THE MARRIAGE QUEST IN CANOPUS A Study of Doris Lessing's The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five

by

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B A , University of Regina, 1975

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

Although Doris Lessing's fiction is remarkable for the scope of its vision, its multiplicity of perspective, and its quest to marry binary opposition, critics often approach it with singular perspectives The focus of this thesis is on the metaphorical model offered by Marriages as central to an understanding of Canopus, and as consistent with the apparent development of Lessing's work to date

The introduction affiliates Lessing with visionaries like Blake and Yeats, as well as with an emergent stream of feminist writers who move beyond dualistic opposition into multiplicity It is important to heed Lessing's challenge to view things as a whole, to read Canopus within the context of her work to date The introduction establishes Marriages as a metaphorical model of Lessing's deconstruction of binary opposition in Canopus, and in her earlier supposedly realistic fiction This chapter also focuses on the feminist, deconstructive, and metafictive tendencies of Lessing's

work. It is an integrative approach, using the matrix of marriage as a vantage point from which to view Marriages in the context of Canopus, and in relation to her other work.

Chapter One considers how Canopus fits into the Lessing canon, recognizing that her writing has always been subversive. The relationship between perception and reality is discussed in regard to theories of quantum mechanics and relativity, and feminist and deconstructive discourse--all of which inform her fiction. I consider Lessing's developing vision of paradox using a limited number of her earlier and later works, bringing into focus her characteristic marriage of binaries.

The second chapter examines Marriages in relation to the other Canopus novels. Lessing's marriage of the usually discrete traditions of the romance novel and science fiction. I explore the Canopus novels as a dance, a reader's experience in moving through shifting perspectives. Canopus is ironic, dynamic, feminist, and metafictive. This chapter explores Lessing's process of undermining the dualistic authority of "either/or," through the relationship between the apparent official text and the subversive subtext of

Chapter Three examines Marriages as a matrix, a model of the dynamics of the subversive subtext of Canopus it is romantic/antiromantic, utopic/dystopic, science/art, allegory The shifts in perspective initiated by the interzonal marriages are analogous to the shifts in perspective in Canopus The authority of Canopus and the Providers is undermined, the Necessity is questioned

The conclusion to the thesis considers Marriages as the conceptual denominator of the literary, philosophic, and scientific theories that inform Lessing's writing perception creates reality

Examiners

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Abbreviated Titles Used in Citing Doris Lessing's Works

Children of Violence consists of Martha Quest (1952), A Proper Marriage (1954), A Ripple From the Storm (1958), Landlocked (1965), and The Four Gated City (1969). Parenthetical page references in the text will use the following abbreviations: MQ, PM, FGC.

"The Small Personal Voice" (1957) appears in the text as "PV."

The Golden Notebook (1962) appears in the text as GN.

Briefing for a Descent into Hell (1971) appears in the text as Briefing.

The Memoirs of a Survivor (1975) appears in the text as Memoirs.

The Diaries of Jane Somers, originally published as The Diary of a Good Neighbour and If the Old Could (1984), appears in the text as Diaries.

"Prisons We Choose To Live Inside" (1985) appears in the text as "Prisons."

Canopus in Argos: Archives consists of Vol. 1, Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta (1979), Vol. 2, The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five (1980), Vol. 3, The Sirian Experiments (1981), Vol. 4, The Making of the Representative for Planet 8 (1982), Vol. 5, Documents Relating to the Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire (1983). Parenthetical page references in the text will use the following abbreviations: Canopus, Shikasta, Marriages, Sirian Experiments, Planet 8, and Sentimental

The Fifth Child (1988) appears in the text as 5th Child.

Introduction

> Quite apart from the marriage, there were plenty of secondary questions. What could it mean that our Al·lth was ordered to travel to the territory of Ben Ata, so that the wedding could be accomplished on his land? This was one of the things we asked ourselves.
>
> What, in this context, was a wedding?
>
> What, even, a marriage? (Marriages 12)

Doris Lessing has achieved prominence among major twentieth century writers through her innovative union of the familiar and the fantastic, from an essentially female perspective. The characteristically paradoxical quality of her writing is central to Canopus, in which she joins fiction and reality, the sacred and the scientific, form and theme, literature and criticism, discrete ideologies and genres. Lessing amplifies the prosaic experiences of ordinary women protagonists into cosmic questions of philosophy. Her fiction incites an avid readership, both popular and scholarly. She explicitly provokes critical readers in her various forms of commentary on her own writing, and implicitly, textually, challenges readers to question literary and social authority. Lessing's characteristic deconstruction of what she calls the "binary mode" affiliates her with an emergent group of feminist writers

who move beyond dualistic opposition into multiplicity

A post-Canopus view of Lessing's writing finds the seeds of these innovative speculative novels in her earlier fiction, as Nancy Topping Bazin notes (157). Her women protagonists evolve from the prosaic to the universal, to varying degrees within each of her novels and progressively within the Lessing canon. In her "Piece Written for the Asia Society" Lessing relates Canopus to her earlier work: "Yet from utopian politics to religion or mysticism is a short step: it is the same emotional 'set'. I had an inclination towards mysticism (not religion) even when being political" (459). More recently, in her 1989 Preface to The Doris Lessing Reader, she describes her early work as being very like Canopus:

> I'm damned if I can see much difference between some parts of The Grass is Singing, my first novel, and some parts of Shikasta. Every writer carries a cargo of characters and impressions and ideas, and these modify and develop and change, but very seldom does something completely new come in. (ix-x)

Lessing maintains that the fantastic is present in her early work, she identifies the apparent change in her work as one of focus, rather than a radical departure from her early writing. Roberta Rubenstein refers to this as

> a change of metaphorical location from realistic to symbolic the author has gradually shifted her focus from the boundaries of selfhood (frequently symbolized by the forms of living spaces) to metaphysical space with its own invented territories (60)

The development of Lessing's philosophy from the early Martha Quest to Al Ith in Canopus, as Ellen Cronan Rose notes, is so "logical and appropriate that it is astonishing we didn't all see it coming" (38).

Critics generally acknowledge GN as transitional, a key link in this evolution. In that novel, she writes of the progress of the individual consciousness towards a state of transformed consciousness or enlightenment, a movement from singularity towards multiplicity.

Critical response to her early novels is typically singular in focus, emphasizing distinctive ideological vantage points or "isms," including racism, Communism, socialism, Marxism, imperialism, feminism, mysticism, and Sufism. The earliest book on Lessing's fiction, Dorothy Brewster's Doris Lessing (1965), typifies this early critical approach. Brewster classifies GN essentially as social realism in the nineteenth-century style, written from a Marxist feminist perspective and enriched by Lessing's fascination with psychology.

Paul Schlueter's 1969 analysis of Lessing's writing is similarly conservative, viewing GN as a feminist, political (particularly Communist) and psychological study Schlueter's commentary is most useful where it draws the relationship between Briefing and R D Laing's The Politics of Experience, highlighting what both Laing and Lessing call "inner space," anticipating later commentary

Both Brewster and Schlueter's books were written before Lessing published her now famous "Preface" to GN This necessarily limits their discussion of her work, as they lack the broader perspective of later revisionist readings in response to the author's explicit challenge to readers These early critical readers would, instead, have been informed by "PV," in which Lessing states,

> I hold the view that the realist novel, the realist story, is the highest form of prose writing; higher than and out of the reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, naturalism, or any other ism (4)

More than thirty years later, in her Preface to The Doris Lessing Reader, Lessing gave readers her revisionist definition of the 'realistic' novel

> And anyway, what was all this about the 'realistic' novel being realistic it was an invention and a convention which we had

> all agreed to see as real . . . Our kind of realism was born about four centuries ago, out of--on the one hand--religious tales and religious theatre, centred on churches and--on the other--adventure stories of knights and maidens and heroes and villains, used by Cervantes, for instance, as a jumping-off point for Don Quixote. Our kind of realism is an infant, for four centuries is nothing at all, compared to the millennia-long history of the other mode, and the succession of the old story-tellers, who would have regarded our 'realisms' as poorly furnished. But 'realism' is what we are used to now, is what is 'taught' in schools and colleges (though I am told things are getting better) and so realism is what a large part of the reading public think story-telling is. Because they have forgotten, have not been told about, that many thousands of years long history . . . Divisions between 'imaginative' and 'realistic' writing are much exaggerated, and that to emphasize them means to lose the advantages of both . . . there is not all that much difference between the ways of writing of an author in early life, or in middle or late life.

Lessing's early critics isolate principles of feminism and Marxism in her individual novels, without benefit of the larger context provided by her later fiction. they misread her apparently conventional formal structures and themes as nineteenth-century realism. In Lessing's perception, the traditional conventions of literary criticism are too limiting to allow critics to appreciate her work. Indeed, much of her later writing centres upon the limitations imposed by the singular authority of conventional forms, and the liberation from convention offered by multiplicity.

While these early, ideologically discrete readings contribute

to informed critical discussion of her development as a writer, Lessing views critical analysis of her work in terms of these discrete ideologies as divisive, reductive. In "PV" she compares these early critics to "litmus paper" or "wind gauges," maintaining that they reflect only the "received opinion" of a single-minded society, rather than genuine criticism. The critical dilemma, then, is that despite Lessing's aversion to discrete "compartmentalization" of her fiction, much of this early criticism is relevant and incisive. These ideologically discrete readings are significant as first steps in understanding her work, yet it is important to heed her provocative challenge to unite heterogeneous concepts so as not to lose sight of the elemental issue of her developing vision.

There are a number of critics who perceive the Canopus novels, indeed, all of Lessing's novels written since Children of Violence, to be totally unrelated to what they consider to be her social realism. Lorna Sage, in her 1983 commentary on Lessing's work, argues that Lessing has exiled herself in her later speculative fiction, and has exploited and exhausted the conventions of that genre. Sage concludes that "the colonial experience--the colonial metaphor--is central to her identity as a writer" (11). Her commentary is

valuable but singular, ignoring other central issues in Lessing's writing.

Sage's contemporary, Mona Knapp, approaches this developmental shift in Lessing's style with a sharper and more critical focus. Like Sage, she argues that Lessing's best writing belongs to the genre of social realism, and that her "subsequent explorations of madness and 'inner space' in the 1970's" disorient readers (453). Knapp maintains that, writing in the tradition of Orwell, Lessing is less than successful in her attempt to link the fantastic and the familiar. Sage and Knapp view Canopus as a radical and unfortunate departure from her earlier writing, they do not acknowledge the development or progression of Lessing's style.

There are a number of shorter commentaries that agree with Sage and Knapp's perception of Lessing's stylistic decline in Canopus. Harold Bloom is highly critical of Lessing's "very severe limitations as a writer of fiction." He maintains that "Lessing is a post-Marxist materialist who has wandered into Sufism in the honorable spirit of the fierce Spanish anarchists who fought against Franco, while seeking a religion in Rosicrucianism and other assorted dank crankeries" (6). Although he recognizes her

anarchistic spirit, Bloom's conservative, singular conceptions of the nature of literature are typical of the sort of attitude that Lessing, in Canopus, attempts to overcome

More recently, Laurie Stone maintains that Lessing has taken on "the thundering prophet role" (9), which John Leonard terms "the spacing out of Doris Lessing" (204) Both criticize her for abandoning the socially realistic women protagonists who served, in the 1970's, as role models for feminists, a common criticism of Lessing's later work

In "Teaching Doris Lessing as a Subversive Activity," Katherine Fishburn describes Lessing's method as one that "engages readers in a progressive dialogue that leads them through a series of multiple realities to a new view of the world " She portrays Lessing as seeking "in critics and their critical response a continuation of the dialectical process that she has set up in her texts" (82)

Lessing does indeed engage in dialogue with her critics Her 1984 Preface to Diaries is her response to those critics who view Canopus as radically different from and inferior to her early "realistic" novels

The Diary of a Good Neighbour got written when it did for

> several reasons One I wanted to be reviewed on merit, as a new writer, without the benefit of a 'name', to get free of that cage of associations and labels that every established writer has to learn to live inside It is easy to predict what reviewers will say Mind you, the labels change Mine have been--starting with The Grass is Singing she is a writer about the colour bar (obsolete term for racism)--about communism--feminism--mysticism, she writes space fiction, science fiction Each label has served for a few years
>
> Another reason, frankly if faintly malicious some reviewers complained they hated my Canopus series, why didn't I write realistically, the way I used to do before preferably The Golden Notebook over again? These were sent The Diary of a Good Neighbour but not one recognized me

Lessing wrote Diaries pseudonymously, in response to critics who considered Canopus the illegitimate child of a respected "literary" author Lessing's most recent novel, 5th Child (1988), can also be read as her response to the largely unfavourable critical reception of Canopus She urges critics explicitly in this Preface to Diaries, and implicitly within the pseudonymous diaries, to recognize her larger vision, to marry the disparate concepts of "literature" and "speculative fiction"

Canopus, and particularly Marriages, viewed within the context of Lessing's explicit commentaries both on her own writing and on critical perception of her writing, maintain this dialectic with critics Lessing critics Roberta Rubenstein, Dee Seligman, and Eve Bertelsen acknowledge this dialectic as dialogue between the

author and her critics, with an understanding of "how strenuously this author works to control the reception and interpretation of her oeuvre" (Kaplan and Rose 16) An understanding of this dialectic Lessing engages in with her critics is crucial to an understanding of Canopus as metafictive, using the matrix of marriage as a metaphor Lessing's challenge to critics, articulated in her "Preface" to GN, generates new and innovative critical readings and rereadings of her work Katherine Fishburn acknowledges that what Lessing "has challenged us to do is to come up with a way of criticizing and teaching her fiction that complements--if not forwards--her purpose in writing" ("Subversive Activity" 81-2)

Lessing's challenge is plural, she directly, explicitly confronts critics in her prefaces, retrospective "prefaces," afterwords, lectures, interviews, and various forms of commentary on her own writing and its critical reception, and, implicitly in her fiction Her writing progresses through the self-conscious narration of her earlier work to the metafictive Canopus, both formally and thematically challenging literary convention and critical response GN marks a turning point in Lessing's fiction regarding her dialectic with critics Her "Preface" to this novel is a good point from which

to view her explicit challenge, the critical response to this challenge, and the ensuing relationship between writer and critical reader that is central to an understanding of Canopus, and especially Marriages.

GN was published in 1962, the "Preface" in 1971. The very fact that Lessing would address a "preface" to critical readers, almost ten years after the book was published, in response to their misreadings of the novel, clearly establishes this dialogue between writer and critics. In this "Preface", which in itself subverts conventional notions of textuality in that it succeeds rather than preceeds the text, Lessing criticizes her critics for classifying GN as a feminist tract, when "the essence of the book, the organization of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalize" (16).

Lessing charges critics with submitting to the authority of the literary status quo, rather than being original or creative thinkers. In this "Preface" and in other instances of the author's commentary on her own writing, she distinguishes between scholarly critical response to her writing and response from readers who have not been indoctrinated by education.

> the reaction of someone from outside is valuable simply because it is fresh and not biased by allegiance to a particular education. Why are they [critics] so parochial, so personal, so small-minded? Why do they always atomize, and belittle, why are they so fascinated by detail, and uninterested in the whole? (18)

There is an emergent style of Lessing scholarship which is eclectic and unconventional, offering provisional readings and responding to her feminist style of discourse. Elizabeth Maslen suggests that Lessing is "forcing her readers to 'probe' their 'definitions of omniscience,' jolting them to 'engage fully' with the meaning of the text in order to recognize their complicity in its production" (Intro 37). These new critics recognize Lessing's challenge, and engage with the writer in this process.

On the title page of Briefing, Lessing has inscribed

Category:

Inner-space fiction

For there is never anywhere to go but in.

With this inscription the author steps outside the textual frame and literary convention to give readers explicit instructions regarding the novel's genre. At the end of the text, she again addresses the critic in an

AFTERWORD, OR END-PAPER

A Small, Relevant Reminiscence

In this "end-paper" she compares psychiatric specialists to literary specialists "these were men at the head of their profession . . But their skilled and compassionate diagnoses, while authoritative, were quite different from each other's They agreed about nothing at all" (252) Lessing mocks the conventions of literary criticism and of literature She explicitly alerts critical specialists to the fact that the novel is to be read on more than just psychological or political levels It is also a fiction about fiction, about the sanity of the "insane" who break down false divisions imposed by the authority of the rational, and broaden their perceptions to include the irrational, the unexplainable

Lessing prefaces Shikasta, the first Canopus novel, with "Some Remarks " In this unconventional Preface, she overtly refers to Canopus as metafictive, making reference to "breaking the bonds of the realistic novel " She identifies science fiction as the "despised illegitimate son who can afford to tell truths the respectable siblings either do not dare, or, more likely, do not notice because of their respectability " She speaks of a union between the sacred and

the scientific, she explicitly attempts to engage critical readers to explore the nature of fiction and reality, or questions of legitimacy and authority

In her Preface to Sirian Experiments, Lessing again explicitly tells critics what her book is about

> In this particular book, I have created a female bureaucrat who is dry, just, dutiful, efficient, deluded about her own nature A skilled administrator, she is; a social scientist I could like Ambien II better than I do Some of her preoccupations are of course mine The chief one is the nature of the group mind, the collective minds we are all part of, though we are seldom prepared to acknowledge this

Lessing once more steps out of the frame of her novel in her Afterword to Planet 8, which she identifies as a piece that was to be the "foreword" to Sirian Experiments This dislocates the reader, undermining inferences one might have made if the Afterword had instead been placed in the context of Sirian Experiments

In a 1991 lecture, "Literature as Metaphor," delivered at the University of Victoria (October 16, 1991), Lessing clearly sets out her vision as one of integration She does not see the world in terms of hierarchies and dualism In an ensuing interview with Doug Beardsley, reported in The Times Colonist, she describes dualism as limiting perception "all these divisions black--white, old--

young, man--woman--mean that if you set up these little boxes in your mind you're going to land in trouble" (M6).

A brief survey of the criticism of Canopus will show the consensus to be that the series is to be read as a moralizing and didactic work, essentially, critics accept Canopus as a beneficient power. Mona Knapp, in her 1984 book on Lessing's work, maintains that the Canopus novels are "unrelenting in their insistence that a new, more dynamic, less restrictive view of life must be pursued" (130). She characterizes Lessing as a writer who "progressively disdains the conventional demarcation lines between literary genres, between truth and fiction, the sane and the mad, the objective and the subjective" (131). Although Knapp recognizes Lessing's characteristically paradoxical quality of writing, she states categorically that "Canopus stands for 'good,' that is, respect for the laws governing nature and history" (131). She sees the question of obedience versus free will as problematic in Canopus; she does not recognize Lessing's implicit challenge to literary authority in the series. "In short, this [Shikasta] and the following volumes of Canopus depict totalitarian systems but neglect to question the premises on which they operate" (139).

Ruth Whittaker, in her recent major study of Lessing (1988), is also "uneasy" about the "obedience to the Master Plan" required of Shikastans (101) Whittaker goes on to note the metafictive quality of Canopus (115), but does not explore the common denominator of these two observations, which is Lessing's admonition in Canopus to question authority

Patrick Parrinder concurs that the emissaries of Canopus are "benign imperialists," although he does wonder "hopefully" if Canopus is

> some vast, bloated satire at the expense of the benevolently despotic aliens Will they turn out, after all, to be the phantasma of computerized human malignancy which their bureaucratic jargon would lead one to expect? (23)

Parrinder is one of the few recent critics to ask the essential question: is the apparent benevolent imperialism of Canopus ironic? Lessing commented in a talk given in 1972 that "the interesting thing is in twenty-five years I haven't been asked the right questions" (qtd in Hardin 565). Parrinder's question is merely parenthetic, however, and his limited reading of Canopus as morally didactic fiction aligns Canopus with "good," Shammat with "bad," and Sirius as marginal

Her critics struggle with this dilemma as they attempt to reconcile this apparent utopian imperialism with her early politics. This paradox is characteristic of Lessing. Lee Cullen Khanna escapes that quandary by situating Canopus among a new genre of feminist utopias.

> Where men's utopias have tended to posit static systems strictly ruled by law, women have celebrated the changes in individual and communal life that bring humans close to the natural cycle and, in similar ways, lead to growth. Despite the multiple differences in values between women's and men's world (of which full female autonomy in women's utopias is not the least), the single most significant gender distinction in utopian fiction is probably the relative evaluation of ends and means. Women's worlds are dynamic, utopian communities and the individual in them must continue to change. (9)

Khanna accepts the paradox in Canopus, viewing the apparently benificent Canopean imperialism as both dystopian and utopian, in the multiplicity of female perspective, and recognizes that Lessing posits questions (Can imperialism be benevolent?) and not singular answers (Canopus is a benevolent imperialism).

Naomi Jacobs, like Khanna, characterizes pre-feminist, traditional utopia as totalitarian and static, and contrasts it with what she terms Lessing's "postdystopian" or "critical" utopia. Jacobs maintains that

> The "grail" is to be found not in the other reality, as the truth was once found by the visitor to utopia, but rather in the act of travelling, the act of seeking, the act of renewing a stagnating self or society through contact with an inimical reality (34-5)

Ellen Peel uses the concept of the "dynamic metaphor" to embrace the paradox in Marriages and to identify multiplicity and difference

> Instead of simply persuading readers toward a course of action to follow later, the work draws them into a process of skeptical feminism that proceeds simultaneously with their experience of the novel, for they are to engage in the process about which they are reading (139)

Jacobs, Khanna, and Peel read Lessing the way she writes, in multiplicity as opposed to division Their conceptions of dynamic or feminist utopian writing allow readers of Canopus to reconcile the critical dilemma of "either/or," Lessing's term for dualism, of choosing either to read Canopus as didactic, and therefore contrary to the developing philosophy in her work to date, or as an inconsistent satire

Of these few critics who see Canopus as ironic, feminist, and dynamic as well as didactic, even fewer identify or acknowledge Lessing's relations with her critics as being central to the satirical, metafictive Canopus, and to Marriages in particular

Elisabeth Maslen's commentary is informed by these conceptions:

> Open to interpretation, too, is the role of the highly evolved Canopus in Argos itself. For the novels of the series continually assert that all powers are dynamic: they rise and they fall, and why should Canopus be immune? Canopus is certainly fallible: its original plans for Shikasta go astray. And its representatives in the series seem to show a decline in their powers through succeeding generations . . . and why should Lessing have placed Canopus in Argos? The Argonauts of Greek legend were questing heroes who achieved much, but those who survived their quest still had bitter lessons to learn, and the Greek word argos means swift, which would imply the dynamics of movement, of quest. Lessing does not presume to write about static worlds, but instead shows the continuing peril of words that are taken as static.
>
> ("The Way to Space Fiction" 8)

Katherine Fishburn offers a reading consistent with Maslen's, with an additional emphasis upon the metafictional nature of the work. She describes Canopus as challenging both literary assumptions and rhetorical devices, and

> the Cartesian dualities that inform the Western world's concept of reality . . . these books remind us that what we take for reality is only fiction--a familiar but entirely provisional construct--and what we take for "realism" is only an attempt to shore up the fiction of reality.
>
> ("Wor(l)ds Within Words" 198)

Maslen and Fishburn's commentaries offer insight into Canopus within the context of Lessing's canon. Their readings, however, are limited. They do not recognize Lessing's deconstruction of the

"official" text of Canopus and her creation of a subversive subtext. An integrative approach, inclusive of all of the elements of paradox relative to the series, is to use marriage as a metaphor, as a vantage point from which to view Marriages within the context of Canopus, and relative to her earlier and more recent novels. This approach responds to her challenge to "look at things as a whole and in relation to each other" ("Preface" GN 33).

Lessing's Canopus has affinities with the visionary, mystical tradition explored earlier by William Blake and William Butler Yeats, in examining the paradoxes of fiction and reality, insanity and wisdom, the familiar and the fantastic, through the "Great Code of Art" (Blake, "The Laocoon"). Like Blake and Yeats, Lessing writes of the relationship of the cosmic and mystical to the familiar and mundane. Lessing also writes within the context of a contemporary genre of critical feminist utopias, which includes writers like Margaret Atwood and Ursula K. Leguin. Canopus is deconstructive, feminist, and metafictive. Lessing's speculative series also has affinities outside of literary tradition: it shares a vocabulary with theories of quantum mechanics and relativity. Canopus eludes singular definition, it is an anomaly.

Canopus Its Place in Lessing's Canon

Re-reading Lessing from a post-Canopus perspective, we recognize that paradox has always been essential to her vision, and that her writing has always been subversive Marriages provides a metaphorical model of her feminist, deconstructive metafictive mode of discourse in Canopus and, retrospectively, in her earlier writing As Lessing contends, "divisions between 'imaginative' and 'realistic' writing are much exaggerated, and that to emphasize them means to lose the advantages of both" (Preface to The Doris Lessing Reader x-xi)

There is an element of science fiction in Lessing's pre-Canopus writing It is interesting to note that Lessing wrote a space fiction television script about marriage early in her career (Howe 435-6) The vocabulary in her early, apparently realistic fiction is that of the new physics, quantum mechanics and relativity As Claire Sprague notes, Lessing's "mind moves inevitably in complex patterns of opposition and collaboration between doubles and multiples as though she were, like a physicist, seeing matter and anti-matter everywhere" (115) Her logic is quantum rather than classical as she

writes of how different perspectives or frames of reference create different realities In her earlier work, as well as in Canopus Lessing is concerned with the effect the act of observation has on that which is being observed The relationship between perception and reality is central to theories of quantum mechanics and relativity, as well as to theories of feminist, metafictive, and deconstructive discourse All of these disciplines inform Lessing's writing

Lessing formally and thematically deconstructs dualistic opposition She does not invert dualities by deposing the dominant element (either/or), since such reversal would only confirm opposition Rather, she attempts to subvert oppositional relationships Whether her focus is on the familiar as in her earlier works, or on the fantastic as in Canopus, Lessing challenges the dualism of authority and unites opposing concepts into paradox Like Charles Watkins in Briefing, she insists upon the multiplicity of "and, and, and," rather than the dualistic hierarchy of "either/or" (140)

Lessing has always written subversively, yet as readers we did not recognize her radical feminist approach of rejecting dualism

and embracing difference in her earlier novels. Reading Canopus in context gives us a revisionist perspective that allows us to recognize in her writing what Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes as a feminist model of discourse:

> A both/and vision born of shifts, contraries, negations, contradictions, linked to personal vulnerability and need. Essay and sermon. A both/and vision that embraces movement, situational. (I don't mean opportunistic, slidy.) Structurally, such a writing might say different things, not settle on one which is final. This is not a condition of 'not choosing,' since choice exists always in what to represent and in the rhythms of presentation. . . . [one] cannot, in formal argument, say both yes and no, if yes and no are given equal value under the same conditions. Either one or the other has to prevail. But, say, in a family argument? Where both, where all, are right? (263)

In order to identify Lessing's writing as subversive and as feminist, it is necessary to address the issues raised by her frequent contention that her work is "not a trumpet for Women's Liberation" (Preface to GN 9). Her writing is feminist, yet it is not only feminist, she has a larger vision that includes not only subversion of the authority of the dominant male social order, but also subversion of the authority of patriarchal dualistic thinking. Responding to feminist acclaim of GN as a "useful weapon in the sex war," Lessing insists that she has been

> in a false position ever since, for the last thing I have wanted to do was to refuse to support women.
>
> To get the subject of Womens' Liberation over with--I support it, of course, because women are second class citizens, as they are saying energetically and competently in many countries. I don't think that Women's Liberation will change much though--not because there is anything wrong with their aims, but because it is already clear that the whole world is being shaken into a new pattern. Emerging from this crystallizing process [of writing The Golden Notebook], handing the manuscript to publisher and friends, I learned I had written a tract about the sex war, and fast discovered that nothing I said then could change that diagnosis.
>
> Yet the essence of the book, the organisation of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalise. (Preface to GN 8-10)

During her recent seminar at the University of Victoria (October 17,1991), Lessing spoke of feminist writers Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer as being in "furious rebellion" about the "physical facts of being a woman." She described what she perceives to be their separatist feminism as one of the "sets of mind" that "prevent us from being more intelligent. There are all kinds of things that are very good up to a certain point, then they turn into their opposites." Lessing mistrusts any dogma, feminist or otherwise, that polarizes people into an oppositional dualistic association. This tenet is central to her fiction. Her writing is radically feminist in the sense that it is "a polyvalent 'negativity'

that undermines and suspends all oppressive univocal oppositions (such as good vs evil, true vs false, male vs female)" (Davis and Schleifer 185).

Mary Eagleton's characterization of binary thought as patriarchal is useful here:

> In extolling the female, the woman writer does not break the pattern of patriarchal binary thought whereby the female is defined in relation to the male. According to binary thinking the male constitutes the norm, the positive, and the superior, the female is the abberation, the negative, the inferior. Her difference, as Mary Jacobus comments, is 'defined as the lack', the difference of not being male. Even to praise the female is still 'a gesture within the terms of the existing system'.
>
> Difference as binary opposition is largely acceptable to the dominant order. (204)

Eagleton goes on to propose a subversive, feminist perspective of female as different, as "other", difference in this sense is not restricted to the opposition of male and female. It "seeks to subvert fixed, unitary meanings in favour of plurality and diversity" (204). Helene Cixous agrees that to be feminine means not to be defined in relation to masculine, but to be that which escapes such enclosing definition (479-491). Carol Christ identifies Lessing's writing as feminist, as it is characterized by union of "dualisms of spirit and body, rational and irrational, nature and

freedom, spiritual and social, life and death, which have plagued Western consciousness" (8). Lessing's writing is feminist in the sense that Cixous, Kristeva, Christ and Eagleton identify feminist writing: to write from a feminist perspective is to subvert the characteristic dualism of patriarchal writing.

In this vein of contemporary feminist thought, Lessing insists that "it isn't a question of alternatives--everything is always interactive" (seminar at the University of Victoria, October 17, 1991). She frequently cites her concern with "the tendency of the human mind to see things in pairs--either/or, black/white, I/you, we/you, the forces of good/the forces of evil" ("Prisons" 24). Her concern with these limiting dualities is not recent, it is reflected in her pre-Canopus work. In a 1984 interview with Susan Stamberg, Lessing made reference to the "binary mode":

> "either/or" has very little to do with how things really are. Because you know that's how the computer works. They call it the binary mode don't they? The this or that, the switch. This or that. I'm asking myself, is the computer, the way it functions, a model of the human mind? (3)

To consider Lessing's developing vision of paradox in depth is beyond the scope of this discussion. For the sake of simplicity, I deal with a limited number of Lessing's earlier and later works

Situating the Canopus novels in context brings into focus Lessing's characteristic marriage of binaries, and points to Marriages as a dynamic, metaphorical, quantum model for deconstructing the binary paradigm of western thought

This marriage metaphor, central to Marriages, provides a more integrative than sequential perspective of Canopus, as well as an extended matrix of concepts central to her pre-Canopus writing I use "matrix" here in both of its apparently contradictory significations as womb and as a mathematical set or array The paradoxical quality of "matrix" is apt, as it is consistent with Lessing's subversion of the dualistic opposition of nature/science, and with her use of the vocabulary of quantum mechanics

The marriage matrix works formally as well as thematically in Lessing's pre-Canopus work her ironic, feminist, dynamic writing deconstructs formal absolutes A Man and Two Women (1963) is ostensibly a collection of short stories, yet reads as a loosely bound novel Just as the fragmented structure of GN conveys its essence, the format of this collection of nineteen short stories has the integrity of a novel about female fragmentation It is a unit of fragments, a marriage of related concepts, formal and thematic,

reaching its apex in the final story "To Room Nineteen" As in GN, this formally fragmented novel reflects Lessing's paradoxical vision

Lessing's marriage of disparate literary forms is also evident as she unites individual novels into sets Children of Violence is sequential, readers follow Martha's progression from the familiar to the fantastic, from singular/individual to plural/collective consciousness In Canopus, this progression is amplified, the speculative and metaphoric nature of the work gives us an integrative rather than a sequential perspective

Lessing's entire oeuvre is integrative, as her characters cross fictional boundaries, violating the formal integrity of the novel In GN, narrators and characters switch roles, as Alvin Sullivan notes (73) Lynda from Children of Violence reappears in Canopus In 5th Child, Canopus is recalled with references to creatures being moved about on the planets, and Ben is atavistic, a reversion to the Dwarves in Sirian Experiments Gangs of unemployed youth rove throughout 5th Child and Memoirs, and are central to the Canopus novels Charles Watkins' city in Briefing presages those in Shikasta Charles, like the Sirians and Canopeans, travels in space (inner

space) to get a more objective perspective of earth. This is but a sampling of the way characters travel through her novels, just as the unnamed narrator of Memoirs travels through walls, and Lessing traverses the traditional literary boundaries between realistic and fantastic.

In Canopus, Lessing amplifies the metafictive quality of her earlier work, expanding the scope of her perspective. In all of her writing she prompts readers to become conscious of the novel as a formal construct, a convention. She does this using highly self-conscious, subjective narratives: they are, as Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose point out, memoirs, letters, notebooks, diaries, chronicles, archives (7). Her narrative voices constantly interrupt the fictionality of her fiction. The effect is provocative, inciting readers to consider the essential absurdity of the traditional opposition of fiction/reality. Katherine Fishburn discusses Lessing's marriage of this dualism:

> The paradox that she has so loved to play with is that she has been forced to use fiction to de(con)struct the fictions we live in. It is only fitting, therefore, that she free us from her own fictional constructs by de(con)structing them. ("Wor(l)ds Within Words" 200)

In the pre-Canopus Briefing, the self-conscious narrator

describes the metafictive perspective

> there is something that disturbs you but you don't know what it is Not at first It is because of any group of those people, the charming, the formal, the pastoral, the essentially civilized, there is always one that looks straight out of the group, out of the canvas, into the eyes of the person who is looking at the picture This person who refuses to conform to the conventions of the picture the artist has set him in, questions and in fact destroys the convention It is as if the artist said to himself I suppose I've got to paint this kind of picture, it is expected of me--but I'll show them (229)

Instances of narrative intrusion also abound in Memoirs, with narrative comments like "But perhaps it wouldn't be out of place here" (3), "perhaps I may be permitted the fancy metaphors" (4), "for the sake of the narrative" (119), "Perhaps it would be of interest if I described this in more detail" (205) Lessing's self-conscious, hesitating narrative voices induce readers to question the integrity of the narrator's perspective

Like her narrators, Lessing's characters search for the right words In PM, Martha questions the validity of words to express her experience She prays to

> Books Words There must surely be some pattern of words which would neatly and safely cage what she felt--isolate her emotions so that she could look at them from outside For she was of that generation who, having found nothing in religion, had formed themselves by literature And so she knelt in front of a bookcase in driving need of the right arrangement of words (73)

Al lth, in a particularly humorous passage in Marriages, calls for a dictionary

> Riding together through the golden mists, he ground his teeth and yearned towards her, while she murmured, 'Is there a dictionary in the pavilion?' (117)

In these passages Martha and Al·lth question the validity of words to define their realities Lessing consistently points to the inadequacy of words to describe experience Accordingly, in her fiction she leads readers to experience a process rather than just telling us about it with words

In 5th Child, no authority could find the right words to describe Ben "No schoolteacher, or doctor, or specialist had been able to say, 'That is what he is' neither could any policeman, or police doctor, or social worker" (132) Sentimental Agents indicts rhetoric, words used to distort and pervert all that is good Lessing's characters question the authority of words, of fiction, to describe reality

Lessing points to the provisional nature of reality by having her characters and narrators question the authority of words Like William Blake and his contemporary, Bishop Berkeley, she inquires

into the nature of perception They share a vision, with the necessary differences in focus between poet and philosopher, with quantum mechanics theorists perception creates reality In our fallen perceptive state we see with our eyes rather than through them, our vision limited by our dependence on reason The self-conscious narrative of Lessing's early fiction becomes overtly metafictive in Canopus, as she points to the provisional nature of reality, and unites fiction and reality in paradox

Lessing formally weds the last book of her Children of Violence series, FGC (1969), to Briefing (1971) with quotations from the scientist Rachel Carson She cites Carson as an invitation into paradox the sea creates the land, the world is contained in a drop of water, a grain of sand, echoing Blake's "Auguries of Innocence" The minute and familiar are the fantastic outer space fiction is inner space fiction With these quotations Lessing points to and explicitly labels her textual subversion of opposing concepts inner/outer, familiar/fantastic, micro/macro, science/fiction She describes Briefing as "inner-space fiction" (front page)

As early as Children of Violence, Lessing subverts binary oppositions implicitly within the novels, both formally and

thematically, and undermines the literature/criticism opposition explicitly with her on-going dialectic with critics As Lessing addresses the individual/collective dualism implicitly in her Children of Violence series, she explicitly admonishes critics for their singular "either/or" submission to dualistic authority

> Not one critic has understood what I should have thought would be obvious from the first chapter [of the Children of Violence series], where I was at pains to state the theme very clearly, that this is a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective At the moment our critics remind me of a lot of Victorian ladies making out their library lists this is a 'nice' book, or it is not a 'nice' book, the characters are 'nice', or they are not 'nice' ("PV" 14)

Diaries also challenges dualistic authority In her 1984 "Preface" to that book, Lessing gives her reasons for writing under a pseudonym

> Another reason, frankly if faintly malicious some reviewers complained they hated my Canopus series, why didn't I write realistically, the way I used to do before preferably The Golden Notebook over again? These were sent The Diary of a Good Neighbour but not one recognized me (5)

The dualistic oppositions of writer/critic and realistic/fantastic give the author literally no authority in the literary world In her dialogue with critics, Lessing sees criticism as a process whereby literary authority imposes its dualistic mindset on literature Her

own logic is quantum, as she writes of perception creating reality As Gary Zukav asserts in The Dancing Wu Li Masters,

> our minds follow different rules than the real world does A rational mind, based on the impressions that it receives from its limited perspective, forms structures which thereafter determine what it further will and will not accept freely From that point on, regardless of how the real world actually operates, this rational mind, following its self-imposed rules, tries to superimpose on the real world its own version of what must be [this is] a concise description of the major conclusion of the general theory of relativity (181)

Throughout her fiction, and particularly in Marriages, Lessing uses form ironically and dynamically, increasingly uniting different and usually discrete forms and refusing to bow to dualistic, rational authority

5th Child (1988) has particular significance for Canopus, as it was also written in response to the poor reception critics gave these five novels In her 1978 Preface to Shikasta, Lessing places science fiction in the "thankless role of the despised illegitimate son who can afford to tell the truths the respectable siblings either do not dare, or, more likely, do not notice because of their respectability " Canopus is critically received as the illegitimate child of an otherwise legitimate author, just as Ben is the illegitimate alien child of legitimate parents, and clearly resembles

the dwarves who are the cross-bred Lombis and Colony 22 technicians, the "underearth races," in Sirian Experiments

> Ben makes you think all those different people who lived on the earth once--they must be in us somewhere (Fifth Child 114) Ben's people were at home under the earth, she was sure, deep underground in black caverns lit by torches (Fifth Child 122) squat little people who were hustling us inside the cave a vast cavern, lit everywhere by small flames (Sirian Experiments 91)

The language of 5th Child is drawn directly from Sirian Experiments

Ben is a paradox He is the illegitimate child of legitimate parents he is a child, yet a mature finished being, he is human and alien Like the Canopus novels, he is that which the experts cannot classify The "science" in Lessing's science fiction is quantum contradiction

> "Quantum field theory" is, of course, an outrageous contradiction in terms the juxtaposition of two irreconcilable concepts In other words, it is a paradox It defies our categorical imperative that something be either this or that, but not both
>
> The major contribution of quantum mechanics to western thought, and there are many, may be its impact on the artificial categories by which we structure our perceptions, since ossified structures of perception are the prisons in which we unknowingly become prisoners Quantum theory boldly states that something can be this and that (a wave and a particle) It makes no sense to ask which of these is really the true description Both are required for a complete understanding (Zukav 219)

In 5th Child Harriet controls Ben with authority, just as the Sirians control the Dwarves, Canopus controls the Sirians, and critics control readers. Harriet struggles to accept the paradox which her husband David refuses to accept. His world is the Newtonian either/or: either Ben is human or he is not. Her world is the quantum and/and: Ben is her child and he is not. 5th Child is analogous to the five Canopus novels on several levels.

Lessing deconstructs the dualistic stasis of authority thematically as well as formally. In her early work, as several critics have noted, she consistently creates "lunatics," characters whose enhanced perception excludes them from the dominant culture's dualism. Their exile gives them the necessary distance or perspective, "a new plane of perception" (Sukenick 533), from which to challenge authority. Lessing subverts this dualism by marrying opposing concepts, accepting paradox. These "lunatic" characters, along with dancing and singing, are the major subversive elements in Lessing's extended marriage matrix.

The universal wedding rituals of dance and song within the marriage matrix are the dynamism, the energizing power uniting binary oppostion. The "lunatic" characters perceive and accept

paradox In Lessing's writing, authority is clearly dualistic, static, and paternal, aligned with the sun and sanity, while her feminine (not necessarily female) protagonists are associated with the moon, they are the "lunatics" who question authority

Martha, Lynda, Anna, Charles, the unnamed narrator of Memoirs, and George, Harriet, Al·lth, and Dabeeb are all "lunatics", they question the authority of dualistic thought Lessing consistently associates their quest to subvert oppositional stasis with the dynamics of dancing and singing, universal symbols of creative energy She draws upon various sacred and secular traditions associating dance and song, following a long tradition of the symbolism of the cosmic dance Dance and song are also the symbolic rituals of marriage, the agents of union

Martha, one of Lessing's early "lunatic" characters, struggles in PM with the authority of marriage and of society's status quo She sees herself as alien, as exempt and different, just as Al lth is alien and different from the others in Zone 3 She "didn't like any of the things she had become obliged to like by the fact of marrying" (10)

> She thought confusedly that there was always a point when men seemed to press a button, as it were, and one was expected to turn into something else for their amusement This

> 'turning into something else' had landed her where she was now married, signed and sealed away from what she was convinced she was (14)

Martha struggles within the traditional roles of authoritarian husband and obedient wife ("Douggie'll put some sense into her head You can't be a Red if you're married to a civil servant" [28]), and its reversal of the victim manipulating the authority figure ("You should manage them without them knowing it they were a sort of wild animal to be tamed" [29]) Martha's struggle within this dominant/submissive dualism highlights the paradox of marriage as "wedlock"

> She was on the point of turning over away from him, when the instinct to please turned her towards him Love had brought her here, to lie beside this young man, love was the key to every good, love lay like a mirage through the golden gates of sex If this was not true, then nothing was true, and the beliefs of a whole generation were illusory (34)

Charles in Briefing is the only significant male lunatic character in Lessing's pre-Canopus fiction He associates himself with the feminine, the moon, more than with the masculine, the sun "my thoughts and movements were set by it, not by the Sun, man's father and creator, no, by the Moon, I was moonstruck I was mooncrazed I was lunatic indeed" (57-9) Charles marries perception and reality, the observed and the observer Like the

quantum theory of particle physics, he perceives the dance

> To celestial eyes, [people] seen like a broth of microbes under a microscope, always at war and destruction, this scum of microbes thinks, it can see itself, it begins slowly to sense itself as one, a function, a note in the harmony, and this *is* its point and function, and where the scummy film transcends itself, here and here only and never where these mad microbes say I, I, I, I, I, for saying I, I, I, I is their madness this is where they have been struck lunatic, made moonmad, round the bend, crazy, for these microbes are a whole, they form a unity, they have a single mind, a single being, and never can they say I, I, without making the celestial watchers roll with laughter or weep with pity (103)

All of the ingredients of Canopus are in Briefing the celestial perspective, the Degenerative Disease of individualism, the stasis of predetermined ideas which create a "terrible bondage, the chains of necessity the web of necessity the weight of cold necessity" (99-100), the vocabulary of quantum mechanics and relativity The meanings of the concepts of "Necessity" and "marriage" change within the novels, signification is not static

Lynda, in both Children of Violence and Canopus, is a prophetic lunatic who, with Martha in FGC, is a harbinger of the higher innocence, in which

> all existing forms of government were as irrelevant as dinosaurs government by concealment, lies, trickery, even stupidity -- was dead The old right of the individual human conscience which must know better than any authority, secular

> or religious, had been restored, but on a higher level, and in a new form which was untouchable by any legal formulas. We quoted to each other Blake's "What now exists was once only imagined." (586)

The enhanced perception of the lunatic characters subverts authority and is likened to Blake's "higher innocence." These characters are irrational. They have awakened from a Lockean dependence on reason, "the sleep of necessity, the cage of ordinary life" (Briefing 210), "a man lying on a rock in the dark" (Briefing 58), reminiscent of Blake's "Albion upon the Rock of Ages" ("Milton" 1 36).

Lessing's lunatics progressively move away from the personal toward collective marriage, the SOWF (Substance of We Feeling) in Canopus, and the marriages of Zones Three, Four and Five, symbolized by Al•Ith, Ben Ata and Vashi's marriages. Martha's honeymoon is collective (PM 14). Charles in Briefing asserts that "'we are all much too personal about the whole thing.' He was talking about marriage, after all" (189), "Our love was carried, or contained by the group" (212). He speaks of the "divorce there has been somewhere along the long path of this race of man between the 'I' and the 'We'. What sent us off centre, and away from the sweet sanity of We?" (103).

In Memoirs, Emily and her gang lead a communal life.

> and mating was far from being the focus or pivot of a relationship when they chose each other. No, any individual consummations were nothing beside this act of mingling constantly with others, as if some giant rite of eating were taking place, everyone tasting and licking and regurgitating everyone else, making themselves known to others and others known to them in this tasting and sampling--eyeing each other, rubbing shoulders and bodies, talking, exchanging emanations. (Memoirs 86)

In Children of Violence, as in Canopus, Lessing uses marriage as a metaphor, the realistic focus on the individual Martha and her marriage in the earlier novel amplified into the collective, abstracted, symbolic marriages of Al•ith and Ben Ata in Marriages. Martha's ambivalence about marrying Douglas reflects the individual/collective dualism, an individual is either exiled from or subsumed by the collective.

> She said to herself that now she could free herself, she need not marry him, at the same time, she knew quite well she would marry him, she could not help it, she was being dragged towards it, whether she liked it or not. (MQ 243)

Martha and Al•ith both question the authority of orthodox marriage, of being Locked (wedlocked) into paternal binary thought (authoritative husband/obedient wife). For Martha, authority is her husband, Mr. Maynard, Dr. Stern, and all of the institutions these men represent. For Al•ith, authority is "The Necessity", the Providers.

Like Al•lth, Martha's acceptance of the role of wife is tinged with "half-humorous appreciation of the ironies of her position this amused, ironical appreciation" (155).

Like Martha, Charles in Briefing refers to a shift in perception as a dance. They agree that to accept the irony of paradox is to dance, to move freely among opposing concepts. Charles becomes the dance, "a dance of matter in time" (58), as in Yeats' "Among School Children," "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,/ How can we know the dancer from the dance?" In The Dancing Wu Li Masters, Zukav explains that

> 'Wu' can mean either 'matter' or 'energy'. 'Li' is a richly poetic word. It means 'universal order' or 'universal law'. It also means 'organic patterns'. The grain in a panel of wood is Li. The organic pattern on the surface of a leaf is also Li, and so is the texture of a rose petal. In short, Wu Li, the Chinese word for physics, means 'patterns of organic energy' ('matter/energy' [Wu] + 'universal order/organic patterns' [Li]) (32)

These elements of dance and necessity in Lessing's pre-Canopus fiction become the central elements of the marriage matrix in Canopus.

In PM, Martha and Alice, heavily pregnant, share a dance of triumph in the rain.

> They were now restored to their own self-respect For to go out in the rain would be a gesture of defiance to their husbands, who were now so full of prohibitions and firm masculine attitudes about getting cold or tired they had adopted this attitude because they were so little with their wives (152)

In labour, Martha, "like some sort of savage creature proceeded to dance in heavy lopsided triumph around the room Never had she felt such a soaring elation as this" (157)

Dancing is associated with drums and pulses, with the surrender of individuals to a collective Dance metonymously associates the drumbeat, womb and birth, nature, and the precision and pattern of a mathematical array Singing and dancing are important to Ben in 5th Child (115), as he is a primordial being in tune with cosmic energy/the origin/birth/the source/drumbeats In Briefing, Charles refers to life as "the great dance, the song" (120) In PM,

> By midnight they were dancing as if they formed one soul Their days and work, their loves and love-making, were nothing but a preparation for that moment when hundreds of them stamped and shouted in great circles to the thudding drums, felt less as sound than as their own pulses, this was the culmination of the day, the real meaning of it, the moment of surrender (78-9)

This passage is very like the drumbeat and women's dances in Marriages that are the agents of change We recognize the drumbeat

in Charles' description of the blood beating through the heart in Briefing

> Why do you say Or? And is more like it It's funny, I've just noticed People say Either, Or, this or that, because of the thud, thud, fudd, fudd, in or out, black and white, yes and no, one and two, the either-or comes from that, the beat, the fudd, fudd in the blood, but it isn't either-or at all, it's and, and, and, and, and, and (140)

Marriages in Canopus provides a dynamic metaphorical model for looking at things in context, deconstructing dualities, embracing paradox This model grew out of Lessing's pre-Canopus fiction

Martha and Anna question authority, and accept paradox Martha glimpses the truth of the essential absurdity of paradox, but rejects it Anna Wulf's quest is to explore paradox, differing perspectives Al•lth grows to accept paradox

> They sat within each other's arms, cheeks laid together, and looked up the pass at the hanging blue mists, and thought that they were still married, for all that they were so finally separated (Marriages 298)

Martha, Anna, and Al•lth all illustrate stages in the process of rejecting dualism and accepting paradox Canopus is not radically different from Lessing's earlier fiction Her concern with the relationship between perception and reality, and the metafictive and feminist elements in her pre-Canopus writing, become apparent

when considering Canopus within the larger context of Lessing's oeuvre

Marriages: Its Place in Canopus

Lessing heralds the Canopus series with "Some Remarks" in Shikasta, insisting that

> space fiction, with science fiction, makes up the most original branch of literature now, it is inventive and witty, it has already enlivened all kinds of writing, . . . literary academics and pundits are much to blame for patronizing or ignoring it--while of course by their nature they can be expected to do no other.

Canopus is indeed a challenge to literary orthodoxy. In the series, Lessing deliberately undermines authority or orthodoxy on several levels. Canopean authority, textual authority, literary authority, and the authority of patriarchal society in the western world. Lessing subverts the authority of dualistic association on these levels by uniting opposition through paradox in Canopus.

Canopus is a plural text. It is dynamic, ironic, feminist, and metafictive. It appropriates elements from a number of genres--speculative/science fiction, critical feminist utopias, sacred writing, romance, allegory--and from theories of quantum mechanics and relativity. All of these descriptors of Canopus share a common conceptual denominator: perception creates reality. The

body of Canopus clothes a process, a dance between text and reader, rather than an entity, a definitive text, in the same way that

> Cells, under magnification, are revealed to be patterns of molecules. Molecules, under higher magnification, are discovered to be patterns of atoms, and, lastly, atoms have turned out to be patterns of subatomic particles. In other words, "matter" is actually a series of patterns out of focus. The search for the ultimate stuff of the universe ends with the discovery that there isn't any.
>
> If there is any ultimate stuff of the universe, it is pure energy, but subatomic particles are not "made of" energy, they are energy. This is what Einstein theorized in 1905. Subatomic interactions, therefore, are interactions of energy with energy. At the subatomic level the dancer and the dance are one. (Zukav 212)

In Planet 8, Doeg appropriates the language of the new physics to describe his perception of his body as,

> from a perspective of vision very far from my own proper eyes, not dense or solid at all . . . But Johor, while I can see what it is you have been leading me to say to you, that this heaviness . . . for I am so heavy I can hardly bear it--this heaviness is nothing at all. A shape of light that has in it particles slightly denser in some places than in others. But what my mind knows is of no use to my lumpishness, Johor. What you see of me, with those eyes of yours that belong to another planet, a differently weighted star--I can imagine, for I have seen cells and even molecules disappear into a kind of dance . . . '
>
> 'A dance that you modify by how you observe it. Or think of it,' he remarked. (91)

Canopus explores the dynamics of shifting perspectives. The series is designed to draw readers into recognizing a process

through experiencing it Katherine Fishburn describes Lessing's process as "Socratic," as one

> by which she engages her readers in a progressive dialogue that leads them through a series of multiple realities to a new view of the world . . . Her purpose in writing, therefore, is not to convince us of the validity of her ideas--the absolute existence of another world or level of reality--but to develop our ability to see beyond ourselves a dialectical teaching story designed to subvert and thus transform our perceptions of the world ("Subversive Activity" 83-4)

The reader's experience in moving through the shifting perspectives in the novels is the meaning of Canopus Lessing shares her vision that the dancer is the dance with quantum mechanics, as well as with Yeats

> The Wu Li Masters move in the midst of all this, now dancing this way, now that, sometimes with a heavy beat, sometimes with lightness and grace, ever flowing freely Now they become the dance, now the dance becomes them This is the message of the Wu Li Masters not to confuse the type of dance that they are doing with the fact that they are dancing (Zukav 43)

Contemporary criticism distinguishes between metafiction, surfiction, the postmodern novel, the anti-novel, self-conscious narration, and other related genres I use the term "metafictive" in the sense that Raymond Federman uses "surfictive" when he speaks of fiction becoming

> the metaphor of its own narrative progress. This does not mean just 'a novel of the novel'--but rather it will create a kind of writing, a kind of discourse whose shape will be an interrogation, an endless interrogation of what it is doing while doing it, an endless denunciation of its fraudulence, of what it really is: an illusion (a fiction), just as life is an illusion (a fiction). (11)

Canopus is a formal anomaly, it eludes definition as a series in the traditional sense of being a sequence, or a consistent symbolic system (as Elizabeth Maslen notes [8]). Canopus forms patterns of movement, a dance. In general terms, Shikasta, Sirian Experiments and Sentimental Agents (the first, third and fifth novels) sketch a complex cosmology influenced by three empires: Canopus, Sirius, and Puttoria. Planet 8 is simpler and smaller in scope, and involves only one of the three empires: Canopus. The second of the five Canopus novels, Marriages, is unique within and axial to the series.

An essential issue in Canopus concerns the benevolence of the Canopeans: Canopus, Sirius, and Puttoria are generally accepted by critics as symbolic of forces of good, misguided but good, and evil, respectively. This reading renders Lessing's cosmology incomplete and inconsistent, incomplete as she does not account for the problem of evil, and inconsistent when viewed within the context of the rest of her work. As Guido Kums comments,

> All this adds up to a curiously ambivalent picture of Canopus in the series on the one hand Canopus stands for the powers of good, for civilization and spiritual growth which it tries to enhance with superhuman, metaphysical means, and on the other hand Canopus is singularly powerless and fallible when confronted with apparently minor and often material problems (272)

Critics who accept Canopus as symbolic of good find the series to be problematic, they succumb to the stasis of dualistic association Lessing writes of paradox rather than of opposition To read Canopus as a struggle between good and evil forces is to divorce the novels from the rest of her work We need to heed Lessing's exhortation to read her novels in the way they are shaped ("Preface" GN)

Lessing writes a satirical subtext into Canopus that undermines the official text, it is not set in opposition to the official text, but in addition to it It is that which makes readers uneasy about Canopus the relationship between the two texts creates paradox The official text institutes Canopus as a benevolent cosmic empire requiring its subjects' obedience, the "Necessity" of heeding Canopean wisdom Lessing's subtext deconstructs the official text, questioning its authority The essential deconstructive current of the metafictive Canopus is a frame-breaking process

which undermines the authority of conventional narrative process Lessing frames that which is perceived through various narrative perceptions, then breaks those perceptual frames by making readers aware of the role of perception in creating different realities Marriages, viewed in relation to the other novels, emerges as a metaphoric model of this subversive activity

The overlying associative pattern of movement (the dance of reading Canopus) originates in Shikasta This first novel provides the cosmology, the pattern of the series On its title page, Shikasta purports to be a "compilation of documents selected to offer a very general picture of Shikasta for the use of first-year students of Canopean Colonial Rule " Lessing has long been noted for consistently and unequivocally denigrating formal education, as in her "Preface" to GN, as a "pernicious" system of "indoctrination"

> Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this
> 'You are in the process of being indoctrinated We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture moulded and patterned to fit the narrow and particular needs of this particular society'
> The point is, we are all so used to it, we no longer see how bad it is
> I am not used to it, because I left school when I was

> fourteen There was a time I was sorry about this, and believed I had missed out on something valuable Now I am grateful for a lucky escape (36-8)

By designating Shikasta as the text for a universal university course on imperialism, Lessing undermines Canopean authority from the outset

Shikasta is ostensibly a retrospective history of the human race, set within a cosmology of the influence of three galactic empires Lessing paints her cosmology with a broad brush-stroke Accordingly, "speculative fiction" is a more comfortable term for Shikasta than "science fiction," since the novel does not focus on creating a singular and consistent cosmology supported by scientific details Science fiction writers traditionally create elaborately consistent cosmologies, their aim is to immerse readers in an alternative reality In Shikasta, as in the other Canopus novels, the reader's attention is directed primarily to a complex set of shifting perspectives; the supporting scientific detail is incidental The "science" in Lessing's science fiction is to be found in her integration of quantum and relativity theory with speculative myth

Lessing draws attention to the deconstructive framing devices

in Canopus. In Shikasta, a retrospective apocalypse, the novel begins at the end and ends at the beginning. Lessing writes relativity theory as fiction, she directs her readers to time and space as mental constructs, to the provisional nature of reality.

That retrospective view becomes a vehicle for ironic comment. Interconnected narrative frames create fragments of differing perspectives. The implied reader, the cosmic undergraduate, is distinguished from the actual reader, so there is no comfortable collaboration between narrator and reader. The alternation of typefaces, the variety of narrators, the insertion of titles of reports, journal entries, excerpts from books and documents from different sources, along with other framing techniques fragment this novel and others in the series.

Gore Vidal accuses Lessing of creating an inconsistent fiction. He charges that the illusion of Shikasta's cosmology is broken on the title page, as the book purports to be a series of otherworld documents related to Shikasta, yet contains contemporary publishing information. "At the bottom of the page, one's eye is suddenly delighted by the homely phrase 'Alfred A. Knopf New York 1979.' There is not much music in Lessing's spheres" (202). On the contrary,

Lessing's intent in Shikasta and throughout Canopus is to be discordant. She sets out to shatter the illusion of the fictional reality. Readers are not to settle comfortably into an alternate reality, they are to be reminded constantly that this is a fictional world. Shikasta is indeed "the broken one" (Sirian Experiments 25); the title's meaning anticipates the novel's thematic and formal "breaking" of dualism, as well as anticipating the association and direction of the series as a whole.

Lessing formally deconstructs the official text of Shikasta. There is an inferred analogy between Canopus/author/Authority/God. In the orthodox text, Canopus (Canopean agents are referred to collectively as "Canopus") is the author of a textbook. Language is emphasized, through many specific references to finding the right word: "But the main cause of the disaster was what that word *dis-aster* implies" (35), "The Degenerative Disease, as we define it" (42), "The aim of the Pre-Lock Phase on Rohanda had been to develop the powers--for want of a better word. When the Lock took place the powers, vibrations, whatever word you like, since all are inaccurate and approximate" (51).

Canopus is presented as God-like, the benevolent and wise

omniscient author, the dominant voice. The Canopean talisman or symbol of authority is appropriately "the Signature". In the official text, Canopus is the author/ity. Yet Lessing creates a subversive, ironic subtext by stressing the limitations of language. In quantum theory, the English language and the symbolic language of Mathematics are inadequate.

> Getting lost in the interaction of symbols is analogous to mistaking the shadows on the wall of the cave for the real world outside the cave (which is direct experience). The answer to this predicament is to approach subatomic phenomena, as well as experience in general, with a language of mythos rather than a language of logos. (Zukav 277)

By establishing Canopus as authority, analogous to the traditional omniscient author, while stressing the limitations of language, Lessing would have us question all authority.

In Shikasta, Johor confirms the existence of an ironic subtext.

> But when the Gods explode, or err, or dissolve into flying clouds of gas, or shrink, or expand, or whatever else their fates might demand, then the miniscule items of their substance may in their small ways express--not protest, which of course is inappropriate to their station in life--but an acknowledgement of the existence of irony. yes, they may sometimes allow themselves--always with respect--the mildest possible grimace of irony. (58)

In the orthodox or official text, Canopus rules through the Lock, the flow of the substance of we feeling (SOWF). That Lock is

remarkably like Martha's experience of wedlock, the dualistic orthodox perception of marriage in which the husband, as authoritarian provider, requires his wife's obeisance In the Canopus/Rohanda marriage, Canopus plays the husband-like role of Provider, Rohanda the wifely role of subordinate "Necessity" represents the dualistic stasis, the need to have one of the two binaries as subordinate, one as dominant The term Lock suggests wedlock, and implies a key there is no key The subtext is not a consistent alternative to the official text but a process of questioning that undermines the official text's authority

Through the "Necessity," Lessing points to the stasis (Lock) of the dualistic opposition of good/evil By highlighting the unwritten law of the Necessity, and leading the reader to wonder why nobody questions it, Lessing creates the ironic tension that is essential to her vision She leads the reader to consciousness of the cosmic battle between good (Canopus) and evil (Puttoria) as a state of being Locked into an either/or duality

"Necessity" in the orthodox text of Shikasta is described as "voluntary submission to the great Whole . . . this submission, this obedience, was not serfdom or slavery . . . but the source of their

health, and their future and their progress" (41) Lessing subverts this obedience by presenting it as above question, while leading readers through a questioning process Consequently, critics who read only the official text are troubled

> However, in positing this Necessity as the universal ultimate rationale which does not itself need explanation, Doris Lessing bars the way to legitimate questions What is this Necessity and what does it involve? Where does it come from? (Kums 272)

In fact, Lessing's intention in Canopus is to direct readers to ask those very questions

In the official text, the Necessity is the surrender of individual will to the needs of the collective Individualism is the "Degenerative Disease," anarchy

> To identify ourselves as individuals--this is the very essence of the Degenerative Disease, and every one of us in the Canopean Empire is taught to value ourselves only insofar as we are in harmony with the plan (55)

In the subversive subtext, the movement from individual to collective is paradoxical Authority, good or bad, is the collective power of a group of individuals Canopeans and Sirians refer to themselves collectively as "Canopus" and "Sirius" The Representative for Planet 8 is a collective entity The marriage of

individuals into a collective in the official text is necessary, it is for the greatest good, yet the lack of free will makes one uneasy.

In Sentimental Agents the individual

> is an animal, recently (historically speaking) evolved from a condition of being in groups, small or large, inside which everything that will conduce to the survival of the group is an imperative, and where individuals can expect to receive what they need; while outsiders are enemies, who are bad, to be ignored if possible, threatened if they intrude themselves, destroyed if necessary. (125-6)

This is Lessing's Zen koan, a riddle which frustrates readers who believe in logical reasoning, either/or. Her subtext, with quantum logic, converts opposition into paradox as an escape from traditional dualism.

From cosmic Shikasta, the reader descends into Marriages, which is much smaller in scope. The only transition between these first two novels is a brief mention in Shikasta of the existence of the Zones, "the various levels of being which lie in concentric shells around the planet, six of them in all" (16), and of Zones Four and Five as "lively," "pleasant" places (259). Zone Six is described at length in the first novel, and briefly mentioned in the second, along with an allusion to Shammat's influence.

> A man came through. That was in my father's time. I was a boy. I listened. He said he had come from--where was it? Not Zone

> Five. Was it Zone Six perhaps? . . . It is a place somewhere. A planet. It is an evil race. They kill and torture each other all the time, for the sake of it. (123)

Apart from these brief allusions, Marriages is conspicuous by its difference. It has elements of spiritual allegory, fantasy, and feminist critical utopia. It seems, as Betsy Draine notes (144), simple and lyrical when compared to the complex, disturbing Shikasta. The juxtaposition of Shikasta and Marriages impels the reader to question its parenthetic inclusion: why does Lessing move from complex space fiction to simple allegory? In retrospect, after reading the deconstructive subtext, we can recognize Marriages as a metaphorical model of the dance that motivates Canopus.

The third novel, Sirian Experiments, projects readers back to a distant and cosmic perspective, this time through the perceptions of Sirius. It is a report by a Sirian bureaucrat, Ambien II. The focus of this novel is similar to that of Shikasta, but with a competing perspective. The Sirians also colonize Rohanda, and it is clear that their imperialism is not benevolent. If Canopus is to Sirius what Sirius is to Rohanda, then by analogy one is led to question Canopean benevolence.

As Lessing says in her preface to Sirian Experiments,

> If I were a physicist there would be no trouble at all! They can talk nonchalantly about black holes swallowing stars, black holes that we might learn to use as mechanisms for achieving time-and-space warps, sliding through them by way of mathematical legerdemain to find ourselves in realms where the laws of our universe do not apply. They nonchalantly suggest parallel universes, universes that lie intermeshed with ours but invisible to us, universes where time runs backwards, or that mirror ours. (9)

In this Preface, Lessing explains the way she uses the concepts of physics "for literary purposes" (9).

In Sirian Experiments, Lessing explores the relationship between the individual and the collective, and the role perception plays in creating reality. The reader is shown the relationship between Canopus and Sirius from both Canopean and Sirian perspectives, as well as the relationships of both empires to their colonies. These perspective shifts create an ironic tension. Although the Sirians look much worse than the Canopeans, the novel casts doubt upon the benevolence of Canopean imperialism.

The Sirians and the Canopeans are doubles. The Sirians resent Canopean authority, and the relationship between Canopus and Sirius plays with dualisms of good/evil. The analogy between Canopus/Sirius, and Sirius/Sirian subjects, creates the subtext of this third novel.

> Canopus, like ourselves, has experienced disappointment--and worse--in their career as colonizers Rohanda was not the only failure I am calling it a failure--though I know they do not--but it is no secret that I have been generally known throughout my career as belonging to that body of opinion that finds Canopus sentimental Sometimes to the point of folly What else can we call attitudes that are often uneconomic, counter-productive, wasteful of administrative effort? (19)

The Sirian perspective is dualistic either chaos or control reigns

> Our thinking had been governed by this one idea That we had abandoned chaos, and random decimation that we had advanced towards conscious and deliberate controls (30)

The tone of the novel is heavily ironic, as Canopus educates Sirius about how to be an authority, Sirius questions Canopus's authority Sirius plays the role of the resentful but obedient wife, married to her authoritative husband Readers question the authority of the official text, as it was written by Ambien II to justify herself to her administrative peers, she writes in the hope of saving her position as one of the Five

> They sent me on extended leave In other words, I am under planet arrest, on Colonized Planet 13
>
> I would do exactly the same in their place In my view the institution of the Five, now--I hope, temporarily--the Four, is the most valuable regulator of our Empire It should not be destroyed I make a point of saying this, hoping that my millennia-long service and experience will not be entirely dismissed (329)

The reader is alerted to the subjective nature of the book, since it

is, on one level, the attempt of a bureaucrat to maintain her position An ironic subtext is created as Ambien II , Sirius, subverts the authority of Sirius, when she ostensibly undermines, but actually supports the authority of Canopus

Ambien II is encouraged to associate with Canopus, to spy for the benefit of Sirius Her growing awareness that Canopus is using this situation to teach Sirius is considered to be treason, she has stepped outside the oppositional stasis of the Sirius/Canopus power struggle, a dualism created by the Sirian perspective, into a more Canopean perspective

> At the back of my mind my thoughts were racing not yet has Canopus wanted something, when it had not happened! A request became a fact, even if I seem to have done nothing to further it Everything that has passed between Sirius and Canopus, re Rohanda, between Klorathy and myself as Sirius and as Ambien, is insisting now, in a thousand voices, that what Canopus wants will come to pass The worst that can happen is that these dear colleagues of mine will punish me in some way, but this will not prevent a Sirian involvement in Rohanda This is because we are already involved, and in a way that Canopus needs--for the education of Sirius I said 'It is my belief that this association has always been for our benefit And planned to be so'
>
> This was, if you like, treason (299)

The fourth novel, Planet 8, again requires readers to descend from a distant cosmic panoramic view to a closer planetary

perspective Here Canopean authority is questioned "Canopus, when are you coming, when will you fulfill your promise to us?" (57)

> our Saviour and Maker Canopus
> Where was Canopus? Why did they delay so, and make us wait and suffer and wonder, and doubt our survival? Make us disbelieve in ourselves and in them? What was the reason for it? (62-3)

In Planet 8 the subversive subtext is explicitly quantum Canopus brought the instrument that made small things visible (123) Doeg's descriptions of those "small things" are remarkably like subatomic particle theory

> 'We learned that everything is made up of smaller things some sort of dance of pulsations the oscillations are so vast that I know this solidity I feel is nothing I have seen cells and molecules disappear into a kind of dance a dance that you modify by how you observe it ' (90-91)

This "dance of pulsations" corresponds to particle physics

> Cells, under magnification, are revealed to be patterns of molecules Molecules, under higher magnification, are discovered to be patterns of atoms, and, lastly, atoms have turned out to be patterns of subatomic particles At the subatomic level there is no longer a clear distinction between what is and what happens, between the actor and the action At the subatomic level, the dancer and the dance are one
>
> According to particle physics, the world is fundamentally dancing energy (Zukav 212)

Lessing deconstructs the authority of the solid text, matter, by a quantum shift of perspective, matter becomes energy, the text

becomes a dance

The fifth novel, Sentimental Agents, returns to the galactic scale of the first and third novels, once again dislocating the reader Words are important in this novel Grice embodies contradiction, dualism, "either I am a guest or a hostage, I can't be both" (135), but the reality is that he is both The reader is led to accept paradox as an alternative to dualism As the final book in the series, Sentimental Agents does not provide resolution or closure Lessing offers questions rather than answers

The overall movement of these novels, then, is a frame-breaking pattern which leads the reader into a dance with the reality and fiction dyad First, Shikasta establishes the dualism of the official text Canopus/good/the collective is set against Puttoria/evil/the individual These opposites vie for authority In Marriages the reader engages in a process of transcending dualism and accepting paradox In Sirian Experiments the subtext begins to intrude into the official text, the reader experiences the stasis of dualism Planet 8 shifts the reader from a cosmic to a subatomic perspective, a process of transcending dualism through quantum mechanics Guido Kums notes that the "story-like quality" of both

Marriages and Planet 8 contrasts with the "official and administrative tone" of the other novels (278). Both Planet 8 and Marriages are allegorical treatments of the Canopus themes. Finally, Sentimental Agents accepts paradox.

The first, third, fourth and fifth Canopus novels provide a parenthetic context for Marriages. Marriages is a spiritual and feminist allegory. Whatever theoretical models or other perceptual filters readers bring to the movement among the Zones (the stages to spiritual enlightenment, the dance of the seven veils, Christian eschatology), the movement or quest is more significant than identifying the stages: the dancer becomes the dance. This is the dynamic metaphor of Marriages that is central to Canopus.

Marriages

In Marriages Lessing presents a matrix, a series of manifold realities, through which she leads readers to recognize and transcend limiting perceptions Lessing herself uses the term "matrix" in describing Sufism

> Throughout the preparatory process, you are expected to study the written material the Shah makes available, most of it in his published books There is a great deal of it, of infinite variety, from scientific information to poetry and jokes and tales, some of it new minted, some of it old, and all together it is arranged to make a whole, right for this time, forming a matrix in which new outlooks, new experiences, can develop ("From Asia" 465)

This matrix is a model of the deconstructive process in Canopus of moving beyond "either/or" thinking to accept a new perceptual frame paradox Lessing deconstructs oppositions of male/female, science/art, authority/submission, literature/criticism, and reality/fiction she subverts the dominant element of each dyad, leading readers to question the authority of dualism Lessing uses marriage as a metaphor of this process

Marriages is paradoxical in terms of genre It has the elements Northrop Frye characterizes as being essential to romance a

powerful polarizing tendency, a virginal woman as sacrificial victim, comic tendencies, marriage as some kind of deliverance. The polarizing tendency characteristic of romance is apparent in the structured geography of the Zones, the ideal and the lower worlds

> Great to Small
> High to Low
> Four into Three
> Cannot go.
>
> Three comes before Four
> Our ways are peace and plenty
> Their ways--war! (11)

Al•lth is a sacrifical virgin in the romantic sense, she is violated by the brutality of Zone Four.

> Al•lth's eyes were full of tears. The women first, then the men, seeing this oaf and his ways, saw too what was in store for her--and they were about to raise their voices in lament, keening, but she lifted her hand and stopped them.
>
> 'There is no help for it,' she said in a low voice, her lips trembling. 'We have our orders. And it is clear down in Zone Four they don't like it any more than we do.' (27)

She is sacrificed to the Providers as bride. She is virgin since she represents an insular and infertile Zone. Marriages also has the comic tendencies of romance, created by the ironically self-conscious narrative voice, as well as by the contrasting viewpoints of the Zones.

> Ben Ata was standing with his arms folded, feet planted, smiling As a result of this song, the current was running strong between him and Dabeeb, whose looks at him were confident,inviting
>
> Al·Ith watched with interest Rather as she would have done the mating approaches of a couple of horses (135)

Yet despite these romantic traits, Marriages is also self-consciously anti-romantic Lessing explicitly deconstructs "the book" of conventional romance While Ben Ata fights for Al·Ith in terms typical of the romantic tradition, Al·Ith calls for a dictionary

> Violent scenes Jealousy Reproaches The men fought, decided that the friendship of men outweighed the love of women, clasped hands, drank together for the whole of a night, fell together into a canal at dawn all according to the book
>
> Ben Ata was now violently in love with Al·Ith
>
> Riding together through the golden mists, he ground his teeth and yearned towards her, while she murmured, 'Is there a dictionary in the pavilion?' (117)

Al·Ith is literally looking for a new definition of love She is uncomfortable with the conventional notion of romantic love in Zone Four, where gender roles are clearly divided and biology is destiny In her Zone, love is antiromantic, women separate biological functions from sexual needs and companionship

> She did not like this connection with him She could not remember ever before, with any man, whether for parenthood or for play, feeling this yearning, heavy, disquiet She judged it unhealthy--a projection of that Zone where all the emotions

> were so heavy and so strong . . . Surely a relation with one person that narrowed others must be wrong? How could it not be wrong? (105)

The matriarchal Zone three is a feminist utopia in which women are freed from the stasis of wedlock. Since they are not biologically, economically, emotionally or socially dependent on men, biology is not destiny. Women in Zone Three diffuse the conventional husband's role into Gene-Father, Mind-Father, and companion-lover. They undermine the conventional, polarized relationship between husband and wife.

> When she had been pregnant--and after what care, and thought, and long careful choices--in the past, she had, as soon as she had been sure, chosen as beneficial influences for her child, several men, who, knowing why they were chosen, and for what purpose, co-operated with her in this act of blessing and gracing the foetus. These men had a special place in her heart and in the annals of her Zone. (72)

Yet Zone Three has dystopic elements: its stasis is symbolized by its infertility, as neither animals nor people are conceiving plentifully (28). In Zone Three, rationality dominates emotion, unlike Zone Four, "where all the emotions were so heavy and so strong" (105).

Zone Four is a feminist dystopia, in which women obey male authority within the "painful bond" of marriage (139). Men dominate women, and women manipulate men: they "always give way and never

give in" (82) Zone Four is a patriarchal zone of the tension of opposition

> The nature of Zone Four--it was conflict and battle and warring In everything A tension and a fighting in its very substance so that every feeling, every thought held in its own opposite (144)

The sexual geography of the Zones is polarized Zone Four is dystopic, it is a country of opposition, a patriarchy, in contrast to the feminist Zone three, a country of peace

Lessing does not propose Zone Three, however, with its feminist utopian elements, as an alternative to Zone Four Although Zone Three is peaceful and more highly evolved socially than the patriarchal, primitive Zone Four, it is insular, complacent, and sterile

> But the Zones could not mingle, were inimical by nature We were not even sure where the frontier was Our side was not guarded The inhabitants of Zone Three, straying near the frontier, or approaching it from curiosity as children or young people sometimes did, found themselves afflicted with repugnance, or at the least by an antipathy to foreign affairs and atmospheres that showed itself in a cold lethargy, like boredom (12)

The marriage matrix includes the binary oppositions of utopia and dystopia, romance and anti-romance

Marriages provides a model that integrates science and art in

Canopus. Lessing uses allegorical methods in a self-conscious, highly stylized artistic form, illustrating scientific principles. Her concern with this dualistic opposition of art and science is not recent. In the Preface to TGN, she refers to this "false dichotomy":

> By the time a young person has reached the age when he has to choose (we still take it for granted that a choice is inevitable) between the arts and science, he often chooses the arts because he feels that here is humanity, freedom, choice. He does not know that he is already moulded by a system: he does not know that the choice itself is the result of a false dichotomy rooted in the heart of our culture. (465)

Marriages is informed by quantum theories of perception, it uproots this dualistic opposition between science and the arts:

> 'Reality' is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is what we believe. What we believe is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends upon what we look for. What we look for depends upon what we think. What we think depends upon what we perceive. What we perceive determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality. (Zukav 328)

Critical readers who perceive Marriages as subscribing to the conventions of romance are confronted with its anti-romantic tendencies, those who perceive it to be utopian are confronted with its dystopic elements. It is self-consciously artistic as spiritual allegory, yet fundamentally scientific in nature. Its opposing impulses compel readers to move through the opposition created by

different perspectives into the paradox of a contradictory reality Marriage has many potential forms beyond the conventional notion of wedlock, of a dualistic opposition between male and female This is Lessing's feminist mode of discourse, the quantum flavour of her matrix This is the science in her science fiction

> The wave-particle duality was (is) one of the thorniest problems in quantum mechanics Physicists like to have tidy theories which explain everything, and if they are not able to do that, they like to have tidy theories why they can't The wave-particle duality is not a tidy situation In fact, its untidiness has forced physicists into radical new ways of perceiving physical reality These new perceptual frames are considerably more compatible with the nature of personal experience than were the old
>
> For most of us, life is seldom black and white The wave-particle duality marked the end of the "Either-Or" way of looking at the world Physicists no longer accept the proposition that light is either a particle or a wave because they had "proved" to themselves that it was both, depending on how they looked at it (Zukav 89)

In terms of form, the other Canopus novels are parenthetic to Marriages Lessing places this small, condensed tale within the context of an expanded and complex cosmology in order to draw attention to its different form and genre The shifts in perspective initiated by inter-zonal marriages are analogous to the shifts in perspective in Canopus as a whole The Providers and the Canopeans seem to be beneficent, yet their authority is systematically

undermined the conventional dualistic parameters of "good" and "evil" are inadequate to express reality. The simple, stylized dynamics of Marriages mirror the more complex, deconstructive frame-breaking processes of Canopus.

Marriages begins with "rumours," "gossip," and "song" (11). The informal, unreliable, unofficial nature of these narratives undermines the official tone of the Canopus documents. The ironic tone of the chroniclers subverts the authority of their narrative. As they present their official text, they deconstruct it: "I am saying that each despised the other? No, we are not permitted actively to criticize the dispensations of the Providers" (11). "We asked ourselves if we had grown into the habit of seeing ourselves falsely . . . We had perhaps grown insular? Self-sufficing?" (14). The inverted syntax suggests both a question and a statement, a contradiction typical of Marriages. From their retrospective narrative viewpoint, the Chroniclers comment on their perceptual shifts caused by the marriages. Their tone is often playful and light in contrast to the import of the tone of official texts.

The Chroniclers are poets and song-makers who self-consciously paint reality as a creation of their own biased

perceptions

> This scene is always depicted thus there is a star-crowded sky, a slice of bright moon, and the soldier striding forward made visible and prominent because his chest armour and headpiece and his shield are shining Beside him Al•lth is visible only as a dark shadow, but her eyes gleam softly out of her veil (25)

> This is a scene particularly loved by our artists, who embellish it with a vast yellow moon positioned so that it is close to, or behind, Al•lth's head Or there is a delightful crescent set off by a star or two And often they add a large peacock, whose shimmering tail fills the orchard with reflected lights
>
> But it is on the whole a realistic depiction, and I am saying this because it is the last of the truthful scenes No, it is necessary, it is forgivable, in us, the songsters and the Chroniclers and the portrayers, when we soften certain facts (277)

The scenes are presented visually, frozen in the present tense Their self-conscious tone directs our attention to the static creations of a chosen perception

> There is of course always--there has to be!--a difference between the way their artists and ours portray the various incidents in the tale of our queen and their king
>
> There have never been lacking scholars only too willing to devote their lives to the analysis of this or that picture or ballad, and while this exercise does not seem to me useful, I must confess I have always been a student of the different emphasis given by the two realms (182)

Through the marriage matrix, Lessing points to the opposition between what we normally think of as fiction and reality, and plays

with the role of perception in creating reality. The official text is static. The subtext is movement, the process of questioning the authority of the official text. The simplicity of this movement, this process of deconstructing opposition, allows the reader to recognize the same process in the complex cosmology of the other Canopus texts, a process by which Canopean authority is progressively undermined.

Readers are not invited to view marriage on an individual or personal level, as Lessing unites the individual and the collective within this matrix. Al·lth, Ben Ata and Vahshi are symbols rather than characters.

> We are the visible aspect of a whole we all share, that we all go to form. Al·lth was, for most of her life, queen. . . the substance of Zone Three expressed itself in her, in that shape . . . queen. Or at other times mother, friend, animal-knower. And when she went down to Zone Four how may we assess the way Zone Three squeezed and forced itself in there, as Ben Ata's wife. . . (242)

These symbols are explicitly identified as fictional and representative. "Another figure that has never achieved realism is Dabeeb" (278). She is symbolic of women who are subjugated by male authority. "It [the name "Dabeeb"] means something that has been made soft by beating" (81). The marriage between Al·lth and Ben Ata

is a symbolic marriage of their realms, rather than their personalities

> They felt for each other at that moment friendship Comradeship If they were nothing else, these two, they were representatives and embodiments of their respective countries Concern for their realms was what they were (61)

The effects of this marriage are felt in both Zones In Zone Four, the oppositional stasis between men and women is broken Before the marriage, gender roles are divided, marriage returns the men to Ben Ata's kingdom, to share in the women's world

> Ben Ata thought that he would go on an inspection of his kingdom to watch life and strength flowing into it, with the return of the men
>
> But meanwhile he found himself with his son, in the garden among the fountains He sat with the child on the raised white marble plinth and lifted his face so that he could see the mountains of Al·lth his mother, and he spoke to him of Zone Three and how one day he would go there, and learn all its ways And the women's ceremonies were wild and victorious, and for the first time the men joined them This new spirit flowing through and around the Zone gladdened Ben Ata, and made the child confident and strong (267)

Ben Ata and Vahshi's marriage, and Al·lth's union with Zone Two, are peripheral, and very briefly sketched in the book Their purpose is to suggest that the dynamics of quest are plural, open-ended Zones Three and Four cannot remain locked in dualistic stasis with Al·lth and Ben Ata's marriage, they transcend opposition and

move into paradox.

> They sat within each other's arms, cheeks laid together, and looked up the pass at the hanging blue mists, and thought that they were still married, for all that they were so finally separated. . . . One day when Al·Ith climbed the road to visit the other Zone, she did not come back. Others of her friends disappeared in the same way--just as, not often, there were always some-- people from Zone Four came to our Zone after being attracted to it, sometimes for all their lives, and found a place with us, and stayed. (298)

Characters and marriages are symbolic. These symbols can be read in a variety of ways: as the sacred marriage of earth and sky, as a vision of androgyny, a reconciliation between the sexes, as a Jungian individuation of the self, as an allegory of Christian eschatology or other sacred traditions of spiritual enlightenment. To engage in critical debate about what it is that the Zones signify is to remain locked in the dualistic stasis of either/or; it is the movement among the Zones that Lessing's matrix is concerned with, the process of moving from opposition into paradox.

Al·Ith and Ben Ata, as symbols of their respective Zones, are ordered by the Providers to marry. The Chroniclers of Zone Three ask, "What, in this context, was a wedding? What, even, a marriage?" (12). Lessing provokes questions. Why do the Providers order Al·Ith and Ben Ata, and Ben Ata and Vahshi, to marry? By what

authority? Why do Al·Ith, Ben Ata and Vahshi submit to this authority? Are the Providers Canopean? How does Marriages relate to the other Canopus novels? The Chroniclers, the characters, and readers progressively question the authority of the Providers, just as Canopean authority is progressively undermined in the novels Lessing engages readers in a textual process of questioning In "PV," she warns of unquestioning submission to authority

> Even the vision of the madman is not so bad We are all of us, at times, this madman Most of us have said, at some time or other, exhausted with the pressure of living, 'Oh for God's sake, press the button, turn down the switch, we've all had enough ' Because we can understand the madman, since he is part of us, we can deal with him, he is not so frightening as that other image of a young empty-faced technician in anonymous overalls, saying, 'Yes sir!' and pressing the button The anonymous technician, one of the growing army managing the departments of death, has no responsibility He might turn the switch looking over his shoulder for confirmation at the Chairman of the Committee who ordered him to do it And the Committee to another Committee And the Chairman of that final superior Committee, one of those little half-men that we see on the newsreels, with their self-consciously democratic faces--that Chairman will say 'I represent the people ' And the people is the brown man sitting under a tree, holding the flesh of his forearm to the heat of the sun, thinking that the warmth of the great sun is the warmth also of that final blast of heat, the people is me (10)

The Providers represent the "Necessity" of authority (151), just as Canopus represents authority They are "that final superior

Committee," representing the people. In Lessing's "vision of the madman," marriage provokes "lunatic" characters to question the authority of the Providers. The subversion or questioning of authority increases progressively throughout Marriages, as it does throughout the Canopus novels.

Al·Ith is the first to question authority. Ben Ata obeys "the conventions" of the Providers (45), accepting his reality in Zone Four as the only reality, until his marriage to Al·Ith. He speaks of the laws of the Providers:

> 'I did not make the law. It has always been our law.'
> 'Always, always, always ... how do you know?'
> 'I do not think that any one of us has ever questioned it. You are the first.' (60)

Al·Ith later asks Dabeeb,

> 'Have you ever thought of rebelling?'
> Dabeeb lowered her voice and said, 'But it is the Order ... is it not?'
> 'I don't know.'
> 'You don't?' (83)

Al·Ith and Ben Ata cannot determine the source of the drumming, the Orders from the Providers. Where do these Orders come from?

> Meanwhile, the drum from the gardens beat, beat, beat ... they sprang up and went out and wandered everywhere over the

> garden, from one end to the other They could see no drummer and no drums But the sound was there--somewhere--here?--no, there--they were always on the point of coming on the source of it, but always failed (91)

Ben Ata begins to question the fundamental martial philosophy of Zone Four, in response to Al·Ith's questioning

> 'If we have no enemies, then why do we have armies?' he asked her, not at all in jest, but in respect for her questioning of him
>
> 'Who do you fight?'
>
> He was tense and silent She knew he was remembering the pillage and the rapine of innumerable campaigns, and thinking that if these had in fact been for some ghost of a mistaken idea then (93)

Al Ith asks, "How is it possible that <u>They</u> [the Providers] expect us to understand each other?" (125) Ben Ata also wonders about the Orders from the Providers "'What ' he breathed 'There is something we have to <u>they</u> want us to" (127)

Murti questions the Orders from the Providers, as they are contaminating Zone Three

> But now when you come back from there, you come in a cloud of black No You must not come again until--'
>
> 'Until what? And I am not obeying <u>my</u> will, but theirs ' Murti nodded 'That is not my business But I can tell you that you are bringing with you a contagion It is not your fault Nothing is your fault, Al·Ith How can it be? (148)

Al·Ith considers that "The Providers, surely, had erred, been wrong in judgement" (230) Ben Ata questions the Providers,

complaining that their Orders are "ambiguous" (251, 253). Vahshi of Zone Five also comes to question the authority of the Providers:

> For what she did, the choices she made, she would have to give an account--but to whom, though? Ben Ata spoke of those he called the Providers. Who were they? How did he know they existed? It made her uncomfortable to feel she was overlooked and watched, and even, so he suggested, directed. (266)

As a result of the marriages, many question the authority of the Providers:

> All of us questioned the marriage again, and felt undermined: some were even wondering about the Providers--if they had made a mistake, or had been careless in allowing themselves to be wrongly interpreted. Such thoughts were new with us, and an uneasy troubling current was set at work throughout the Zone. (282)

Even Jarnti of Zone Four, whose unquestioning obedience as a loyal soldier defines him, learns to question:

> 'Dabeeb!' he might demand, broken but stubborn. 'Dabeeb, you talk of the Providers. You talk of them... one'd think you knew them the way you talk! But they take everything away. That's what they do... they lead you one way, or they let you go all your life one way, and you feed yourself on it and you think that it is everything and then--pouf! It's gone! Gone... Dabeeb, what do you say to that, eh? Tell me!'
>
> 'We have to believe they know what they are doing, my dear.'
>
> 'We do? Well, I'm not so sure.' (288-89)

These characters question the authority of the Providers, just as the reader of the subversive subtext in the other Canopus novels

is progressively led to question not only the authority of the official text and that of Canopus, but also the authority of dualistic association or binary thinking On all levels Lessing provokes readers to question the authority of dualistic convention

In Marriages as in the other Canopus novels, dancing and singing symbolize union, just as wedding dances and songs are the ritual enactments of sexual union, of conception and birth Wedlock originated as "a pledge that is danced" (Hinz 912) As the marriages are between Zones, dances and songs depict the movement among the Zones Dancing and singing in Marriages are symbolized by movement around the static, frozen pictures (Ruth Whittaker notes [109]) of self-conscious narrative comment The first of these friezes is entitled "Al·lth's Animals"

> Our Chroniclers and artists have made a great thing of this exchange between Al·lth and the soldiers Some of the tales begin at this point She is erect before them, on her horse, who hangs his head, because of the long, difficult ride She is soothing it with her white hand, which glitters with jewels . . but Al·lth was known for her simple dress, her absence of jewels and splendour! They show her long black hair streaming, the veil streaming with it and held on her forehead with a brilliant clasp They show the angry commander, his face distorted, and the jeering soldiers The bitter wind is indicated by flying tinted clouds, and the grasses of the plain lie almost flat under it (19)

This frozen image is followed by the movement of Al Ith's descent into Zone Four. The descents and ascents are symbolic of dance. Her concern for the stasis within her Zone, the infertility of the animals, as she pauses in her descent to Zone Four, constitutes a second frieze.

> This scene, too, is one much depicted. It always shows Al·Ith, alert and smiling, surrounded by the men and women of the settlement, with her cup of wine in her hand, and beside her Jarnti, drowsy and drugged. Above them the wind has scoured the sky clean and glittering. The little trees are leaning almost to the ground. The herds surround the fireside scene, looking in and wondering, waiting for a glance from their queen. (26)

Alternating scenes of stasis and movement describe Al·Ith's descent into Zone Four, including "Jarnti's Walk" (30) and "The Riderless Horse" (38). These static pictures contrast with the dynamics of movement among the Zones. The only motion in the static vignette is that of the artist who creates the picture: the narrative voice which interrupts its own narrative to point to it as a fictional construct. This is a dynamic metaphor for the subversive subtext that questions authority in the other Canopus novels. Songs and dances undermine authority, the official "reality" of these pictures.

There was a ballad about how the horse of the dead Al Ith had gone with the troop of soldiers to the king to tell him that there could be no marriage. The horse stood on the threshold of the wedding chamber and neighed three times, Ben Ata, Ben Ata, Ben Ata--and when he came out, said to him:

> Cold and dark your wedding bed,
> O King, your willing bride is dead
> The realm she rules is cold and dark.

And this was popular, and sung when everyone knew that Al Ith was not dead, and that the marriage was a fact. That it was not the smoothest of marriages was of course known from the beginning. How? But how do these things get themselves known? The song was always being added to. Here is a verse that came from the married quarters of the army camps:

> Brave King, your realm is strong and fine.
> Where beasts may mate, then women pine.
> I will be your slave, brave King. (39)

The movement of singing and dancing thaws the frozen stasis of the pictures. These are agents of change, they transcend the oppositional "official" text chronicled by the static vignettes. The songs from Zone Four contradict the songs of Zone Three. "In their Zone, the riderless horse gave birth to songs of death and sorrow, in ours to songs about loving friendship" (40). Songs unite the Zones.

Dancing and singing are female modes of discourse. In Lessing's vision, women are "the custodians of all kinds of private beliefs" (101), they subvert the patriarchal authority of Zone Four, of the Providers, of dualism. Women hold secret festivals of dance

and song, "rituals" and "ceremonies" (169-70), questioning male authority "no man ever knew when the women congregated They were not told" (165) At one of these ritual ceremonies, Dabeeb sings

> 'If I said to you, you are a man,
> You'd pick up a stick,
> Throw it for a dog to fetch
> And so you went to school!
> Very well, let's play the fool!'
>
> 'Oh, little boy, dear baby,
> Why are you so slow and silly?
> Swaggering and silly (170)

Women are the custodians of this secret knowledge that men should "climb the mountains" (174), broaden their perspective, yet the women cannot do it alone Both men and women together, as gender opposites, must unite

> 'The mountains mass and fill the sky,
> Yours to hold and know,
> You loiter here below,
> This is your rule,
> To play the fool
>
> Match your women, men and man,
> Without you they can't,
> Without you they won't,
> Bend the rule
> That plays the fool (171)

When Dabeeb visits Al•lth just before her absorption into Zone

Two, it is through song that the women realize that marriage has broken the dualistic opposition between the Zones

> 'What are you singing?' said Al•lth, sitting straight up
> 'It's a new song.'
> 'Yes, I know. I haven't heard it. Where is it from?'
> 'It is from the desert. From Zone Five,' said Dabeeb, apologetic.
> 'From <u>there</u>.' Al•lth was kneeling, leaning forward, hands gripped together in front of her. And Dabeeb could not help smiling.
> 'Oh, you have changed so much, Al•lth!' (279)
> 'That it should come from there,' Al•lth was whispering, 'there.' (280)

Water and drumming are images of birth associated with dance and song. A drum starts beating at the moment the first marriage is accomplished (89), its beat is analogous to the pulse of blood throughout <u>Marriages</u>. It is likened to a heartbeat, the driving life force throughout the Zones. Al•lth and Ben Ata are "Walking again in the mists and splashings of the gardens, with the drum everywhere, in their blood, and in their minds" (92). The drum is an unborn baby's heartbeat. "She even heard the drum, faint, but there. She put her hand to cup her lower belly, thinking that she heard that small heart but it was the drum" (113). Ben Ata

> would press his ear there [on Al•lth's pregnant belly], shutting out all the other sounds from this dear and familiar house of flesh, so that he could hear only the drum, the drum, beating

into his ears and setting the tides of his own blood (158)

The drumming symbolizes the pulse of life infused into the Zones through marriage, sexuality, creation. Sexual union symbolizes the merging of the Zones (189), the fertility of marriage.

> They made love all that night . . . and when they woke, at the same moment, they heard a drum beat, beat, from the end of the garden, and this rhythm they knew at once was signalling to the whole land, that the marriage was properly accomplished. And the drum was to beat, from that time on, from when they met, until they parted, so that everyone could know they were together, and share in the marriage, in thought, and in sympathetic support--and, of course, in emulation. (89)

In Zone Three, making love means to be "with" someone, in Zone Four, it means to "have" them. Lessing italicizes "with" and "have" to highlight this difference (136, 141). In Zone Four marriage is "to have and to hold" (192), a man owns his wife and children.

> Yet this child was felt to be Ben Ata's son. Not her son. This <u>mine</u>, <u>mine</u>, <u>mine</u> about a child paid every kind of reverence to the flesh, but where was the acknowledgement of the high and fine influences that fed every child. . . . Anyone could lick a child all over as if it were a puppy or kitten . . . one might not, most definitely <u>could</u> not, say of a child, 'mine, mine.' (193)

This sense of personal ownership within marriage in Zone Four contrasts with Zone Three, where the concept of marriage is collective rather than personal, matriarchal rather than patriarchal.

In Zone Three,

> Every child in the Zone had Mind-Fathers, who were as responsible for it as wete the Gene-Fathers These men formed a group who,with the Gene-Mother, and the women who cared for the child, considered themselves joint-parents, forever available to her, or him, any time they were needed, collectively and individually (72)

The marriage matrix unites oppositions of personal and collective, male and female

The marriage pavilion in Zone Four is consistently associated with the element of water rainfall, fountains, the fluid nature of the union Water is metonymously associated with drumming and dancing, all are fluid, life-giving, symbolic of birth

> All waters are symbolic of the Great Mother and associated with birth, the feminine principle, the universal womb, the prima materia, the waters of fertility and refreshment and the fountain of life they are associated with the moisture and circulatory movement of blood and the sap of life as opposed to the dryness and static condition of death, they revivify and infuse new life, hence baptism by water or blood in initiatory religions in which the water or blood also washes away the old life and sanctify the new (Cooper 188)

From the marriage pavilion in Zone Four, "The fountains could be heard, and the running of waters" (43) "The great pleasant room was full of water sounds, and the watery reflections from the pools and fountains" (45) "The cistern contains the fountain overflows" (Blake

"The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" 8 15)

After their first love-making, Ben Ata wakes to the danger of water

> His senses were anxiously at work, mapping the space that surrounded him where it should not, coming to terms with sounds that suggested whispering, danger His tent flap had been left open . but the opening was higher than it should be his tent had been torn away by a wind, or an attack? Water . water flowing, and rising the canals were overflowing, would he find himself standing in water? Ready to accept the cold wet clasp of a calamitous flood around his ankles, he swung his feet onto a dry floor (49)

Water is a danger to Ben Ata, since it represents the flow of change within the rigidly hierarchical life of Zone Four This flow of movement among the Zones initiates the search for new perspectives, fresh ways of seeing

> There was a continuous movement now, from Zone Five to Zone Four And from Zone Four to Zone Three--and from us, up the pass There was a lightness, a freshness, and an enquiry and a remaking and an inspiration, where there had been only stagnation And closed frontiers
>
> For this is how we all see it now (299)

The marriage matrix explores the dynamics of shifting perspectives, leading readers through sets of opposing impulses into an acceptance of paradox, symbolized by the birth of Arusi a new vision

Conclusion

Arusi is described in Marriages in terms of vision, and in terms of the blue associated with Zone Two. He is an interzonal child. Al•Ith speaks to Ben Ata of Arusi: "'He will be built like you,' she whispered,' but he will have a look of me--he has the eyes of our country'" (210), his eyes are noted by Ben Ata and Dabeeb as well. Arusi is associated with the blue of Zone Two, from his infancy, as he sleeps on a blue cushion (214). Both Al•Ith and Ben Ata hold him up to see the blue mountainous Zone (202, 267). Before Arusi's birth, perception of what was beyond one's Zone was punished in Zone Four, and unthought of in Zone Three. Al•Ith feeds their son with the blue of Zone Two,

> Al•Ith sat and took her child in her lap and bent and gazed into his eyes and fed him with what she had brought from there.
>
> 'Take it back,' she was whispering. 'Take it to your father. Give it to Zone Four--feed, strengthen, nourish, endure.'
>
> 'What is it that you see up there?' asked Dabeeb.
>
> 'I am not able to see. But I do see more and more . . . there are beings like flames, like fire, like light . . . it is as if wind had become fire, or flames . . . the blue is only the matrix of the real light, Dabeeb, and if I shut my eyes--'and she shut her eyes--'I can see images, pictures, reflections.' (281)

The marriage of Al•Ith and Ben Ata, of Zones Three and Four, creates new paradigms. A paradigm as a framework, a singular way

of looking at things, is like a Zone with boundaries Arusi's birth generates shifts in these paradigms, movement among the Zones Al•Ith ascends into Zone Two, Ben Ata descends into Zone Five, and visits Al Ith at the border of Zone Two, Dabeeb ascends into Zone Three, Vahshi ascends into Zone Four Marriage and birth generate new perceptions "Ben Ata "was riding back and across and around and everywhere through his realm He wanted to see how it struck these new eyes of his--a vision that was the gift of Al•Ith" (194)

> He had not suspected that there could be a different view of the matter It seemed to him that he had spent most of his life blind to his own nature (203)

Al•Ith wonders why she and others in Zone Three have not seen Zone Two

> Why did not people venture here occasionally, or even make it a part of their lives? Why did Zone Three live without ever thinking of this neighbour of theirs, separated from them by nothing, not even a frontier Nothing here was familiar to her Yet the strongest feeling in her was that she did know this place, it was familiar to her--she was at home, even while she recognized nothing at all (237-8)

Their new vision cleanses the doors of perception (Blake "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" 14) After Arusi's birth, Al•Ith and Ben Ata speak with a new awareness of how perception creates reality Ben Ata "was able to observe himself in this scene with an eye which he

knew was Al•lth's--or at least was her gift to him" (256). Blue is analogous to this new perception. Al•lth describes the "blue falseness". "It seemed almost as if a blue falseness was claiming her mind. What falseness?" (236).

> Into that Zone she had taken the senses of Zone Three and, of course, Zone Four, whose citizen she now was, but had tried to take in, to assess, that high delicate place but without what was needed to assess it. Who could tell her what in fact she could have seen there, if differently tuned, if more finely set? . . . And those eyes would soon see the springing cold flames that fed on the blue base that was all she could take in . . . and she could see. (240-241)

The blue of Zone Two is all that Al•lth perceives, yet she is aware that her perception is limited. The Chroniclers relate that "every one of us anywhere is what we think and imagine. No more and no less. We are the dull blue base to the wildest subtlest flames" (244). Al lth is conscious that she needs only to change her perception in order to change her reality.

Al•lth's movement into the blue Zone, Ben Ata's marriage to Vahshi, and the birth of their daughter create a potentially perpetual process of marriage and birth. Lessing focuses on the dance, rather than on the dancers. Vahshi's daughter and Al•lth's son will continue to break boundaries: "this girl child would be as much of

Zone Four as of Zone Five, but in partnership with an already born son" (265)

This new vision is the conceptual denominator of the literary, philosophical and scientific theories that inform Lessing's writing perception creates reality Her work progressively questions authority the authority of Canopus and of the Providers, the authority of traditional novelistic convention and the author's omniscience, the authority of western dualistic thought Marriages provides a matrix within which Lessing transforms oppositional dualism into paradox, a marriage of binaries Hers is a feminist discourse, hers is a quantum logic

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Title of Thesis: The Marriage Quest in Canopus: A Study of Doris Lessing's The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five

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June 22, 1992