



modern
fiction
studies

doris lessing number
spring 1980
volume 26

\$3.00
number 1

mfs

THE MOMENT OF REVELATION IN
MARTHA QUEST AND COMPARABLE
MOMENTS BY TWO MODERNISTS



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IN "TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT" T. S. Eliot emphasizes that the writer both learns from and transforms literary tradition. I shall explore Doris Lessing's involvement in this process, especially her relation to the modernist tradition, by analyzing her use of the moment of revelation, which may be described as a sudden, unforgettable revelation of truth through something comparable to a mystical experience. The inclusion of such moments in literature has a long history, but as Morris Beja has established in his study *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*, they appeared in early twentieth-century fiction with "a frequency unmatched and even unapproached in the fiction of the past."¹ In this paper I shall compare the most important moment of revelation in *Martha Quest* (1952) with the chief moments of revelation in two earlier autobiographical novels which, like *Martha Quest*, focus upon adolescence, namely, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

In these two earlier works, the moment of revelation marks the climax of the novel. It arises out of an initial state of despair and carries

¹Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971).

the protagonist into ecstasy. The experience is a religious one, and the particular spiritual illumination it offers functions subversively, for it makes clear, all at once, what had been previously perceived but not fully acknowledged, namely, the hypocrisy inherent in the church, the family, and the larger social fabric. Freed from the idea that these authorities must be right and his own feelings wrong, the protagonist suddenly accepts the validity of his own perceptions; consequently, prior indecisiveness and tensions disappear. The total clarity with which he now knows what is right for him produces an overwhelming sense of elation; released from his anxieties and hesitations, he has the sensation of being totally transformed by this experience. The totality of this transformation is an illusion, however, for even though he can now reject the people and institutions which impede his development, he will never escape completely the influence they have already had upon him.

In Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, the moment of revelation occurs when Paul Morel's relationship with Clara has already begun to deteriorate. Just before the moment occurs he has talked of leaving her to go to London to live there with his mother. However, his decision to leave Clara is a painful one, not free from conflicting emotions: "'Don't ask me anything about the future,' he said miserably. 'I don't know anything. Be with me now, will you, no matter what it is?'"² Because Clara pities him, she ignores his announcement that he is leaving her and decides to "let the moment stand for itself" (p. 353). Submitting herself to him, Clara becomes the medium through which he experiences a loss of self and, in turn, union with a force greater than himself.

Paul Morel loses consciousness of his separate identity and experiences union, not with Clara (whose identity has also been obliterated for him), but with the identity-less woman she has become as well as with the nature that surrounds him: "What was she? A strong, strange, wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars." "When he came to, he wondered what was near his eyes" and "what voice . . . was speaking" (p. 353). Aroused from his experience of oneness with his surroundings, he is forced to become aware once again of the separateness of the plants, the birds, the woman, and himself.

Both Paul and Clara are conscious of the magnitude of what has been revealed to them in this moment:

They felt small, half-afraid, childish and wondering, like Adam and Eve when they lost

²D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (New York: Viking, 1958), p. 352. All further references to this work appear in the text.

their innocence and realised the magnificence of the power which drove them out of Paradise and across the great night and the great day of humanity. . . . There was a verification which they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away; it was almost their belief in life. (pp. 353-354)

Lawrence stresses here that Paul and Clara have a new and transforming knowledge and that this knowledge is of the sort which is forbidden by the Church and its God. Lawrence reinterprets the Adam and Eve story for his own purposes, however, transforming the "magnificence of the power which drove them out of Paradise" from the power of an authoritarian, punishing God into the great power of sexuality. Furthermore, Lawrence makes the fall from innocence, not a negative, but a positive experience; it is an "initiation and a satisfaction." Paul and Clara, though awed, are pleased with their new knowledge, not ashamed of it. Lawrence's reversal here of the Christian interpretation of the Adam and Eve story symbolizes Paul's rebellion against the Christian view of sexuality, a rebellion which has been totally realized and validated through this mystical moment with Clara. Prior to this experience, Paul realized that he had to free himself from the influence of the Church and his possessive mother, for both directly and indirectly (through the influence of the Church on his first love, Miriam), they were denying him the full experience of his sexuality. However, after his awesome experience with Clara, his determination to revolt is intensified, for he now knows what he is freeing himself for.

But during the moment of revelation Paul and Clara have come to know much more than just their own sexuality, for through the concrete sensations of their bodies, they have made contact with an abstract, invisible, but powerful force—what Lawrence describes as "the tremendous living flood." To become one with this vital force, they must abandon their self-control and allow themselves to be passively "carried by life" (p. 354). As the self dissolves, Lawrence's language joins with the experience in becoming abstract: they are "borne along in one flood" (p. 363). The reward for their submission to the greater power of the "flood" is a sense of wholeness and "peace" (p. 354). In a late essay "We Need One Another," Lawrence uses the same metaphor of the river to clarify what he means by "peace": "What we suffer from today is the lack of a sense of our own wholeness, or completeness, which is peace. . . . And by peace I don't mean inertia, but the full flowing of life, like a river."³

Paul's quest in *Sons and Lovers* is for this "full flowing of life"; and although his rebellion against those elements in his environment which impeded the "full flowing of life" began, seemingly, almost at birth, the climactic moment with Clara, which "nothing could nullify . . . nothing

³*Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), pp. 192-193.

could take . . . away" (p. 354), indeed validates the rightness of his quest. Thus, his moment of revelation becomes the test against which each new experience is measured. It also intensifies his determination to break with all those whom he perceives to be obstructing the achievement of his goal of being fully alive. Paul has a strong sense that a permanent transformation of self has occurred, and, therefore, the remainder of the novel is basically an account of his shedding the past. His decisions to reject both Miriam and Clara once and for all and his decision to kill his mother, who, despite her painful cancer, refuses to allow herself to die, are deeply agonizing, and, yet, from his point of view, they are necessary preparations for a new, more vital life.

But despite the transformation that Paul experiences, he remains to some extent unable to meet the challenge offered him by the revelation. Even moments of ecstasy cannot be experienced free from the political and, hence, psychological context in which they occur. Paul's response to Clara has been crippled by the love-hate relationship he has had with his mother, an oedipal relationship rooted in the inequalities of sex and class that had poisoned his parents' marriage. Moreover, Paul initiated his relationship with Clara because she was a feminist, and he, therefore, wanted to seduce and, in that way, subdue her. This desire to destroy her ego, which was present from the start, reappears in his response to his dependence upon her for the achievement of his revelation. To eliminate any sense of indebtedness, he uses the annihilation of individual identities that occurs during the moment to insist that it was an "impersonal" experience that had nothing to do with Clara.⁴ Since Clara cannot accept her personal insignificance and since Paul is disturbed because Clara, in contrast, wants him as well as the magnificent moment she can have through him, their "splendid moments" together occur less and less frequently: "They did not often reach again the height of that once when the peewits had called" (p. 364).

There is reason, then, for being critical of Paul's responses to his moment of revelation, especially because of his need to prove his superiority and his manliness and because of his particular ways of freeing himself from others (for example, by returning Clara to her husband and precipitating his mother's death). At the same time, the revelation Paul has had about the importance of sexuality retains its authenticity, for it stands out as a moment of truth. Hence, this moment of revelation is the climax of the book, and it functions to convey to the reader both the shape and the significance of the novel.

The most important moment of revelation in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* occurs at the end of Chapter IV when

⁴See Annis Pratt's discussion of their relationship and other topics relevant to this paper in "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction," *Contemporary Literature*, 13 (1972), 476-490.

Stephen Dedalus sees the "bird-girl." Whereas Paul Morel is brought to a state of ecstasy through a sudden revelation of the beauty of physical interaction with a female, Stephen achieves his ecstatic state through a sudden revelation of the magnificence of a particular young woman's beauty at a particular moment in time. Like Paul Morel, Stephen Dedalus believes he has been permanently transformed by the knowledge he has gained through this moment:

He turned away from her suddenly and set off across the strand. His cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow; his limbs were trembling. On and on and on and on he strode, far out over the sands, singing wildly to the sea, crying to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him.

Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory. On and on and on and on!⁵

Although Paul's experience is sexual and Stephen's aesthetic, Stephen's experience during the moment of revelation is very similar to Paul Morel's. Stephen is similarly overwhelmed and transported by an impression of having been in touch with something greater than himself—something which he too calls "life." The sense of being transported, which in *Sons and Lovers* was conveyed by the allusion to the expulsion from Paradise of Adam and Eve and by the image of the flood, is conveyed here by Stephen's turning away "suddenly" and setting off over the sands "on and on and on and on." The relinquishment of self-control in the Lawrence passage is paralleled here by Stephen's "singing wildly to the sea" and "crying to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him." Lawrence's religious terms—"innocence," "magnificence," "flood," "peace," and "belief"—along with ecstatic words like "wondering," "tremendous heave," and "lifted" find equivalents in Joyce's use of "soul," "holy silence," "to err, to fall," "angel," and "glory" along with his ecstatic "leaped at the call," "to triumph," and "the fair courts of life." In both passages, too, the movement is from the concrete to the abstract. Lawrence moves us from the experience of the sexual act to the experience of the "living flood" and the "tremendous heave"; Joyce moves us from the girl to the "advent of the life" and "the call."

Precisely because this spiritual illumination derives from the real girl and, in turn, Stephen's perception of her as bird-girl, Stephen knows now that the truly divine experience will come to him through

⁵James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1964), p. 172. All further references to this work appear in the text.

the transformation of the real into the aesthetic, through creating "life out of life," not through the church or through the power of the priesthood by which he had recently been tempted. The natural and sensuous world from which the bird-girl comes—the world that is the raw material of the artist—is good; and, despite what the church says about preferring "the other world," it is *this* world that is sacred. Stephen now knows incontestably that he can be his own artist-priest. Although he risks being heretical or sinful, he is no longer afraid to assume creative power. In terms of the Icarian myth that informs the novel, by flying too close to the sun, he risks melting the wax that attaches his wings; yet by flying this high, he also has the chance, if he does not fall, of achieving "glory." The bird-girl has opened up for him "the gates of all the ways of error and glory."

Stephen's decision to reject the church and choose nature and art resolves the tension that has been building up in the first four chapters of the novel. In the final chapter that follows, he need only shed his past. Like Paul Morel, he can now turn his back on what has both formed and crippled him—the church, his family, and his homeland.

But, as in *Sons and Lovers*, the transformation of the protagonist is flawed, and it is flawed in a similar way. Joyce makes the flaw evident through dividing Stephen's response to the young woman into three parts: his initial perception of her as "bird-girl," his recognition of the girl as she really is, and his final response to her as "a wild angel."

Initially, Stephen's artistic imagination (his "magic") transforms the female who makes the moment of revelation possible into a "likeness"—a "bird-girl":

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. (p. 171)

Stephen's way of perceiving her makes her into an aesthetic object. Her immobility and words like "ivory" and "slateblue" give her a statue-like quality as does the emphasis upon line and shape: the legs are "long," "slender," and "delicate," the thighs "fuller"; the skirts are "dovetailed," her bosom "soft and slight, slight and soft." Even the rhythm of the words evokes the rhythmic lines of the art object.

But then the girl moves, first her eyes and then her body, and her movement and, in turn, her breaking of the silence transform her, for Stephen, back into herself, the raw material from which art is made. It is the real girl responding to Stephen's presence and even blushing who provokes his cry of ecstasy:

She was alone and still, gazing out to sea; and when she felt his presence and the worship of his eyes her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance of his gaze, without shame or wantonness. Long, long she suffered his gaze and then quietly withdrew her eyes from his

and bent them towards the stream, gently stirring the water with her foot hither and thither. The first faint noise of gently moving water broke the silence, low and faint and whispering, faint as the bells of sleep; hither and thither, hither and thither: and a faint flame trembled on her cheek.

—Heavenly God! cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy. (p. 171)

Stephen is surprised that she can look at him with neither the shame of the virgin nor the wantonness of the whore. She does not fit into the stereotypes he has inherited from the church. He has already noted her "slender bare legs," "her thighs," "her bosom," "her long fair hair," but what was previously beauty immobilized is suddenly moving and blushing. She is not an art object; she is alive; she is made of real flesh. So his joy is indeed "profane" and unsanctioned by the church.

But Stephen is incapable of continuing to respond to her as real. He does not acknowledge her fully as a person, but instead, cued less by his awe than by the language in which he has expressed it, he reverts immediately, as demonstrated in the passage quoted earlier, to seeing her as another female stereotype—as "a wild angel." Preoccupied with himself, he turns away to celebrate his new knowledge alone.

The carefully articulated sequence of Stephen's moment of revelation suggests that James Joyce was more able than D. H. Lawrence to see his protagonist's limitations in a critical light. Lawrence's point of view remains ambiguous—though he seems to share Paul Morel's—while Joyce intentionally undermines Stephen's ecstasy by showing us that Stephen fails to perceive or remember that the human and aesthetic are fused in the vision of the bird-girl; Stephen resolves the tension between life and art by turning away from the living elements out of which the art is made.

Stephen Dedalus's transformation through the moment is, therefore, imperfect, because he is unable to comprehend fully what, in fact, has been revealed about the interdependence of life and art. Joyce wants us to take seriously Cranly's observation in the final chapter that Stephen must get to know the Rosie O'Grady's of the world (pp. 244-245)—that is, the real women, not just the virgins, the whores, or the wild angels. Until Stephen knows women as real women, he cannot recreate "life out of life." So, too, we should take seriously his mother's prayer that he needs to learn "what the heart is and what it feels" (p. 252).

But, even though Joyce makes us conscious of Stephen's limitations, he does not question the validity and significance of Stephen's moment of revelation. However much we disapprove of Stephen's rejection of his homeland, his heartless treatment of his mother, and his total self-absorption, we are convinced that because of his vision of the bird-girl, he does know what aesthetic beauty is and how important it is. That experience sanctions his decision to become an artist and, therefore, functions as the climax of the novel.

The most important moment of revelation in Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* occurs near the beginning of the novel, rather than near the end as in *Sons and Lovers* and *Portrait*. Instead of building up to the climactic moment, Lessing's book starts with it so that it will provide a special lens through which to view everything that follows. Her emphasis falls more on the protagonist's need to refer back to it, to be guided and nourished by it as she proceeds with her everyday life. Also, Lessing's description of Martha's moment of revelation requires three pages rather than a few paragraphs. The care with which Lessing analyzes Martha's experience indicates that she is extremely interested in the moment itself—in the process of experiencing it and in its potential for transforming human behavior.

Martha has her moment of revelation alone on the veld, away from the people in the town who make her feel self-conscious and out-of-place, and far from her parents who make her feel irritable and imprisoned. Mixed with her elation at finding herself free from these social and parental pressures is a deep sense of melancholy at the thought that her freedom will soon end. As in the novels of Lawrence and Joyce, the moment of revelation seems to be provoked by melancholy.

Indeed, Martha's moment is similar in many ways to those of Paul Morel and Stephen Dedalus. She too views it as a religious phenomenon, and, therefore, she is relieved to discover that she can still experience it despite her recent conversion to atheism.⁶ Like Paul and Stephen, she feels that the moment puts her in touch with a force greater than herself. It makes her understand "quite finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity" (pp. 52-53). Like Stephen, she achieves her moment through visual detail. To encourage the moment to happen she walks more slowly in order to observe the details of her environment. She notes colors ("the dark greens of the foliage," "the dash of red of the soil," "the pale blond of the grass," "a single white-stemmed tree," and "an unbroken stretch of silver gold mealies") as well as a hawk and two grazing bucks (pp. 51-52). Like Lawrence, Lessing suggests that although a certain mood or setting may allow the moment to occur, seeking the moment too actively or consciously will prevent it from happening. Martha has experienced the moment before, and she refers to it as "a visitor who came without warning": "even the fact that the delicious but fearful expectation had crossed her mind at all was enough to warn it away" (p. 51). Furthermore, for Martha, as for Paul and Stephen, the moment becomes the standard by which other experiences are tested. Lessing is more explicit than Lawrence and Joyce about this: "the measure was that experience (she thought of it as one,

⁶Doris Lessing, *Martha Quest* (New York: Plume-New American Library, 1970), p. 51. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

though it was the fusion of many, varying in intensity) which was the gift of her solitary childhood on the veld: that knowledge of something painful and ecstatic, something central and fixed, but flowing. It was a sense of movement, of separate things interacting and finally becoming one, but greater—it was this which was her lodestone, even her conscience” (p. 200). Because her experience of oneness contrasts so sharply with the situation in Zambesia, with its rigid barriers separating blacks and whites, English and Dutch, non-Jews and Jews, her moment of revelation, like those of Paul and Stephen, functions subversively, revealing the divided nature of the society she almost, through habit, had come to accept as normal.

As is true for Paul and Stephen, Martha's moments have marked her permanently, even though she can rarely live up to the challenge presented by these experiences. For instance, she is different from the rest of the crowd at the Sports Club, for, at some level in herself, she has knowledge of the potential for wholeness in the individual and in society that they are out of touch with. It is this something in her which enables her to respond sensitively when, for example, she sees “a team of oxen, a plough, a native driver with his long whip, and at the head of the team a small black child, naked except for a loincloth” (p. 10). Martha feels an overwhelming sense of pity for the black child, son of “a harsh and violent man,” rendered harsh and violent one assumes by the harshness and violence that characterize the racist society in which he lives. And then “her mind swam and shook” and “instead of one black child, she saw a multitude, and so lapsed easily into her favorite daydream”—that of the four-gated city whose “citizens moved, grave and beautiful, black and white and brown together,” watching and approving “the blue-eyed, fair-skinned children of the North playing hand in hand with the bronze-skinned, dark-eyed children of the South” (p. 11). Out of the pain of what she sees, Martha fabricates the joyful vision of the city. Knowing the one enables her to know its opposite in a way that others cannot.

For Martha Quest, as for Paul Morel and Stephen Dedalus, the moment of revelation is the means by which one learns what is absolutely and unquestionably right. Martha may not act immediately upon that knowledge, yet even when she eases into conventional behavior at the Sports Club or into her marriage with Douglas, we remain aware that she will eventually extricate herself, at least for a while, from these drugged, mechanical, false states of mind.

When Martha slips into ridiculous behavior, she is at least aware that she is doing so. She develops a double self, with one self observing the other critically. The more she adopts conventional behavior, the more fragmented, the less whole, she feels; yet, even as she watches, she feels helpless, unable to stop herself.

Even if she cannot change what she observes herself or others doing, at least the moment of revelation has made her know the difference between what should be and what is. She is able to recognize the self-destructive tendencies in herself and her society, and her vision on the veld of the oneness of all life continues to exist as a constant criticism of all those who violate that basic oneness. The implications of her vision are that the organic unity of all life should not be violated through wars, discrimination, class barriers, and other behavior made possible through the dehumanization of others. By placing the revelation early in the novel, Lessing shows her interest in how it affects her protagonist's and her reader's vision thereafter. Her moment emphasizes the beginning of a new way of seeing rather than, as in the books by Lawrence and Joyce, primarily the end of an old way. Even if Martha is unable to alter her everyday reality because of what has been revealed, the reader knows that her way of perceiving has been transformed.

But, despite the many similarities mentioned above, the moment of revelation in *Martha Quest* is quite different from those in the two earlier novels. Lessing has altered the tradition that she had inherited. To begin with, the experience of it is described in a wholly different manner. Throughout the description, Lessing has her protagonist maintain a guarded skepticism about her ability to articulate the process. Martha notes the disparity between what actually occurs and what she and many others tend to say occurs. The experience is, in fact, one of pain, not happiness: "what she remembered always, was the exultation and the achievement, what she forgot was this difficult birth into a state of mind which words like *ecstasy*, *illumination*, and so on could not describe, because they suggest joy" (p. 52). She can understand why others lie about it, for she herself found it "impossible for her to remember, in between, how terrible an illumination it was" (p. 52).

The tendency to lie about the nature of the experience is related to another problem. The experience is not one that can even be described in words, for when it happens to Martha, words become "like the sound of a baby crying in a whirlwind" (p. 53), and she cannot even distinguish, among the "inhuman" sounds, the sound of her own voice. She questions whether one can apply "the terms for time" to the "moment," and because language is inadequate to describe this physical and spiritual experience, she feels that it is, therefore, "impossible to remember" (p. 52).

Because Martha is skeptical of her ability to recapture the "moment" as it really is, her step by step process of integration is conscientiously described in much greater detail than that of her predecessors, Paul and Stephen. She stresses that the integration was "slow," that it began by her merging with specific elements in her environment: "the little animals, and the moving grasses, and the sun-warmed trees, and

the slopes of shivering silvery mealies." Moving outwards to the more distant and general, the integration process then takes in "the great dome of blue light overhead and the stones of earth under her feet" until all of the above become "one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms." What was once visible has become invisible. A relinquishment of the self then takes place as the outside world merges with the human body: "the rivers under the ground" force themselves through her veins and the earth merges with her flesh, and "her eyes stared, fixed like the eye of the sun" (p. 52).

This dissolution and relinquishment of the self is painful and ultimately devastating; her experience is quite unlike the ecstasy felt by Paul and Stephen. The force that absorbs her does not bring her peace or joy but instead hurts her. What happens is like a nightmare. To describe it, she uses words like "shuddering," "swelling," and "unbearable pressure" and says clearly that she could not have "borne it" "one second longer." It is a devastating, "inhuman" annihilation not only of her but of everything, and like Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*, Martha experiences the dissolution of all values and hierarchical order. All distinctions destroyed, "she knew futility; that is, what was futile was her own idea of herself and her place in the chaos of matter" (p. 53).

Martha is more aware, therefore, than Paul and Stephen of the total transformation required by her new knowledge. She is faced with the challenge of accepting "something quite different," "as if something new was demanding conception, with her flesh as host; as if there was a necessity, which she must bring herself to accept, that she should allow herself to dissolve and be formed by that necessity" (p. 53). It is through the dissolution of her flesh that the spiritual "necessity" of rebirth into a new wholeness is made known. She is aware that rather than face this necessity for the transformation of herself and her society, she is likely to reduce what she has learned from the revelation to something like a New Year's resolution; for instance, she resolves to kill no more bucks because two of them had been part of her momentary sense of the oneness of all life. Ironically, she cannot even retain in her mind this reductive message, for a few days later she kills another buck simply "because it happened to present itself; she was surprised when it fell dead" (p. 56). This subsequent killing makes evident to Martha that however well aware of her own inadequacies she had been, she is even more inadequate for meeting the challenge presented by the moment than she had assumed. But Martha is at least conscious of her own imperfect nature whereas Paul Morel and Stephen Dedalus are relatively unconscious of theirs.

The important way in which the moment functions in *Martha Quest* and Lessing's obvious fascination with this experience foreshadow her later interest in Sufism. Sufism provides a framework for a collective

recognition of the moment as a way of knowing the truth and perceiving the cosmic unity. To the Sufis, such moments are indications of the evolution of human beings—of the development of new sense organs that will allow humans to know more than is at present possible.⁷ Through knowing more, we may, in Lessing's view, be able to save ourselves from the catastrophe that she foresees in her later novels. In 1970 Lessing told Jonah Raskin, "We're already in a time of total chaos, but we're so corrupted that we can't see it."⁸ In a talk at Rutgers University in 1972, she said that in such chaos there is no time left to persuade people rationally to behave otherwise; there is only hope for the non-rational path to truth. In her mind the momentary mystical vision has become the source of insight into what the nature of the new political-social order must be. For example, because of it, Martha is capable of envisioning the four-gated city. Therefore, Martha Quest's readiness to explore the moment of revelation and its implications is exemplary of the attitude Lessing would like to see all people adopt.

For Lessing, as for Lawrence and Joyce, the moment of revelation is a literary device that serves to sanctify the deepest conviction of the protagonist and, in turn, the author. But in Lessing's work, the moment assumes an even greater role; it becomes a necessity for human survival. It is not simply, as in Lawrence and Joyce, a moment of climactic synthesis; in Lessing's view the moment of revelation must become an integral and recurring part of our lives so that we can learn and change. The pain which Martha experienced during her moment and the risk involved in the total relinquishment of self are part of the price which must be paid for our salvation. Lessing is telling us clearly that, given the horror of our present situation, there is no easy way out. The moment is our only hope, because it releases us from our usual patterns of behavior and thought and, through the dissolution of self, offers at least the possibility of transformation. To follow Lessing in her belief that moments of revelation or other manifestations of the "evolving part of humanity"—"telepathy, second sight, hunches, the intimations of dreams,"⁹ extrasensory perception, and experiences in madness—are a basis for hope and struggle requires of her readers a willing suspension of disbelief, a leap of faith that fewer and fewer people may be willing to take. No one can deny, however, that her explorations of these phenomena are fascinating.

⁷Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1971), p. 61.

⁸Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview by Jonah Raskin," *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, ed. Paul Schlueter (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1975), p. 71.

⁹Doris Lessing, "An Ancient Way to New Freedom," *Vogue*, July 1971, p. 125.