities, real and nightmare houses and rooms – and the regenerative forces of water and light. These visions are drawn both from Martha's dreams and her experience in a way that breaks down the distinction between objective and subjective. Dreams prefigure and influence events so as to register dream reality as equally valid as conscious experience, and rather an altered sense of experience. Unconventional imagery builds special meanings and resonances in the course of the novel and becomes more meaningful than anything that actually happens. Correspondences between all kinds of environments and Martha's inner states are obvious in the course of the five novels of *Children of Violence*. It becomes even more evident in *Landlocked*, and increases in the last novel of the series, *The Four-Gated City*. The testing out of various spaces for living in takes Martha to different places and states of consciousness; the houses and rooms she enters may be places of love and visionary experiences. Like many other women in Lessing's fiction she strives to leave her deterministic domestic spaces to find new transcendental experience in new spheres of life. But the paradox of Martha's ever-changing environments is that getting there never quite happens in Lessing's worlds. Displacement, not arrival, is at the centre of her imagination, even in her galactic novels. In making displacement the organizing metaphor of her study of Doris Lessing, Lorna Sage describes it as an element so central in Lessing's work that virtually all critics have commented on it (Sage 1983). Displacement defines the varied shapes of Lessing's otherness – her female, white, colonial, political selves.

If we follow Martha after she leaves Africa at the end of *Landlocked*, bound for the ruined city of London in 1949, we will see that the “lock” has been broken, and with it the social determinism that governed the first three novels. In *The Four-Gated City*, which is the last book of the sequence, Martha looks for new environments, and finds the new house (the house of Mark Coldridge) which is to become her home for the rest of her life, and the exploration of which will provide her with the key to new perspectives oppositional to the values of traditional culture.

References

Draine, B. 1983. *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. London: University of North Carolina Press.

² The Polish translation of the novel's title *Landlocked* as *Czas nadziei* (Albatros 2013) does not retain Lessing's idea of being surrounded and blocked with no way out. The Polish translations of the other titles in the series are as follows: *Martha Quest* – *Martha Quest* (Albatros 2008); *A Proper Marriage* – *Odpowiednie małżeństwo* (Albatros 2009); *A Ripple from the Storm* – *Fala po burzy* (Albatros 2010), *The Four-Gated City* – *Miasto o czterech bramach* (Albatros 2013).

- Cederstrom, L. 1990. *Fine-Tuning the Feminine Psyche: Jungian Patterns in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. New York: Peterlang.
- Graves, R. 1971. Introduction. In: Idries Shah, *The Sufis*. New York: Doubleday.
- Howe, F. 1975. Talk with Doris Lessing. In: Paul Schlueter (ed.) *A Small Personal Voice: Doris Lessing, Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, 12-23. New York: Vintage.
- Idries Shah. 1971. *The Sufis*. New York: Doubleday.
- Karl, Frederick R. 1986. Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy. In: *Modern Critical Views Doris Lessing*. Harold Bloom. (ed.) New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Kaplan, C., Rose, E.C. (eds.) 1988. *Doris Lessing: the Alchemy of Survival*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- King, J. 1989. *Doris Lessing*, London: Routledge.
- Laing, R.D. 1969. *The Divided Self: an Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson. 1981. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lessing, D. 1982. *Martha Quest* London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Granada Publishing Limited.
- Lessing, D. 1982. *A Proper Marriage* London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Granada Publishing Limited.
- Lessing, D. 1982. *A Ripple from the Storm*. London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Granada Publishing Limited.
- Lessing, D. 1982. *The Four-Gated City*. London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Granada Publishing Limited.
- Lessing, D. 1994. *The Grass is Singing*. London: A Flamingo Modern Classic.
- Rubenstein, R. 1979. *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sage, L. 1983. *Contemporary Writers: Doris Lessing*. London: Methuen.
- Stockwell, P. 2002. *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. London/New York: Routledge.