

# **The Ecofeminist and Gaian Spirituality: Subverting the Patriarchal Discourse in Doris Lessing's Selected Novels<sup>(\*)</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Doris May Lessing (1919-2013) lived most her life on the veld of South Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and came back to London in 1949. Her multicultural upbringing allowed her to gain a special connection with nature via her intuitive instinct. This article sheds light on three novels by Lessing namely, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Four-Gated City* (1969) and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) that are to be tackled within the theoretical frame of ecofeminist and Gaian spirituality. This paper dives into the depth of the Gaian and ecofeminist spiritual realm in the selected novels. It explores the alternative path of female spirituality that the novels pave to counterbalance patriarchal destruction. It analyzes the metaphor of motherhood within the ecofeminist and Gaian frame to expose the myth of gendered nature, which is constructed by the masculine discourse to exploit women and nature. It also draws on the close connection between nature and spirituality; the synthesis of these two constituents forms a doorway to a new sensibility that is attained by madness. This research will rely on primary sources such as Lessing's selected novels, interviews, and related writings. Major books on ecofeminism by Catherine Roach (1974), Greta Gaard (2017), Carolyn Merchant (1980, 1995), Maria Mies (2014), Ariel Salleh (1997), Rosemary Radford Ruether (1994), Susan Griffin (1980), and Val Plumwood (1993) among others, and on Gaia by James Lovelock (2000) will be under study as well. It also relies on articles published in databases and academic journals based on the primary sources.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, ecofeminism, nature, Gaia, women, female spirituality, ecology, madness.

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## الملخص:

نشأت الروائية دوريس ليسينج في حقول زيمبابوي ثم عادت لموطنها لندن في عام ١٩٤٩، فكانت لتلك التجربة تأثير عظيم علي تشكيل وجدانها مما أدي إلي ارتباطها الوثيق بالطبيعة. تتميز كتابات ليسينج، الحاصلة على جائزة نوبل لعام ٢٠٠٧، بربط الروحانيات النسائية بالمشاكل البيئية الملحة شديدة الإتصال بتجارب النساء اليومية، حيث إن رواياتها تدمج بين مجالات عدة كالبيئة والنسوية والروحانية. تعتمد الروايات على ظاهرة جنون النساء وليدة الفكر الأبوي وتستخدمها كأداة لحث القارئ علي سلك المنهج البيئي الروحاني. يختص هذا البحث بدراسة ثلاث روايات مختارة لليسينج: المفكرة الذهبية (The Golden Notebook (1962)، The Four-Gated City (1969) المدينة ذات الأبواب الأربعة and مذكرات من نجا (The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974) من منظور نسوي روحاني إيكولوجي يتفق مع فرضية جايا في النظر إلى كوكب الأرض كمجتمع تسوده المساواة بين جميع كائناته الحية. يستند هذا البحث على مصادر رئيسة كروايات ليسينج ومقالات، وكتابات مرتبطة بموضوعنا هذا؛ كما أنه سيعتمد على كتب مهمة عن النسوية الإيكولوجية لروتش، وجارد، وميرشانت، ومايز، وروثر وجريفين وبلادموود وغيرهما، وكتب عن جايا للوفلوك. وسيعتمد هذا البحث أيضاً على مقالات تم نشرها في مجالات علمية وقواعد بيانات معتمدة ذات صلة بمصادر البحث الرئيسية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأبوية، النسوية الإيكولوجية، الطبيعة، الروحانية النسائية، جايا، المرأة، البيئة، الجنون.

This article demonstrates that madness in Lessing's selected novels is a tool that brings about societal change. It is a new mode of awareness that exposes rationality as a suppressor to intuitive knowledge. The madness tendency will pave the way to an alternative world that is filled with healing, wholeness, and spirituality encompassed by telepathy, dreams, and visions. Most importantly, this research subverts the relics of patriarchy by disrupting the cultural conditioning of the mind that is trained to only view the world from a single dimension. Therefore, this paper attempts to address the following research question: To what extent can the female spiritual power offer an alternative path to the patriarchal ecological destruction?

## **Overview of the Selected Novels in Relation to Ecofeminism and Gaia**

### **a. *The Golden Notebook* (1962)**

This novel narrates the story of Anna Wulf and her friend Molly. The two women, who are closely connected, can be interchangeable at times. The two live in the same London apartment, both are divorced, and are single mothers. Anna has a girl named Janet while Molly has a boy, Tommy. Anna is a blocked writer incapable of establishing healthy normal relationships with men who frequently mistreat and abandon her throughout the course of events. On the other hand, Molly is a passionate actress, who like Anna, struggles with forming romantic relationships as well. Richard is Molly's ex-husband representing conventional patriarchal views that are being contested by the protagonists. Anna writes a novel within a novel titled *Free Women*, which is the main narrative. She also writes another novel in which the same pattern is repeated by her and Molly's replicas Ella and Julia. Although the same pattern is excessively repeated, Anna fails to capture what is real in her writings, and thus creating multiple versions of the truth. In an attempt to depict

reality, Anna records her personal diary in four colour-coded notebooks.

She categorizes and organizes her ideas and events in them as if she had "divided herself into four" (41). The first notebook we encounter is the black one, in which Anna narrates her past in Rhodesia. In this notebook, Anna lives in a colony in Africa with the British pilot Paul and Willy her ex-husband and father of her daughter. She also spends her time with locals such as Maryrose and the Boothbys who are the owners of the Mashopi hotel where they stayed. Then, Anna moves to write about her communist past and her disappointment with the communist cause, which forms the entries of her red notebook. Next, Anna begins the blue notebook that is mostly around her therapy sessions and later news of the world. In this notebook she moves from the personal to the collective consciousness. In the second part of the blue notebook, she pastes scraps of newspapers in her diary. Finally, the yellow notebook is Anna's account of madness. Within this notebook, she displays a long episode of madness along with the mental state of her new roommate and later lover Saul Green whose surname refers to green activism.

### ***b. The Four-Gated City (1969)***

This novel is the final volume of the series *Children of Violence* that narrates the story of Martha Quest from childhood in Rhodesia in Africa to middle-age in London. In this novel, we witness Martha's spiritual transformation by connecting herself to nature. Martha is a single woman who leaves behind her baby girl in Africa and comes to London to begin a fresh start. Throughout the novel, Martha is homesick to the African nature that is infused with her unconscious. At the beginning of the novel, Martha aimlessly roams the streets of London and is restless, but she finds purpose in life once started working as Mark Coldridge's housekeeper. She then plays the role of the carer to Mark, his mentally ill wife Lynda, their unstable nephew Paul, and their son Francis. However, Martha revolts against

this confining role, and under Lynda's supervision, she develops new senses such as visions, telepathy, and dreams.

Martha and Lynda become powerful seers revealing a futuristic catastrophe that sets the world on an apocalyptic mode. Mark Coldridge's son, Francis, describes the post-disaster world where he lived. He states, "we use candles made from sheep's fat for lightning, and soap made of fat and sand"; he adds that people "wear sheepskins or garments ... their food is what stone-age men ate" (933). He also mentions that people at that time were in a state of "terror" (935). Eventually, Martha turns into a leader and a saviour settling on a stranded island called Faris where she teaches the new offspring sustainable ways of living through planting. Martha and Mark co-author a novel *A City in the Desert*, which theme is the recurrent pattern of chaos and havoc caused by men.

***c. The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974)***

This novel narrates the story of the anonymous middle-aged narrator and her adopted girl Emily. They both live in a post-apocalyptic world where children formulate street clans on the pavements due to having no parents. Emily is placed in the custody of the narrator by a complete stranger who one day comes to her doorstep and tells her to look after her. The pavement children become barbaric and demonstrate violent behaviour to the extent of cannibalism. On the same day that the narrator welcomes Emily to her life, a mystic world gets unfolded. This world emerges behind the narrator's living room's wallpaper, which is accessed by the power of meditation.

This world behind the wall consists of two types of rooms the personal and the impersonal. The former has a suffocating atmosphere while the latter has a relevant freedom. The rooms need attentive work to be "habitable" (14). In addition, the narrator is able to see the unknown past of Emily in the personal rooms. At the beginning of the novel, little Emily was not being herself as if she wants to be loveable and likable all the time; hence, she was greatly obedient to the

narrator. Then, she meets her boyfriend Gerald on the pavement, and they gather a group of children into a clan which Gerald tried to civilize but failed. Moreover, the rooms in the world behind the wall are in mess and need amendments that the narrator embarks on providing. These rooms are in total chaos; however, she has the freedom to choose whether to clean them or not. Unlike the personal rooms that she compares to a prison where she is helpless and is forced to watch Emily's sad child memories. The narrator can witness Emily's past in the world behind the wall. Emily is sexually objectified by her father, and her mother is a cold and cynical woman towards her daughter.

## **Methodology**

### **a) The Ecofeminist Historical Overview of Women's Relation to Nature**

The relationship between women and nature is as old as history, and it is determined by the patriarchal dominating law. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, women and nature started to be linked to one another and earth was viewed as either a "nurturing mother" or a wild female who can cause chaos such as storms and droughts (Merchant 2 1980). Conversely, nature in the Middle-Ages was revered as reflected in the Chaucerian poetry (6). In a similar note, Rosemary Radford Ruether mentions that in the Middle Ages "women and female modes ... dominated" (143). However, she explains that this domination was lost due to the construction of urban civilization and the appearance of patriarchy (143). Ruether maintains that the quest of ecofeminism is to heal the earth which will accordingly heal the relationship between women, nature, and humans. Val Plumwood explains that since women became attributed to nature, they as well were considered "passive ... non-agent and non-subject" (1993 10).

In fact, in the masculine discourse "nature is feminized" and "women are naturalized" (Kaosar 998). Nature, in this view, is

“historically constructed as a gendered object” (Merchant 1995 55). According to Gretchen T. Legler, ecofeminist critics revise the relationship between women and nature to eliminate well-established oppression that favours male over female (1997 228). The masculine discourse has considered woman and nature as the other inferior being to men’s superior masculine-self. Legler further explains that nature exists within the masculine discourse and is considered as its possession (233). In the same vein, she asserts that women as well are perceived as objects to be owned. Both nature and women need to be rewritten and their relationship needs to be revised.

Plumwood attributes this love of ownership to anthropocentrism that she defines as human-centeredness (329 1997). She explicates that the human race is selfish and is self-centered due to its “psychological egoism” (329). This pattern of self-favouring is recurrent in the masculine mindset which places men’s ego above any other living creature. Based on that, Plumwood and other ecofeminist critics connect anthropocentrism to androcentrism. She maintains that all types of centrism are created to justify the superiority and authority of the centric perceiver that is the male figure. She explains, “the centric structure accomplishes this justification by promoting insensitivity to the Other’s needs” (340). Women and nature in this view are not considered as rational beings; they have no qualities such as “mind and agency” (340).

Pamela B. June, in *Solidarity with the Other Beings on the Planet* (2020), mentions that the representation of women as nature made the patriarchal exploitation of women and land accessible. She explains that the analogy of “land – as - a woman” allowed women to be seen as either lovers or mothers and the same applies to lands as well (55). As such, men were able to violate women and “Mother Nature” at any given whimsical impulse (55). June sounds her rejection of considering women as non-human beings and justifies her stance by stating the dangers of such metaphor, for it justifies the abuse of both humans and animals (67). In this manner, it degrades

women and nature and allows humiliation and torture to both (67). It also feeds men's ego and encourages their usurpation. In fact, Plumwood proposes that this imagery is an oppressive tool used by men to assert their masculine power (16). In response to women and nature subjugation, ecofeminism emerged as a counter reaction to maintain sustainability and achieve justice. The term ecofeminism was first coined by Françoise D' Eaubonne in 1974. In *Feminism or Death* (1974), she mentions that the future of humanity is jeopardized under men's rule.

### **b) Gaia Hypothesis**

Gaia prevails as a scientific, philosophical, and spiritual answer to ecofeminist and ecological concerns. Gaia in Greek mythology is the goddess of earth, life, and death (Primavesi 125). This hypothesis was first formulated by the scientist James Lovelock in the nineteen sixties. Sean Kelly defines Gaia as a place where we live and exist (208 2020). It is a "communion of subjects, and not mere collection of objects" (210). According to Gaia hypothesis, all living creatures depend on one another. They exchange the gift of life, and this collaboration is evident in Lessing's selected novels. In this view, life on earth is a gift and not a possession to be owned by the elitist gender. The Gaia hypothesis advocate, Ann Primavesi emphasizes that human beings are only members in the Gaian community who cooperate with other living organisms to produce the intricate web of life (71). In fact, she explains that in the Gaian view of life "grass is food for us ... [and] we are food for grass" (128). This act of givenness of food is in itself the gift of life. This relationship with earth is mutual and reciprocal. This, Kelly elucidates, makes our bond to Gaia sacred because our joint history narrates our beginnings and predicts our mutual destiny (212).

Moreover, Primavesi, condemns the chasm created between humans and nature due to urbanity. She urges humans to connect themselves with the earth beneath the city streets they created (71). This connection can be revived via certain "meditative awareness"



which stresses the spiritual connection to nature (71). She also explains that the way we treat nature and living beings directly affects human's interaction with life, attributing Plumwood's psychological egoism to the fact that humans are the only species with language and complex civilizations (77). Nonetheless, humans and other beings are "participants in natural cycles"; therefore, she asserts that the overexploitation of natural resources destroys ecological balance (123).

Lovelock indicates that humans are part of the "Gaian process of regulation" (120). This was misinterpreted by the masculine discourse and men who separated themselves from nature, land, and the feminine. Conversely, his partner Lynn Margulis equates humans to animals as both are living beings whose bodies "maintain a relatively stable internal temperature" (147). Moreover, all living creatures produce heat and chemical waste (148). Similarly, the hypothesis of Gaia demonstrates that humans should look at themselves in an egalitarian way (Primavesi 126 2003). In this view, all creatures are valued for their own existence (126).

Lovelock demonstrates that Gaia hypothesis, unlike scientific interpretation of earth, displays mystical notions that are rejected by mainstream science. He insists on the significance of storytelling in narrating the history of the earth and criticizes science for "spoiling good stories" (11). Similar to ecofeminist tendencies, Gaia also refuses to perceive nature as a "primitive force to be subdued and conquered" (Lovelock 11). On the contrary, Lovelock suggests that nature "arouses [in humans] ... pleasurable feelings" (134). Conversely, mistreating nature causes a "sense of emptiness and deprivation" (134). In this manner, caring for nature is an instinctual imprint in the human psyche and going against this instinct destroys humans' main purpose in life. Lovelock compares humans' ownership of earth to the "benevolent colonialism" which he believes are both "doomed to failure" (137).

### **c) Ecofeminist Gaian Spirituality and Madness**

Ecofeminist and Gaian spirituality mainly challenges patriarchal ideologies. It is a counter cultural force that facilitates the healing process of the earth and the individual (Davila et.al. 9). Ecofeminism propagates ecological spiritualism at the age of the Anthropocene when humans' technological impact on earth's ecosystem is most explicit (Battacharyya 1). It advocates the return to the principles of traditional societies which promoted eco-spiritual contemplation of nature. In addition, it challenges capitalist ideologies that view natural resources as a means to satiate their greed.

Moreover, eco-spirituality is employed to encourage people to alter their negative attitudes towards their planet. If the cosmos has a shared mind with us, then we form one entity and what harms our habitat harms us as well. In this context, it is impossible to separate the soul and the body or human and nature since everything is interconnected (6). Thus, the American writer and psychologist Ken Wilber associates the global ecological problems with the spiritual crisis currently prevailing (qtd. in Zimmerman 245). In response to this crisis, he advocates the SDE (Spiritually Oriented Deep Ecology), which sheds light on the global mystical traditions that allow access to a transcendental reality existing across all ages and times (245).

Ruether explains that ecofeminism does not only superficially consider the environment as a mere habitat, but also views it as "deep ecology" which means that nature has an independent consciousness of its own (2). This outlook on ecology raises awareness to its "symbolical, psychological, and ethical" aspects (2). It also sheds a "holistic" overall view of nature. In such manner, Ruether demonstrates that ecofeminism intertwines feminism with deep ecology and shows the urgent need to create a "loving interrelationship between men and women" and between humans and animals (2). She also demystifies the fact that science is objective, and that rationality is the only mode of learning. She clarifies that spirituality, according to scientists such as Bacon, dwells in "a realm outside of scientific verifiable truth" (35); however, in this realm,

Lessing's selected novels reside. Most importantly, Ruether clarifies that Darwin's theory of evolution deconstructed the distinction between humans and animals spiritually unifying both, which abolishes the concept of elitism of the human species who placed themselves on top of the social hierarchy (34).

Several ecologists have rejected the spiritual aspect of environmental studies. On the contrary, and although being postulated by a scientist, the Gaian hypothesis is infused with spirituality as it interprets life from logical and mystical perspectives (Plumwood 130). This hypothesis contests the patriarchal exploitation of scientific knowledge as a tool of power by stressing woman and nature's spiritual connection, which produces powerful intuitive knowledge. The world in this view is construed via rational and intuitive faculties. Lovelock asserts the same concept and explains that science needs poetical insight and emotions to fully conduct its investigation on life (xiii). He confirms that Gaia hypothesis is "part of science with a moral dimension" (xi). In the Gaian assumption and unlike the masculine claims, Gaia is a female that ensures the suitability of "air, oceans, and soil" for life (Lovelock xiv). Gaia is a "powerful deity", which can save the world from catastrophic disasters, and it also can defy patriarchal logic in which women are represented as the other, and men are perceived as godlike (Spretnak qtd. in Merchant 3). This metaphor of women as Gaia, is empowering and not demeaning as portrayed in the masculine discourse. Merchant maintains that Gaia hypothesis and ecofeminist theory are interrelated approaches that initiate a new mode of understanding the earth which fuses spiritual and scientific aspects (4).

Conversely, patriarchal ideology deems intuition and spiritual knowledge as madness. Elaine Showalter defines the mad woman as an assertive and independent person whose strong resolution and fearlessness are considered insane by the indoctrinated society (145). Madness in the nineteenth century was disseminated as a female malady (148). In the patriarchal logic, the mad woman is someone

who is incapable of expressing her views in a rational manner. Hence, in this context, language plays a significant role to demonstrate intellect and wisdom. These patriarchal claims are subverted in the selected novels by the protagonists who develop new channels of communication other than verbal language. In the novels, madness is a way of learning a new mode of knowledge that is attainable via the faculty of intuition. Through insanity women connect to nature on a deeper level, which unfolds a utopian world to them. Madness is employed in the novels to challenge the one-sided and mechanistic world view, introducing an extra dimension, which mainstream science has long denied.

## **Analysis**

### **I. The empowerment of the protagonists by Gaia**

#### **a) *The motherhood metaphor***

The ecofeminist theory propagates the matriarchal history that existed prior to patriarchy. The image of Mother Earth is a universal and a popular motif that is vital in conceptualizing nature (Roach 2003 37). The archetype mother becomes a universally encoded symbol across several cultures, which allowed it to gain a global implication (Merchant 1995 32). In ancient eras, the mother goddess was revered due to its “benevolent female rule” (Ruteher 145; Merchant 6). Lovelock explains that mainstream science rejects the image of mother earth and prefers instead to call it a “Geophysiology”, a term devoid of any human emotions (xiii). However, ecofeminist critics appropriate this metaphor as a source of unity and empowerment to all women.

Maternity strengthens women emotionally and psychologically, making them solid and practical beings (Salleh 71). It also allows them to gain knowledge through the faculties of rationality and instinct. The same thing is exemplified by Julia Kristeva who is interested in Lacan's “prelinguistic semiotic” realm where language is insignificant and only bodily drives are met. This realm, relying on instinct, empowers women who tend to feed, nurture, and display a

semiotic authority over their offspring. This phase is also important in the formation of the young ego that later determines the adult character (qtd. in Salleh 74).

As a result, Emily's mother in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) is the key to how she behaves in the narrator's world. The narrator, for instance, describes Emily as a teenager trapped in a cultural mold where she must be obedient and loved at all times. She is always clean and neat, acting like a "good child whose mother needs her children to be well dressed" (34). This refers us to the masculine discourse that splits women into two identities either as good or bad mothers. The good mother is caring and nurturing but the bad mother is a vicious mother earth who seeks revenge by destroying human empires and returning them to precivilized tribes (Ruether 84). On the other end of the spectrum, Gaia hypothesis postulates that earth is a mother perceived as a living organism that regulates climate and creates life on its surface (Lovelock xv). Similarly, Christian Gnosticism portrays mothers as divine creatures who are a source of wisdom, creativity, and power (Merchant 1980 7).

This contradiction of the good and bad mother dualism is critiqued by ecofeminist critics, who demonstrate that women are no longer degraded by their affinity to nature; instead, they are empowered by this correlation. Hence, ecofeminist critics, concurring with the novels' protagonists, offer an alternative image to the archaic patriarchal view of land as a woman (Legler 234). Initially, they expose this patriarchal scheme by stressing men's dependency on the mother, whom then they exclude to enthrone themselves as kings of the universe (Ruether 200). Thus, Lynn Stearney defines motherhood as an "ideologically and socially constructed institution" (145); it is a man-made concept that can be contested. Synchronically, men devised this intrigue to prove that women's physiological features devalue their cultural and societal role (Merchant 1980 144). Women's breasts and wombs make them susceptible to the dichotomy of childbearing versus civilization building.

Plumwood highlights the traditional connection between women and nature that depicts women as “reproductive animals” or “contended cows” (1993 16). It is a normalized connection that becomes natural within a patriarchal frame (Roach 2003 31). It also forms an affiliation that is employed as an oppressive tool by patriarchy to validate their masculinity. It is an interpretation that cages women in nature and reproduction stripping them of self-determination. In this view, women are reproduction machines deprived of autonomy and freedom of choice whether to be mothers or not (Merchant 1995 18). Conversely, the ecofeminist critic Stearney, concurring with Gaia hypothesis, challenges this harmful association by demonstrating that both women and nature are life givers, and hence they are connected on the symbolic, spiritual, and physical levels (152).

The female characters struggle to perform their maternal role in the novels. Thus, the novels' protagonists separate their motherhood experience from the maternal norms reproduced by patriarchy. In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), all protagonists are single mothers, which deconstructs the conventional family unit at that time. Anna, for instance, forces herself to be the typical mother who unconditionally cares for her child:

[Janet] looks defenseless and tiny when she is asleep, and *I have to check in myself* a powerful impulse to protect her, to shut her away from possible harm. This evening is more powerful than usual ... I needed to cling to somebody myself [My Italics] (Lessing 1962 535).

Anna feels obliged to plant in herself a feeling of protection towards her own daughter. She needs to cling to Janet as if the roles are reversed. This quote disrupts the typical motherly feelings created by patriarchy in order to entrap women in this role despite their rejection of it. Likewise, Molly leaves her teenage son for a whole year “to care for himself” (21). She seeks freedom from her maternal

role, and this is frowned upon by her ex-husband Richard who embodies the patriarchal mindset.

Another figure that challenges patriarchal views of motherhood is Lynda in *The Four-Gated City* (1969). Lynda is portrayed as a mother who is incapable of fulfilling her maternal duties towards her son, Francis (480). She feels guilty due to her incompetency; however, this guilt is resulting from the patriarchal lens through which she views herself. In fact, Lynda practices motherhood differently; she teaches her son Francis telepathy and trains him to use his instincts to predict future catastrophes and save the world. Stearney explains that patriarchal ideology romanticizes and idealizes motherhood, imposing it universally on women (148). Therefore, the novels shake patriarchal beliefs by dismantling obsolete maternal roles/molds. They also challenge other patriarchal ideologies that separate nature from spirituality, both of which are denounced by the masculine mindset.

### **b) *The synthesis of nature and spirituality***

In the mid eighteenth century, Hegel sought to bridge the gap between spirit (thesis) and matter (antithesis) through a union or a synthesis (qtd. in Ruether 239). This equation is materialized in the novels to balance between these two antagonistic poles. The novels demonstrate that the ascendance of the human spirit can be completed through the contemplation of nature. This reminds us when the metaphysical realm started unfolding to the narrator while meditating on the natural patterns of her living room's wallpaper in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974). She describes this occurrence as follows, "I waited, watched ... walking through a light screen of leaves, flowers, birds ... the essence of woodland brought to life in the effaced patterns of the wallpaper" (120). In this spiritual encounter, the narrator describes a spiritual place behind her walls where a holy presence can be felt but not seen. This spiritual experience of sensing the divine can be attained by connecting with nature (Ruether 239). Similarly, the ancient Greek tradition postulated a similar dualism of matter (mortal

body) and spirit (eternal soul) (Ruether 255).

The ecofeminist critic Julia Kuznetski emphasizes that Lessing's novels provide an opportunity to recreate a harmonious community where both nature and spirituality are embraced (58). In this context, gardens are perceived as a space for women where they can unrestrictedly express themselves (June 89). Consequently, the dynamic interaction between nature/gardens and the protagonists is indeed empowering, which weakens the patriarchal hyperseparation from nature that is perceived as a sign of civilization. Lovelock opines that our instinct connects us to nature but due to urban evolution this instinct is now diluted (136). In the masculine mindset, wilderness and its associates are chaotic and ought to be ousted due to their barbarism (Plumwood 1993 75). The same applies to Lynda and Martha in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), who were initially shunned and alienated from the traditional family unit, until they validated their value through their psychic powers. The novels instead emphasize the mutual relationship humans ought to establish with nature as a guarantee to a balanced life.

In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Anna breaks away from this cyclic and repetitive analogy of degradation via her connection to nature. She shifts towards a more developmental and progressive spiritual path, which is a path that empowers women and increases their agency (Davila et.al. 12). By working on their spirituality, she and her friend Molly are able to recognize and criticize the commodification of nature. They condemn a street seller selling strawberry from a cart, denouncing him a "shark" (15). They compare him to a predator violating nature's possessions. This thought is aligned with Gaia hypothesis that dismisses the view of food as a product and promotes food as a gift (Primavesi 2004 130). In the same context, Merchant critiques the modern agricultural view that separates food crops from trees or nature, considering it a product of consumption (1995 20).

Anna and Molly feel entrapped in their urban city of London,



where the soil feels frozen and lifeless (15). On the contrary, they feel at ease while eating strawberries and stretching their legs freely in the sunlight but when Molly's ex-husband knocks on the door, they "both instinctively gathered themselves into more tidy postures" (16). This patriarchal presence constrains and contradicts the smooth relationship the two women enjoyed while having strawberries. In the same vein, Martha in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), describes London's ground as an "unaired rootless soil, where electricity and telephone and gas tubes ran and knotted and twined;" this is held in comparison to Africa where earth is a "mat of working life" (14). Martha feels more connected to Africa and its nature; like Anna, she is disconnected from urbanity and civilization.

The narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) is closely connected to nature as well through her spiritual experience in the world beyond the walls. In this world, she encounters a four walled garden which is multilayered. She describes it as follows:

I was in a garden between four walls ...and there was a fresh, delightful sky above me that I knew was the sky of another world, not ours. This garden did have a few flowers in it, but mostly it had vegetables. There were beds neatly filled with greenery – carrot tops, lettuces, radishes ... (Lessing 1974 214).

The garden in this scene connotes sustainability due to its vegetation. Its produce is not for ornamentation purpose but for basic survival. Similarly, in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Martha's mind can access a "territory lying just behind ... this world where ... its gardens and its forests and seas and lakes, had come so close, so familiar" (679). Both the narrator and Martha are familiar with nature that lies in a spiritual realm behind our world. Although Anna strived to reach this world in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), she has not fully succeeded unlike Martha and the narrator.

Anna hesitatingly admits, "I seem to have some awful second

insight ... an intuition of some kind ... that is much too painful to use in ordinary life" (745). This intuition, described as *awful* and *painful*, frightens Anna who is indoctrinated by patriarchy and is saturated by its ideology. However, on their spiritual journey, Lynda, Martha, and the narrator achieved what Anna sought but could not fully realize. Anna's battle against rationality is partially lost. Her indoctrination stopped her from achieving what Martha and the narrator obtained. Her dreams are not foretelling the future but are intrinsic perception of her degradation as a woman. She mentions that her dreams about inability to play music is "stylized, like a scene in a play or an old illustration" (304). Although being immersed in madness, Anna shuns her mind from the alternative spiritual realm.

The gardens depicted in the novels are natural spaces where the protagonists connect to their inner self. In fact, spirituality in the novels serves as a catalyst that connects the protagonists' inner selves to nature. Hence, the *Memoirs of a Survivor's* narrator witnesses several sacred symbols in the spiritual realm such as the giant egg that is described as the essence of fertility, fecundity, and organic life (256). The protagonists are united with the cosmos through this synthesis of nature and spirituality. This episode Freud described as an "oceanic feeling", which is an empowering and limitless sensation of eternity (qtd. in Sharky 6). Thus, the human soul is part and parcel of the cosmic soul that mirrors the oneness of the universe (Ruether 48). Moreover, humans are considered the universe's consciousness through which it gets aware of its own existence (43).

This unity with the universe enables humans to transcend the mundane reality, which is the case with the protagonists in the selected novels. The novels dedicate a spatial form to this synthesis. For instance, the utopian story coauthored by Mark and Martha in *The Four-Gated City* (1969) is an exemplar to it. The place depicted in their story is a "gardened city" where buildings are constructed within trees. This natural landscape is full of richness and abundance, where inhabitants "spent their lives on the gardens" (242). However, this

utopian space was ransacked by a newer city which formed an exploitative tyranny over it.

Although the novels' protagonists succeeded in materializing spiritual utopias in their inner worlds, the novels envision an apocalyptic world that is considered nature's revenge on humanity. These dystopian realities are subverted in the novels by offering an alternative spiritual world that demolishes fear and disperses love to disseminate harmony. Anna, in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), tells her therapist that nature is humanity's only way to salvation. She ponders upon this thought, "the blade of grass ... will press up through the bits of rusted steel a thousand years after the bombs have exploded and the world's crust has melted" (828). Thus, nature's sustainability will survive, and it will continue growing and prospering.

The human soul is instinctively attached to nature (Ruether 102). Nature in this sense nurtures the soul, activates imagination, and develops a deep feeling of care and empathy. The environmentalist Mitchel Thomashow, aligning with the Gaian theorist Primavesi, explains that we associate with nature via our active imagination that is a conduit to spirituality (60; 230). Activating this imagination, allows the psyche to meld with the outer biosphere, which encompasses a cosmic dimensionality that is buried in the unconscious (233). Digging in the unconscious, a person can connect to the primal man, animals, and most importantly Gaia (Feigel 192). The same is experienced by Martha in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), when she views her mind as a soft space that can connect her to past time and to different soils (57). Through her mind, which she describes as an empty dark space, she encounters rivers and gardens she has never seen (91).

In fact, nature is the feminine and creative power of the cosmos (Battacharyya 3). This connection between women and nature is incarnated in the female spiritual power that can take the form of animals or trees (Ruether 2005 116). Ruether demonstrates that in Genesis story the female spiritual power took the form of tree and a

snake (116). In several incidents in the novels, the protagonists are portrayed interchangeably with natural elements. Anna, in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), often compares herself to a tree, "I often feel myself spring up like a tree that has been bent over by weight" (438). She, also, at other times equates her body to a dead plant; she describes herself as follows, "like unsunned plant; when I touched the hair on my head it was dead" (797). Martha, in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), is also connected to her animalistic self. She broods over the black cat across her room window in the street and spiritually pairs with it, "when the old black cat rose, arching its back ... the delight of this movement was felt in Martha's back" (388). In this scene, Martha and the cat form a spiritual union. The same union is formed between Emily and her pet Hugo. The narrator compares them to Beauty and the Beast but with Emily wearing furs, "the beauty was close to her Beast now", making it difficult to differentiate between the two (234). Primavesi expounds on this idea, stating that humans and animals share several commonalities such as the capacity of movement and sensory behaviour, which are imprinted in us (2000 17).

The protagonists' spiritual connection to nature enabled them to develop new senses through which they can be part of Gaia. Primavesi blames humans for not training their intuition to be in contact with Gaia. This is achieved in the novels by employing madness as a tool to gain new knowledge.

## **II. A new perspective for change**

### ***a) Madness a new mode of knowledge***

Madness is disapproved by the civilized human race; however, the novels employ it to offer a new lens through which we can look at life differently. This fresh outlook at life is a new or extra dimension of reality that is provided by madness, which in the novels is equated with intuition and emotionality. In the novels, madness is closely linked to spirituality. In *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Martha states that people must seek spirituality through madness and its variants (553). The mental breakdown that the protagonists experience is a

motif of empowerment that frees them from society's indoctrinated and mechanized thinking.

Carl Jung demonstrates that connecting to the unconscious combats the narrowness and one-sidedness of the mind (108). Likewise, R.D. Laing destigmatizes madness and normalizes its existence (Tonkin 250). The protagonists weaponized madness to contest the single dimension of the patriarchal world. Moreover, Jung rebukes the fact that reason is the sole source of wisdom. Instinct is one of the forces that humans share with animals, which exposes the limitedness of the rational human mind. The same is articulated by Laing who perceives madness as a healing force (qtd. in Scott and Thorpe 331). To him, madness is not the traditional concept of a breakdown, but it is a breakthrough (qtd. in Conboy 68). This matches to a great extent the novels' perception of madness.

Anna, in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), fully dedicates the blue notebook to jot down her madness. The diary's entries liberate her and allow her to fight society's mechanization. Anna shocks the reader by the extremity of her writing when she portrays death, destruction, and cannibalism, the latter being a recurrent theme in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974). Anna normalizes madness, "we all have mad flashes about being dead on the pavement, or cannibalism, or committing suicide" (353). She emphasizes in the novel that madness endows her with a "different kind of sensibility" (353). Through it, she widens her horizon and opens new areas in her mind that she did not know that they existed. She clearly announces that she is not ashamed of these moments of craziness; and on the contrary, these moments are when she feels the most enlightened.

In the novels, madness reveals the inadequacy of language in conveying information; although humans exhibit their uniqueness and intelligence through speech, the novels suggest that language is less significant than other faculties. Anna in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) highlights the futility of language, "words mean nothing ... but a series of meaningless sounds ... and a way to one side of experience"

(622). Griffin explains that language fails to empower girls who were trapped in their eternal silence (111). Likewise, Hala Kamal maintains that madness has been used to contain and silence women (84). The mad woman in the attic has been long held as a symbol of victimization and weakness, but the novels' protagonists through notions of madness appropriate silence and forge new ways of communication such as telepathy through which Martha and Lynda will warn people about a future catastrophe and save the world in *The Four-Gated City* (1969). Martha and Lynda are labelled as the mad women in the basement. Unlike the confinement of the attic, this basement is considered a resistance site, where they receive most of their visions about the apocalypse and undergo a process of transformation into first-class seers.

Annette Kolodny explains that the more we understand how language uses us instead of us using it, the more we are urged to devise new and more beneficial ways of communication that can convey our experience of "the mysterious realm of phenomena outside ourselves" (177). Historically, language has been used as a tool that legitimized women and nature's oppression; therefore, the protagonists and other characters subvert this oppression and mimic trees and animals in their silence, which is considered by ecofeminism a new medium of communication.

In *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Sally-Sarah, Paul's mother, is portrayed as a creature licking her son "like an animal with her cub" (185). In this scene, words cease to have powers, for the love is conveyed in a nonverbal manner. Language, as a result, is alienated in the novels by undergoing a process of defamiliarization incarnated in insanity. This primal nonverbal language was originally the norm. However, rules and laws had to be legislated to counter intuition by reason and to impose order on the chaotic humans (Merchant 1995 34). This anthropocentric view led language to be seen as a higher tool of expression that distinguishes humans from animals. The same is echoed by Lynda in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), when she exclaims

that patriarchal figures stopped killing witches because they now are locked in lunatic asylums where they are being confined and tortured to conform to masculine rationality.

Moreover, madness serves as a vehicle to women's freedom from the social and patriarchal restrictions imposed on them. Assertive women who refuse to be imprisoned in their domestic roles are perceived as mad (Mies 122). The patriarchal system exploited madness by labelling women as hysterical for its own interest (Davis 319). On the contrary, insanity in the novels introduces a shift in perception that is slowly and gradually presented to the protagonists. Anna, in *The Golden Notebook* (1962), describes how she feels exploring madness, "I was moving down into a new dimension, further away from sanity than I had ever been" (797). Similarly, Martha in *The Four-Gated City* (1969) describes this experience as a wavelength, a person can tune in and out of (686). Through madness, the protagonists connect to a higher being using their intuition rather than rationality. For instance, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), the narrator contemplates a presence she strongly senses in the metaphysical realm behind the walls; it was a "soft presence, an intimate, whose face would be known to me, had always been known to me" (121).

In fact, in the novels, intuition enables humans to be attentive to nature and its needs. This attentive sensitivity to nature, according to Haberman, opens a new entrance to a deeper knowledge and to a new sensibility that can be facilitated by madness (106; Salleh 37). As such, madness becomes a gateway to a newly acquired awareness of the biosphere; an awareness that the novels utilize to reconstruct a better reality. Being mad, Anna in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) confirms, "I moved forward into a new knowledge, a new understanding; and this knowledge came out of Anna ... the little animal, sitting on the floor cowering" (766). Anna in this scene assimilates with Gaia's knowledge and her animalistic self through madness. Similarly, Martha in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), states that

the nature surrounding the Coldridge house shifts balance of her mind and introduces a new perception the same as Anna had (144). She laments that she had been blind as a result of being detached from this knowledge (335). Her madness connects her to nature, and so she feels that she has developed “different ears, senses, with which one heard, experienced what one couldn't before” (347).

***b) The alternative world of healing, spirituality, and wholeness***

In the novels, the synthesis of the trio, nature, women, and spirituality, facilitated by madness, paves the way for an alternative world of healing for women and earth. According to Douwe Fokkema, humans seek imaginary utopias as an alternative to the “misery, want, and worries” of their real world (15). To Primavesi, utopias blur the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, which allows us to hope for a better future and encourages us to change the present moment (62). Therefore, the novels interweave spiritual knowledge in the corpus of ecological concerns to propose a solution to the impasse of our world's potential apocalyptic ending. This view enables women and nature to undergo a movement from degradation to celebration.

The novels advocate an extra sensory perception (ESP), which mirrors the spirituality within us that can be manifested in dreams, allowing the unconscious to access information that the conscious mind blocks (Jung 165). Consequently, dreams can include symbols that determine our life and predict our future (Raskin 22). Sometimes, Martha receives dreams that were not remembered but they woke her up with a sense of a warning (299). At other times, she dreams of sunlight, sky, leaves and earth that impart her with a sense of happiness (736). This information can be also manifested in visions that are not bound by time and space (168). The supernatural is perceived by mainstream knowledge as madness that needs to be regulated by the laws represented in psychiatric hospitals. Likewise, telepathy is viewed as insanity but in the novel, it is considered as an acquired skill that is developed by connecting to the inner self. This



skill mimics the method of communication observed between animals and trees when they warn each other about danger (Margulis 142). Thus, all these forms, construct a whole and a unity, connecting to Gaia by transforming the world into one “shared mind” (Barnes 160; Ruether 245). In fact, in *The Four-Gated City* (1969), telepathy becomes a spiritual and normal development of humans’ language which is perceived as part of the natural world that has no spoken language.

The next generation children, at the end of *The Four-Gated City* (1969), manifest the spiritual union with the universe. After the apocalyptic catastrophe that took place in the novel’s world, those children are led by Martha, who has become an esteemed mystic figure by then, on a stranded island called Faris. They are called the children of the sun which entices the integration of nature and female spirituality that leads to ending the apocalypse. Those children have strong skills of seeing and hearing things which come natural to them after embracing their spirituality (940). This island is construed as a wasteland that is being revived by Martha and her children clan. In this dystopian setting, hope emerges to the future of humans’ race. Martha describes this, “as if the veil between this world and another has worn so thin that earth people and people from the sun could walk together” (903). The same world is described by the narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), when the narrator exclaims, “it is as if ... two worlds, lay side by side and are closely connected” (34). These spiritual visions are the alternative path of healing that subverts and reverses ecological catastrophes and pollution. It creates a substitute world filled with natural beauty, pleasure, and happiness.

Similarly, in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) the narrator leads Emily and a group of children to a utopian realm that is unfolded by an intense spiritual experience. The narrator herself follows a female spiritual figure that turns out to be the presence she sensed all along in the spiritual realm. This figure can be Gaia the powerful goddess that defies the patriarchal domination. She describes her as

follows, "The one person I had been looking for all this time was there: there she was ... She was beautiful ... she turned her face just once at me, and all I can say is ... nothing at all" (257). The narrator here is guided by female spirituality that connected her to nature in the metaphysical realm where she encounters, "gardens beneath gardens, gardens above gardens: the food-giving surfaces of the earth doubled, trebled, endless – the plenty of it, the richness, the generosity" (192). The same vision is echoed by Ruether who suggests that ecofeminist spirituality envisions a female, rather than a male character, to maintain the well-being of our planet (247). She demonstrated that this female figure is actively engaged in ecological concerns unlike the dominating and exploitative nature of patriarchy. This perception opposes centrism and favors the sustainability of natural resources over its ownership. The protagonists embody the primal seed of spiritual wisdom used to empower women and to resist patriarchal domination over women and nature.

In fact, all protagonists pursue this alternative path to female spirituality. Anna begins this journey by criticizing the single dimensional world of patriarchy, a world which Martha and the narrator completely demolished, creating new utopian places integrating nature and spirituality. This alternative path relies mainly on intuition and emotionality that subvert the masculine discourse exposed in the novels. The novels address a significant question posed by Timothy Clark, a professor in environmental humanities: "how far does a change in knowledge and imagination entail a change in environmentally destructive modes of life?" (qtd. in Sergeant 119).

### ***C) Subverting the mechanistic view of patriarchy***

The alternative world of female spirituality in the novels does not only offer a solution to the crisis of the planet's sustainability but it also opposes the masculine discourse. Ecofeminist and Gaian trends subvert the degradation of nature and women. Instead, they celebrate this spiritual connection between the two and consider it empowering (Hunnicut 15). Contradicting the masculine mindset that perceived

spirituality as superstitious, ecofeminist and Gaian thought consider spiritualism as ecological wisdom (Battacharyya 4).

Throughout several ages, the human mind has undergone a reductionist process of mechanization that shifts the humans' perception of nature from being dynamic and alive to being non-living. Ruether illustrates that this indoctrinated mechanization begins its process by weaving patriarchal stories about the creation of the world (1994 57). For instance, it claims that the universe was created by a violent destructive event called the big bang, a term devoid of any feelings of love and care. In the same vein, the universe becomes a machine designed by a clockmaker which discards all spiritual meanings from the cosmos (Ruether 1994 197). The novels challenge this type of narrow-mindedness and display other dimensions of the universe as shown above. Similarly, Gaia hypothesis postulates that humans need to see their universe in a new way, pertaining to love and spirituality (Lovelock 15). Zimmerman expounds on this arguing that "the one-dimensional ontology of mechanistic materialism has emptied humans and things of their substance" (256). This view dehumanizes humans depriving them from their essence.

Therefore, the protagonists attempt to break free from the authority of the patriarchal control over them. The patriarchal system introduced a one-sided story that ignores nature and women's perspectives. Bacon, for instance, considers anything related to the spiritual realm as something outside of the scientific verifiable truth (qtd. in Ruether 1994 35). This truth is however narrated from one perspective, neglecting other versions of truth that can be narrated. Plumwood, as a result, suggests that these conventional scientific concepts need to be destroyed to be able to construct a new society. In this single story, the masculine mindset indicates that it has the upper hand due to its rational logic. In this view, feelings must be separated from thought and intuition must be buried (Griffin 117; Bigsby 84).

The novels address and challenge androcentric and anthropocentric views by demonstrating the importance of

maintaining a balance between various faculties such as logic and intuition, which will achieve a harmonious relationship among humans, earth, and animals. Most importantly, the novels shed light on the futility of the father's right to "ownership" of land and women (Salleh 73). The protagonists reclaim their autonomy by connecting to nature via spirituality. They also retrieve the control over their own bodies in the same way. This connection with nature and spirituality liberates them from the domestic roles that were imposed upon them; simultaneously, ecofeminist critics subvert the metaphor of the caring mother from a symbol of passivity and powerlessness to a symbol of authority (Salleh 89). Lynda, for example, subverts the typical housewife character (181), in which conformity is challenged.

In the novels, therapy is used as a tool to enforce patriarchal hegemony. The therapist characters of mother sugar and Dr. Lamb in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and *The Four-Gated City* (1969) reinforce the taming of the mind as articulated by Dr. Lamb to Martha in one of the sessions, "if you are in the mechanism, then that's what you are" (354). Martha considers this brainwashing and compares those orthodox indoctrinated people to a sea creature whose "tentacles ... equipped with numbing poisons: anything new ... must be stunned into immobility" (664). She also compares them to being drugged and hypnotized.

However, the novels contest this conditioning and show that the protagonists are not settled in molds. They are mothers, housekeepers, seers, spiritual figures, saviours, and leaders. This view also defies the patriarchal instrumentalism and exploitation of women and nature. Women surpass the domestic roles that men try to cage them in. Thus, male characters such as a Richard, Mark, Francis, and Gerald are left with no option but to learn from the spiritual journey the protagonists undergo to connect with nature. In fact, by saving the earth, the protagonists' psychic powers subvert the dogmatic view that looks down upon similar skills.

In conclusion, the novels subvert the masculine discourse on

two levels. First, on the social level, they expose the social and cultural construction of motherhood's institution by patriarchy to subjugate women and nature. Then, they appropriate this metaphor to empower women, separating the protagonists' maternal experience from the patriarchal norms. Moreover, on the spiritual level, the novels empower women internally, connecting them to nature. Through episodes of madness, the protagonists are able to gain new and profound knowledge about Gaia. This new sensibility enables them to realize inner utopias through their spiritual journeys. Finally, the novels challenge the patriarchal conditioning of the mind that makes the world mechanized and inactive.

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