‘WILDNESS’ IN DORIS LESSING’S *AFRICAN STORIES*

BY

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SUPERVISOR

EXAMINER 1

EXAMINER 2

Preface

This dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my original work.

The reference system I have used is a modified version of the Harvard system. A comprehensive list of references is found at the end of this dissertation and includes both works cited and those that represent extended reading undertaken for this study.

All references to the primary texts, the two volumes of Doris Lessing's *African Stories*, are taken from the editions listed in the bibliography.

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Abstract

Doris Lessing's two volumes of *African Stories, This Was the Old Chief's Country* and *The Sun Between Their Feet,* are an important part of her African writings. Perhaps not as well known as her novel, *The Grass is Singing,* and *The Children of Violence* series, the stories reflect her childhood and adolescence in a district of Rhodesia in the colonial era and they give a vivid picture of the settler society and the African terrain. Settler society, in the stories, is made up of various subgroups defined by age, culture and gender. My study analyses the way in which members of these subgroups react to wildness in the environment. Recent trends in ecological criticism have drawn attention to the significance of landscape in literature. Indeed, in Lessing's stories 'wildness', the natural environment, the 'bush', serves as far more than a mere background to human activity. Often it acts as a point of reference in terms of which different individuals define themselves and interact with others. 'Wildness' is particularly significant in this regard as it stands as a challenge to the colonial imperative of taming and cultivating. Thus there is often a tension between those who embrace wildness and those who reject it. Children are a particularly significant sub-group because they respond with openness and imagination to the invitation of wild spaces, and because their presence on the margins of the adult world enables them to act as silent and unnoticed observers in places where adults would have been denied access. The freshness of the children's responses to people and to nature shows up the limitations of the adult world and so provides an ironic commentary which exposes some of the forces underlying colonialism. Relationships across linguistic, cultural and racial barriers are likewise affected by wildness and defined in terms of it. The short story is a particularly flexible genre. My study demonstrates that the two collections are a significant part of Lessing's representation of colonial society because they allow her to explore the complexities of the colonial situation and the colonial process. The construction of 'wildness' in the stories is a crucial aspect of this exploration.

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'Wildness' in Doris Lessing's *African Stories.*

Chapter One: Introduction

> What would the world be, once bereft
> Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
> O let them be left, wildness and wet;
> Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.
> (Hopkins, from 'Inversnaid')

Gerard Manley Hopkins's impassioned plea for wildness has been echoed down the years by nature lovers and conservationists alike. He is one of the champions of wildness in the nineteenth century and his words are even more important today than they were then. As the demand for paper accelerates the destruction of forests and the drying up of wetlands, we see many wild places disappearing. The environmental movements in different countries place a great value on wild places as habitats for wildlife and biodiversity. Yet wildness has been viewed in different ways over the centuries.

Before the agrarian revolution, in nomadic, hunter–gatherer societies, people were surrounded by wildness. As crops were not planted, no boundaries divided wildness and cultivation. In addition, a close connection seems to have existed between hunters and the wild animals which they hunted. For example, one of the Bushmen paintings in the Sloman Collection of the Africana Museum in Johannesburg depicts a group of ostriches being hunted by a man who has dressed himself like an ostrich in order to get near them. In many of the poems and stories of the Bushmen, too, there is a close identification between human and animal. Only when people start domesticating animals and planting crops does the concept of wildness have any meaning. Conceiving of wildness involves a process of contrasting. 'Wildness' is generally defined in relation to the concept of tameness or cultivation. It can also have various other meanings, such as 'natural or indigenous', as opposed to 'unnatural or exotic'. Madness can also be associated with wildness, although this meaning is not the main focus of the present study.

With regard to changing perceptions of wildness, mountain landscapes are a case in point. In *Mountain Hope and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite,* Marjorie Hope Nicolson writes:

> During the first seventeen centuries of the Christian era, 'Mountain Gloom' so clouded human eyes that never for a moment did poets see mountains in the full radiance to which our eyes have become accustomed. Within a century – indeed, within fifty years – all this was changed. The 'Mountain Glory' dawned, then shone full splendor. Why? It was not merely a matter of literary language and conventions, though that played some part. It was a result of one of the most profound revolutions in thought that has ever occurred (1959:3).

One may take issue with Nicolson's analysis by citing the famous verse from Psalm 121, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help' (Bible, King James' version). However, in the later New International version, the translation changes subtly: 'I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?' In the first version, nature has restorative power whereas in the second, the hills are not redemptive in the same way. Rather, the psalmist seems to be scanning the hills to find something hidden there, not looking to the hills themselves as the source of help.

The point that I am trying to illustrate is that attitudes towards mountains and, more broadly, towards wildness have changed over time: they are culturally and historically based. Whereas in the 1964 *Concise Oxford Dictionary* 'wild scenery' is defined as 'of conspicuously desolate appearance', where 'desolate' refers to the absence of human habitation, today such absence has a positive rather than a negative value. The aesthetics of wildness demands that there be no evidence of human habitation. Wild life photographers take care to exclude all signs of human presence from their documentaries. The meaning and value of wildness in the environment is continually changing.

One of my interests in this study is this range of meanings which people give to natural phenomena. 'Wildness' is a cultural construct, formed according to people's perceptions of their environment, which are in turn dependent on their social, political, economic and cultural background. Although I have defined 'wildness' in terms of its opposites, suggesting a dichotomous approach to the concept, in this analysis I will be using the concept as a continuum, ranging from the pristine and untouched at one end to the tame and domesticated at the other. At different points along this continuum are a number of gradations of wildness. For example, a garden may be made up of exotic as well as indigenous plants. It may be very formal and 'unnatural' with lawns and fountains, or it may blend with the wild bush on its margins. Farms are not simply areas of cultivation: in Africa many farms have small sections of cultivation and large areas of untamed land or 'bush'. Thus, conceptually separating purely wild areas from cultivated areas becomes problematic.

In addition to including different types of terrain in my analysis, I shall also be considering domestic as well as wild animals. After all, the process of taming an animal is not always successful. Even pets as domestic as dogs have inherent wild instincts which cannot be completely trained out of them.

The topic of this study has evolved from the teaching experience I have had over the past years. When I taught Lessing's *African Stories* at the University of Zululand, students initially reacted against them because of their setting in colonial times. They interpreted Lessing's representation of colonial society as support for the colonial system simply because it featured servants and labourers on white-owned farms. They often saw the colonialists in a stereotyped way, as an undifferentiated group. It was challenging to work with these responses, and to get the students to look more closely at the settlers, a group that is in fact divided in many ways, for example by language, class, culture, gender and age. These divisions often result in conflicts other than racial ones, for example between English and Afrikaans-speaking settlers, between male and female, and between adults and children. Such conflicts make Lessing's representation of the colonial situation complex. Lessing herself has often spoken about the 'colour question', as in this interview with Eve Bertelsen:

> About this color-bar thing: the point I was making was that it's not just the white man's attitude towards the black, but people's attitudes to each other in general – all over the world you'll have a dominant group despising the rest.

> This is the pattern. This is what interests me more and more. I've found it very limiting when people say, 'You are a writer about color-bar problems'. I wasn't writing only about color-bar problems. Not even my first volume [of African stories] was only about color-bar problems; there were a lot of other themes in it (1984:124).

In an article entitled 'Spatial Patterns and Closed Groups in Doris Lessing's *African Stories*' (1978), Patricia Chaffee refers to the divisions just mentioned. She defines a closed group as a group of people who have a sense of shared understanding, which isolates them from an opposing group. Some of these groups overlap, as people might belong to more than one group, but the closure of groups tends to cause misunderstanding, pain, and conflict.

In identifying the binary oppositions that are to be found in these stories, students found that differences between characters could often be measured by those characters' attitudes towards the natural environment. Firstly, if the characters differ greatly in their relationship with nature, it generally means that they cannot understand each other very well as people. Secondly, a great deal is revealed about the characters through their attitudes towards nature. Finally the natural environment influences people's interactions with each other, often in quite subtle ways. Thus it seemed worthwhile to focus on the role which this 'non-human other' plays in Lessing's representation of the colonial world. These insights provided the impetus and motivation for the more thorough investigation undertaken in this study. My thesis is that wildness is a crucial element in Lessing's representation of colonialism. It shows up the differences between people, and between groups. In particular, children's responses to wildness point to possibilities of integration between coloniser and colonised. Lessing's treatment of wildness also draws the reader's attention to the problems of environmental exploitation.

In addressing these issues, I will be drawing on colonial discourse theory and aspects of ecocritical theory. Doris Lessing writes during the colonial period about colonial society. The extent to which her stories provide a critique of that society is the main thrust of this study. Colonial discourse theorists provide the scope for this type of critique, as Sara Mills points out:

> Whilst it is clear that individuals cannot be held responsible for the larger scale organisation of imperialism, it is also clear that individuals differed in the degree to which they championed, acquiesced or challenged imperialism. Some presented representations which destabilised British colonial involvement, whilst others affirmed colonial rule in their writings. (1997: 9).

Lessing's *African Stories* are based on her experience of growing up on a farm near Banket in Rhodesia, in the 1930's. Discursive structures current at that time would have presented Africa to prospective farmers as a vast tract of untamed terrain. In 'Doris Lessing: Rhodesian Novelist' (1985), Antony Chennells writes:

> The myth of the empty, unformed land appears in most colonial literatures in the earliest British settlements in America. . . . its universality may owe something to the ease with which the empty land can be transformed into a mythopoesis of the proto-myths of Eden or the Golden Age, where man lived at ease with himself and his surroundings, regretting nothing and aspiring to nothing. Unlike Arcadians of pastoral literature, however, the colonial experience could be described in such a way that Arcadia need not remain mere nostalgia, but could be shown to be a state recoverable by contemporary man (1985:4).

The assumption that the land is empty means that it is a wild land, as there are no people to transform the land in any way. In the case of Rhodesia, this assumption was of course false, as Chennells goes on to point out: 'In 1890 the country was fairly heavily populated, and the first pioneer had difficulty in finding land that was not already used for fields or grazing' (1985:4). However, the myth of the empty land persisted. As Eva Hunter puts it, 'The notion that the land was empty, and even when not entirely empty in need of "taming", buttressed the self-righteousness of the white colonisers of southern Africa' (1990: 35). The wildness of the terrain was something to be overcome, to be fought, and to be transformed by (imperial) human agency.

The title of the first volume of Lessing's *African Stories*, *This Was the Old Chief's Country*, indicates that Lessing was well aware that the land had been occupied before the coming of the settlers. However, some aspects of the myth seem to be acceptable to her: 'She also seems, to an extent, to have identified with settlers who saw in the empty land an opportunity for self-realization and for the free development of personality, impossible to achieve in England or even in Rhodesia's towns' (Chennells,1985:4). What Lessing identifies with is the settlers' quest for adventure, an element that is missing in England and in the towns. It is wildness that provides the raw materials of adventure, the unknowable, the excitement, and the risk that adventure requires.

In a study of Rider Haggard's African romances, Lindy Stiebel explains how the quest-romance is linked to the idea of empire: 'The imperial romance set in Empire's far flung dominions depended on this duality of the knowable and therefore predictable and yet unknowable and uncertain' (1998: 96). The knowable is necessary for the sense of control, for dominance over the Other, whereas the unknowable provides the space for heroism. She writes of Haggard, 'It was the wildness of African terrain as opposed to the domesticity of English farmland that captured him' (1998:92).

Although Lessing acknowledges the falsity of the 'emptiness' of the myth of the empty land, she recognises in the environment that element of wildness which challenges, frightens and attracts the settlers. It occurs even on cultivated farms, as several of her stories show. Many questions arise in this regard. How does Lessing construct the wildness of Africa? How do the responses of the settlers differ from each other in their interaction with the wildness of the African terrain, and what does this tell us about them? How do the responses of the settlers differ from those of the indigenous inhabitants? What value does Doris Lessing give to wildness in her stories?

These questions involve the interaction between the human and the non-human: between people and the environment. However, the concept of 'wildness' can also be applied to people themselves. Of course, one does not want to equate colonial with 'civilization' and indigenous inhabitant with 'savage'. Rather than placing 'wildness' in opposition to 'civilization' on the continuum, I would like to use the concept of 'domesticity' as an index of the amount of wildness people allow into their lives. Some of the settlers, for example, refuse to stay in a house for long, and go wandering in the bush and sleeping under the stars. Although indigenous people live in their houses, they are distinguished from the settlers by their intimacy with the natural surroundings. Their knowledge of wild plants, for example, can be seen in the story 'No Witchcraft for Sale', where Gideon, the servant, heals the boy's eyes with a plant from the bush. He sees 'the bush' not as alien wilderness but as familiar territory. The concept of 'wildness' is brought by settler culture to Africa. It is used to categorize aspects of Africa in order to make meaning of settler experience.

The reason why I have chosen to focus attention on the wild aspect of the environment rather than the more usual concept of 'nature' is because of the colonial context of the stories. Part of the colonial project is to 'tame' the wildness, to bring it under control. This makes wildness a crucial aspect of the colonial world which Lessing represents in her stories. Analysing the way in which the settlers categorize Africa and respond to it gives insight into the settler mentality. It also breaks down our stereotype of the settler as it shows up differences between the subgroups of the settler community. Ultimately I wish to argue that Lessing's use of the natural environment in general and wildness in particular both exposes the weaknesses of the settler community and demonstrates its complexity. Her representation provides a powerful basis for criticism, tempered by sympathetic understanding.

My use of colonial discourse theory will be supplemented by ecocritical theory. The mission statement of the ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) is 'to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world' (Glotfelty, 1996:xviii). In analysing Lessing's representation of colonial society, I shall be focussing primarily on the relationship between people and the natural environment. I shall also be making use of a concept described by Patrick Murphy in his essay, 'Anotherness and inhabitation in recent multicultural American literature':

> The concept of the 'Other' has proven to be a valuable tool in psychoanalytic and feminist literary theory and criticism. It has been interpreted in various ways to provide stunning critiques of patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, metaphysical linguistics and Freudianism.This Absolute 'Other', founded upon notions of permanent incompleteness and prematurity, communicative incommensurability and binary constructs, is, however, largely an illusion. And its continued acceptance is a dangerous reification that protects much of the

> Western dominant hierarchical power relations that its use has been designed to dismantle. Ecology and ecocriticism indicate that it is time to move towards a relational model of 'anotherness' and the conceptualization of difference in terms of 'I' and 'another', 'one' and 'another', and 'I-as-another.' (1996:40)

Murphy points out that in Russian a distinction exists between *drugoi* (another, other person) and *chuzhoi* (alien, strange; also, the other). He says that 'the *another* Bakhtin has in mind is not hostile to the *I* but a necessary component of it' (ibid, 40). This term provides a useful extension to the postcolonial paradigm for analysing texts such as Lessing's stories.

In a narrative the representation of nature is complex as it is expressed through the narrator and the focalisers of a text. There is a multiple mediation of primary reality which in turn conveys crucial information about the narrators or focalisers involved. Their perceptions of the natural environment and responses to it give clear indications about their backgrounds and cultural contexts. My intention is to study the way Lessing uses these responses to the natural world to draw a full and complex picture of the settler community in her stories.

Lessing has insisted that her stories are not only about the 'colour-bar' problem. She is very conscious of the impact of the natural world on the human world. In an interview with Roy Newquist in 1964, she has remarked:

> Then I wrote short stories set in the district I was brought up in, where very isolated white farmers lived immense distances from each other. You see, in this background, people can spread themselves out. People who might be extremely ordinary in a society like England's where people are pressed into conformity, can become wild eccentrics in all kinds of ways they wouldn't dare elsewhere. . . .I don't think my memory deceives me, but I think there were more colourful people back in Southern Rhodesia because of the space they had to move in (Ingersoll:1996:3).

Lessing's awareness of the effect of geographical space on human beings is apparent in the examples of early settlers in her stories. When they are transferred from the constricted spaces of England to the vast expanses of Africa it can result in their rejecting domestic space altogether. The vast spaces can provide a site for adventure, or cause people to feel insecure, and consequently try to create smaller spaces around them, isolating them from the rest of Africa. Like the adventurers, children too are generally more open to the environment, more willing to go into unknown areas and more free of the prejudice.

Variety in people's responses to the environment can clearly be seen in a collection of short stories. A novel such as *The Grass is Singing*, for example, has a limited range of responses to the nature. The article, 'Race, Gender, and Anti-pastoral Critique in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*', by Oliver Buckton presents the argument that the idealized notion of escape from the evils of the city to the purity of the countryside is reversed in Lessing's novel: 'Mary's "eviction" from the paradisiacal garden takes place when Mary leaves the town' (1986:8). This may indeed be true of Mary, but it is not necessarily true of several of the second-generation settlers in Lessing's stories, and in particular the children or adolescents. One of the questions to be investigated therefore is whether this anti-pastoral critique can be generalised as a feature of all Lessing's writing.

Eve Bertelsen, too, raises some interesting points about Lessing's representation of nature in Africa. In 'Veldtanschauung: Doris Lessing's Savage Africa', Bertelsen refers mainly to *The Grass is Singing*, in which she reads a 'mystical and deterministic resignation in the face of the forces of savage Nature' (1991:648). Bertelsen traces two different and contradictory traditions in Western thought with regard to nature. Firstly, the 'developmental or evolutionary idea' sees humanity becoming progressively more complex and civilized than its simple, primitive, savage past. In contrast to this scientific, rational world view is the counteraction by artists and cultural thinkers: a rediscovery of the instincts, and a sentimentalized postulation of a primitive 'past'. On the one hand nature is threatening, anarchic and destructive and, on the other, it is a place of liberation, where the restrictions and inhibitions of urban life can be escaped. She writes:

> I would like to suggest that Lessing is fully engaged in her representation of Africa in the European tradition I have sketchily outlined – both in her portrayal of Africa...as the white man's savage past, his childhood as it were,

> pristine, untouched in many ways by the repressions and restraints of 'civilized' society – and simultaneously as hostile, irrational, and disordered, the source of a fearsome and destructive energy (1991: 650).

It seems to me that Lessing's representation of Africa in the stories includes both. The positive view of nature is that it is pristine and free of repression and has a negative counterpart in 'civilized' society. Conversely, the view that nature is hostile and destructive implies that society is by contrast ordered, rational and constructive. In the stories full play is given to these ideas.

I now return to the pedogogical problem I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, my students' responses to Lessing's representation of the settler community, and of the colonial world. Although I disagreed with the students' responses, I had to admit that they were not alone in their criticism. The English critic, Antony Beck, in his article entitled 'Doris Lessing and the Colonial Experience' has this to say:

> there is little in the way of overtly hostile judgements made by the author about her characters, only a wry, detached observation which adds up to very little by way of the condemnation of white racialism. She exhibits the strongest dislike for the more extreme non-elite, but is noticeably muted in her criticism of the values and beliefs of the English elite. With her own background of a decidedly modest, almost failed farm, perhaps it is social aspiration which accounts for her tolerance of the elite whilst treating the more outspoken Afrikaners and white working-class immigrants with greater dislike (1984: 66-67).

Firstly, I take Beck's point that Lessing has a 'wry, detached observation' of her characters, and it is this very process which needs to be analysed. However, to say that she tolerates the elite because of her own social aspirations is a profound misjudgment of Lessing's work. With reference to Lessing's supposed dislike of Afrikaners, for instance, Beck does not seem to take into account the complex interaction between narration and focalization in these stories, and specifically the crucial role of children as observers. It is true that Lessing does not make 'overtly hostile judgements' about her characters, but in my view, this is precisely her strength. I feel that the very act of exposing racist attitudes is condemnation in itself.

The difference between Beck's criticism and the students', however, is that Beck recognizes the diversity within the settler group, whereas the students, at least initially, did not. They seemed to regard all whites as the same, in a fairly stereotyped way. Looking at the role that nature plays in these stories helped to reveal to them the distinctions within the groups. In this study I shall be examining the interaction between people and the environment, and showing how Lessing uses this interaction to build up her representation of the settler group. My chapter divisions reflect an attempt to give coherence to the study by selecting stories with similar concerns or features and grouping them together. Because of the complexity of the stories, there are of course major overlaps between chapters. The chapter on the solitary child is possibly the simplest example of an interaction between a human being and nature. It is followed by the more complicated situation where children or adolescents are contrasted with adults with regard to the wildness of the environment. Next, I focus on different relationships between men and women and the effect of wildness on these relationships. Finally I look at cross-cultural interaction and wildness. Differences between language groups and racial differences form part of this interaction. The study thus increases its level of complexity in each chapter. The one constant factor is wildness, against which all other variables are measured.

Chapter two: Wildness and the Solitary Child.

'A Sunrise on the Veld'

'The Sun Between Their Feet'

According to Karin Lesnik-Oberstein in 'Children's Literature and the Environment', 'there can be few ideas in Western culture as intimately connected and intertwined as "nature" and "the child"' (1998:208). Certainly, in Western thought we can think of Rousseau and his picture of childhood innocence in nature in *Emile*. In the nineteenth century, there are many examples of the solitary, innocent child in nature. Blake, and *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* come to mind. Wordsworth, in *The Prelude*, gives us perhaps the best known example of a solitary child in nature. As far as novelists go, we might turn to Dickens, who, in the opening scene of *Great Expectations,* places Pip in a vast and desolate landscape:

> My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard, and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip (1994:5).

The retrospective narrator in this passage tells us about the boy Pip's observation of his surroundings, of 'things' in his attempt to find his own identity. In registering in his own mind the identity of these 'things', external to himself, he eventually comes to see his own identity, from the outside, as it were. The description of the landscape moves outward from the initial focus on the churchyard to the surrounding wilderness. It takes the reader from human elements (his family) to non-human elements: 'the low leaden line' and the 'distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing'. It takes us from the churchyard to the wild, 'savage' space, filled with darkness and noise. Wildness has also invaded the churchyard as it is 'overgrown with nettles'. This emphasizes the desolation of the place which is neglected and deserted by all except the dead. The focus then returns to 'the small bundle of shivers', which is the small boy, dehumanized and reduced to the essence of fear. Against such a landscape, the child's fear, his vulnerability and his isolation are emphasized. This makes his meeting with the convict, Magwitch, particularly dramatic.

The elements of fear and vulnerability often seem to be associated with the solitary child in nature. It may be that it is through the experience of fear that a sense of identity is forged. In the search for identity, the landscape performs the function of a framework in which the child attempts to separate out his own being in relation to the non-human beings in his world. I would like to suggest that Lessing has a similar project of placing children in nature so that they can use nature to understand their own identity and that of the world around them.

Ruth Whittaker makes an important point about the child's point of view in Lessing's stories:

> Some of the African stories are told from the point of view of a child or an adolescent, and through their openness to their surroundings we see the dawning realisation of strangeness, or differences, of unbridgeable gulfs. (Whittaker, 1988:29)

'A Sunrise on the Veld' is just such a story where the events are focalized by a boy of fifteen who gets up early in the morning and goes into the bush with his gun and his dog to see the sun rise. Because this boy's circumstances are very different from Pip's, the comparison serves to highlight the differences between a child's experience in Europe and Africa, between the metropolis and the periphery. Unlike Pip, this boy is full of exhilaration and confidence in his abilities. He feels that he is able to control his circumstances, beginning with his own body: he is able to order his mind to wake up at a certain hour, and it does. He chooses to leave his parents who are still sleeping and to go out alone into the bush. Pip, on the other hand, seems to be a victim of circumstances. He is alone because his parents and brothers have died, not through any choice of his own. The wilderness frightens him into becoming an uncontrolled 'bundle of shivers'. Although the boy in Lessing's story is probably older than Pip, he has no fear of the wilderness or the dark whereas Pip's fear is contained in phrases such as 'the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing'. The idea of a wild animal in its 'lair' is an intensely frightening one for a boy whose main contact with animals would be the cattle feeding on the marshes. The image is Dickens' way of conveying the impact of the landscape on Pip's imagination. On the other hand, the African boy braves the world of wild animals with eagerness at the outset of his adventure, armed with his gun and his dogs. One has to point out in Pip's defence that it is a grim prospect to be faced with deepening darkness as the 'raw afternoon' gives way to night, whereas the boy in the story awaits the more cheering prospect of the coming day:

> As soon as he stepped over the lintel, the flesh of his soles contracted on the chilled earth, and his legs began to ache with cold. It was night: the stars were glittering, the trees standing black and still. He looked for signs of day, for the greying of the edge of a stone, or a lightening in the sky where the sun would rise, but there was nothing yet. Alert as an animal he crept past the dangerous window, standing poised with his hand on the sill for one proudly fastidious moment, looking in at the stuffy blackness of the room where his parents lay (p.27).

Initially, the boy's interaction with nature is intensely physical. Even though it is a winter's morning, he exposes himself deliberately to the coldness of his surroundings. He locates his sensations of contraction and aching in the different parts of his body with a sense of awareness and accuracy. Again we compare this with the formless 'bundle of shivers' to which Pip is reduced by coldness and fear.

A sharp distinction is drawn in the above passage between the boy and his parents. While they are lying asleep in their room of 'stuffy blackness', he is breathing the cool, crisp air of the early morning, with the 'glittering stars' overhead. The adults are oblivious to the subtle changes of light, to the 'greying of the edge of a stone', which is something which the boy knows as a sign of dawn. Lessing seems here to privilege the boy's connection with nature over the adult's deadened and blunted responses, surrounded as they are by the man-made and the comfortable. By shutting themselves in the room of 'stuffy blackness', they do not participate in the wonder of the return of light in the early morning. By contrast, the boy observes the processes of nature in detail and appears to gain a sense of power from this familiarity with nature. It is almost as if nature is his ally, as opposed to his parents, to whom he feels superior. This is shown in his bearing as he stops for 'one proudly fastidious moment' with his hand on the sill. It is as if he is daring his parents to catch him, as he leaves the house, probably against their orders. He makes a deliberate choice for nature and wildness and against the home and domesticity. In contrast, Pip does not go out into the wilderness deliberately: his quest is to visit the family graves, and to make contact with his parents in that way. He sees the wilderness beyond the churchyard, but shows no inclination to explore it.

The trees in the above passage, 'standing black and still', can be compared with the trees in *The Grass is Singing:* 'the trees were pressing in round the house, watching, waiting' (1950:242). In the novel, the trees are aggressive, active, and alive with malicious intent, while in this story the trees are enigmatic: neutral, but with a suggestion of secrecy. Clearly, the mysteries of nature are not yet known or understood by the boy, but he has none of the fear which so clearly marks Mary who, at this late stage in the novel, is in the process of breaking down. The trees in the story mark the boundary between domestic and wild space:

> He always looked back over his shoulder at the house before he passed a wall of trees that shut it from sight. It looked so low and small, crouching there under a tall and brilliant sky. Then he turned his back on it, and on the frowsting sleepers, and forgot them (p.27).

The boy crosses the barrier without hesitation, leaving the domesticated sphere of house and garden and entering the untamed and unknown region beyond. His swift and decisive action of 'turning his back' on the house suggests his rejection of this realm and the people who do not cross these boundaries. Later in this study I will be looking at adult men such as Leopard George and Johnny Blakeworthy who turn their backs on settler society in ways that are similar to the boy's attitude here. In showing us people who do this in her stories, Lessing is building in a critical dimension to convey her own rejection of that society later in her life.

The boy's attitude to his parents is symbolized by his description of the house: 'It looked so low and small, crouching there under a tall and brilliant sky.' The word 'crouching' suggests that the boy sees the house as being very small and afraid, and trying to hide away from the light of the 'brilliant sky'. It suggests the cramped, enclosed existence of his parents, compared to the freedom which he experiences, reflected by the vast expanse of the sky. The narrator indicates that the boy is not part of the narrow, cramped way of life which his parents lead. He escapes it by being prepared to open himself to nature, even if it is uncomfortable for him. Again, this is similar to the way Johnny Blakeworthy reacts against the narrowness of domestic life, and he also escapes into the wild where he sleeps under the stars for considerable periods in his life.

In this story, the adults seem to be alienated from nature, and to regard it as 'the Other'. This is evidenced by the way the parents of the boy huddle inside the house, shutting out the dawn and the cold air, whereas the boy welcomes nature, and feels part of it. It could be said that the boy regards nature as 'another', to use Murphy's term. Not only does the narrator describe the boy in terms of an animal, ('alert as an animal'), the boy identifies his existence with the non-human:

> . . . he felt the years of his life with his hands, as if he were counting marbles, each one hard and separate and compact, each one a wonderful shining thing. That was what he was: fifteen years of this rich soil, and this slow-moving water, and air that smelt like a challenge whether it was warm and sultry at noon, or as brisk as cold water, like it was now (p.29).

What is obvious in these lines is the boy's deep identification with the land: the earth, water and air of Africa. These are the most basic elements of existence: the foundations of the boy's life are based very firmly in his natural surroundings, in his familiarity with the soil and the changes in the weather. This is not a momentary feeling, but one which proceeds from a long established rapport with his environment. The image of the marbles is of course appropriate for a boy, and by implication contrasts with adults in general, who, as they grow older, do not see each year as a separate entity as clearly as the boy does. It is also an image which brings to mind another solitary child in literature: Waldo, in Schreiner's, *The Story of an African Farm.* As Waldo looks after sheep on the karoo farm, he makes a little altar with some pebbles, in order to test whether God will answer his prayers. He is disappointed. The experience he has while alone in nature is an intensely painful one. Schreiner writes: 'The barb in the arrow of childhood's suffering is this – its intense loneliness, its intense ignorance' (p.42). In contrast, the boy in Lessing's story does not seem to suffer from loneliness. He enjoys being able to go out into the veld by himself, away from his parents. There is no spiritual quest on his part as there is with Waldo. However, he does suffer the pain of ignorance in relation to the world of nature and himself. He learns a painful lesson about suffering and death, but initially his closeness to nature gives him a sense of power, which is magnified when he begins to sing, and his voice echoes back to him from the valley:

> And for minutes he stood there, shouting and singing and waiting for the lovely eddying sound of the echo; so that his own new strong thoughts came back and washed round his head, as if someone were answering him and encouraging him: till the gorge was full of soft voices clashing back and forth from rock to rock over the river (p.30).

This image of the boy going out and confronting nature, shouting and calling contrasts strongly with Pip's crying at the sound of the rushing wind in the distance. Pip reacts with fear to the sounds of wildness, whereas the boy in the story causes wildness to answer him. His actions, however, demonstrate his narcissism. Nature is giving him an amplified image of himself, of his own thoughts. His relationship with nature at this point is indicated by his words: 'That was what he was! – he sang, if he chose; and the world had to answer him'(p.30). These words give the impression of a rather imperious attitude towards nature, but it is this very attitude that is undermined by the events in the story.

J.M. Coetzee sees Lessing as being strongly influenced by Wordsworth in her attitude towards nature. In his review of her autobiography, he says:

> Aside from the restorative power of the natural world (about which Lessing is unabashedly Wordsworthian), there reigned among the children of the settlers a strongly egalitarian spirit that helped her escape the class obsessions of her parents (1994:51).

The 'restorative power' that he refers to is a complex mixture of subjective experience and external existence. If Lessing is portraying her characters as experiencing the restorative or redemptive power of nature, it is possible that she believes that nature, 'out there' has that power, but that at the same time, it is dependent on the receptivity of the subjective mind to receive this power. The picture of Lessing's solitary boy, making sounds and listening to the echoes, closely resembles Wordsworth's boy in *Poems of the Imagination*, who stands alone,

> Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
> And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
> Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
> Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
> That they might answer him. – And they would shout
> Across the watery vale, and shout again,
> Responsive to his call, - with quivering peals,
> And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
> Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
> Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause
> Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
> Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain torrents; ('There was a Boy': lines 6–21)

Although the actions of the two boys are similar, there is in fact a strong contrast between them. Wordsworth's boy is attempting to sound like an owl, so that he can draw out the bird's response to him, whereas Lessing's boy is intoxicated by the sound of his own voice – multiplied and amplified by the passively receiving earth; human magnified by non-human. The boy in the poem manages to start a conversation with the owls, and thus puts himself on the same level with the animal world, whereas the boy in the story does not try to make contact with another being. He takes the echoes of his own voice as 'another' – a being who agrees with him and gives his own thoughts more power. But he is startled out of his mood of exhilaration and confidence by a voice which is 'not his own'. Just as the boy in the poem stops and listens when the response he expects is not forthcoming, this boy listens, trying to identify the sound. In Wordsworth's case, the unexpected silence allows him to hear the background sounds of the 'mountain torrents' which had been obscured by the shouts of the owls. It is a natural part of the harmony of the scene. Lessing's boy does not recognize the sound which he hears :

> And then it seemed as if there was a new voice. He listened, puzzled, for it was not his own. Soon he was leaning forward, all his nerves alert, quite still: somewhere close to him there was a noise that was no joyful bird, nor tinkle of falling water, nor ponderous movement of cattle (p.30).

The boy goes on to discover that the cry comes from a wounded buck being eaten alive by ants. The experience of watching this animal suffer and die is one which shocks and disturbs him deeply, and robs him of all his previous confidence. Through the 'pity and terror' which he feels he comes to a painful understanding of the meaning of death:

> The knowledge of fatality, of what has to be, had gripped him and for the first time in his life: and he was left unable to make any movement of brain or body, except to say: 'Yes, yes. That is what living is.' It had entered his flesh and his bones and grown into the farthest corners of his brain and would never leave him (p.32).

The knowledge is not merely intellectual knowledge, it is something which he feels deeply with his body. From the beginning of the story the boy opens himself physically to the impact of the natural world, and so the knowledge he comes to here is also experienced viscerally. In contrast to the adults in the story he has the capacity to learn things in a holistic way, whereas adults are too intellectual, too cerebral, and have lost the ability to feel knowledge intensely with their bodies.

The knowledge of fatality raises the question about intervention in nature. As the boy witnesses the appalling suffering of the buck, he considers shooting it to put it out of its misery. However, he does not do this. His argument is that if he hadn't been there, the buck would have died in the same way. But when he looks carefully at the remains of the buck, he realizes that it might have been human intervention in the first place that caused this scene of 'natural' destruction – the buck's leg has been broken, possibly by a shot from his rifle on a previous occasion. This thought changes him: 'He was a small boy again, kicking sulkily at the skeleton, hanging his head, refusing to accept responsibility' (p.34). The control which the boy was so confident of having at the beginning of the story is shown to be very limited. He is only part of the great cycle of living things, and although his actions can influence events, they cannot control them.

The non-human speaks in this story, but in a voice broken by human intervention. It is not the clear, pure non-human voice, untouched by human beings, which Wordsworth's boy encounters at the lake. It reflects back onto the human, and the part he plays in the stewardship of the natural world. In this way, Lessing shows us that the relationship between the child and nature is a complex one. In spite of his joyful identification with nature, he can also be an agent of destruction. The adult's conflicting role of conserving or destroying nature can be seen in this boy. Poised to enter the adult world, he sees himself in the beginning of the story as superior to that world. At the end, however, he slips back, 'sulkily', into the world of the child because of the difficulty of taking responsibility for his possible complicity in the suffering that he witnesses.

Eva Hunter, in her thesis, 'A Sense of Place in the Fiction of Doris Lessing'(1990), points out that the boy does not take over the narration of his own story, as the girl does in 'Chief Mshlanga' suggesting that Lessing has a greater affinity with the girl protagonist than with the boy. Hunter says:

> Lessing locates herself, through her fictional characters, closer to the (feminine) urge toward empathy and relatedness than to the (masculine) desire to dominate (1990:48).

Hunter sees in this boy an example of male domination of the female, the earth: 'through the boy protagonist she writes of the psychology of the will to subjugate and exploit land and people' (1990:47). Although he does seem to be egocentric at times, ('I contain the world. I can make of it what I want' p.30), it seems to come from exuberance rather than aggression, as the narrator makes plain:

> He leapt up into the air, shouting and yelling wild, unrecognizable noises. Then he began to run, not carefully, as he had before, but madly, like a wild thing. He was clean crazy, yelling mad with the joy of living and a superfluity of youth (p.29).

The 'superfluity of youth' gives him his over-confidence in his abilities ('there is nothing I can't become,' p.29). However, rather than wanting to 'subjugate' the world, he is shown as wanting to fit into his natural surroundings. For example, when he leaves the house initially we are given the following detail:

> he felt the chilled dust push up between his toes, and he let the muscles of his feet spread and settle into the shapes of the earth; and he thought: I could walk a hundred miles on feet like these! (p.27)

Here one can see his childlike exuberance and unrealistic confidence, similar to the mad puppy in 'The Story of Two Dogs', who runs around barking at the moon. The boy's impulse is to mingle with the soil, to feel it between his toes and to alter the shape of his foot to fit into the shape of the earth, rather than to dominate it. This sense of accommodation and co-existence with the earth brings the idea of male dominance into question. There is a sense of mutual interchange between the human and the non-human which is upset by the death of the buck later in the story and the boy's sense of superiority to the adult world collapses. I think the story is partly concerned with adolescence and the way a child's development swings from positive to negative in a short space of time. The natural world performs the role of catalyst here in the boy's transition to adulthood and it is a painful lesson that adulthood is not so easily reached or transcended as he thinks it is initially.

Hunter's thesis about the masculine desire to dominate and the feminine urge toward empathy can be further tested in 'The Sun Between Their Feet'. In this story there is a girl protagonist and the narration is in the first person. It has been argued that this type of narration indicates that Lessing identifies more closely with the girl, and this may be the case.

In this story, a young girl goes into an uninhabited part of the land and spends the day watching two dung beetles trying to push a ball of dung up a rock face. Initially the girl plays the role of observer of the natural world, but later she tries to intervene in the activities of the beetles. She watches them struggling to push the ball of dung up a steep rock, without success. But when she tries to move them to an easier place on the rock, it is futile. No matter how well-meant her 'help' is, it is not accepted by these insects.

Significant interactions between the human and the non-human world take place under particular conditions in these stories. In most cases, the human beings are isolated in some way, and this makes them more open to the natural world. The boy in 'A Sunrise on the Veld' is isolated by time as he goes out at dawn when most people are still asleep. The girl in 'The Sun Between Their Feet' is isolated by space. She chooses a wilderness area which is not often inhabited by people. It is 'throw-away' land – an area where only those who have no claim to good land go:

> The station itself was busy with trains and people, and the good country in front was settled thick with white farmers, but all the country behind the station was unused because it was granite boulders, outcrops, and sand. The scrub cattle from the Reserve strayed there. There were no human beings. From the track it seemed the hills of boulders were so steep and laced with vines and weeds there would be no place to go between them. But you could force your way in, and there it became clear that in the past people had made use of this wilderness (p.182).

The girl deliberately chooses this area. No reason for her choice is given in the story, but from the above passage it may be concluded that it is the atmosphere of isolation that attracts her. 'There were no human beings'. The place seems inaccessible, as if nature is deliberately excluding people, with its steep boulders and curtains of vines. She, however, knows how to penetrate these barriers and find the secret spaces within. The phrase, 'you could force your way in', suggests the kind of aggressive invasion of space that, in Hunter's terms would be associated with male dominance.

In this story, the myth of the 'empty land' is challenged. The uninhabited area looks empty, but once the girl has found a way in, it becomes clear to her that the area has been used by people for many years, and she acknowledges this: the Matebele, the Mashona, and the Bushmen before them. Lessing refutes the myth by showing that the land was not empty in pre-settler days. However, she makes the 'empty' space a site for adventure, a place where the European protagonist can learn about the secrets of nature. The girl tries to relate to the creatures she observes by attempting to enter into their perspective. Here she is behaving according to the feminine empathetic model:

> I got down off the rock, and sat in the grass behind them to view the ascent through their eyes.
>
> The rock was about four feet long and three feet high. It was a jutting slab of granite, wooded and lichened, its edges blunted by rain and by wind. The beetles, hugging their ball between legs and bellies, looked up to a savage mountain, whose first slopes were an easy foot-assisting invitation (p.184).

The focalization in this passage has two levels: the adult retrospective narrator is focalizing the girl who is focalizing the beetles. She tries to cross the boundary between the human and the non-human in order to understand their problems. She is willing to change her position and her habitual way of viewing the world in order to identify with the 'other'. The phrase 'savage mountain' is humorously used to indicate the appearance of the rock to the beetles. A mock-heroic tone describes the frantic activities of the beetles:

> As soon as the piece was freed, both beetles assaulted it with legs and bodies, modelling fast, frantic with creation, seizing it between their back legs, spinning it, rolling it under them, both tugging and pushing it through the thick encumbering grass stems that rose over them like forest trees until at last the ball rolled away from them into a plain, or glade, or inch-wide space of sand (p.183).

A frenzy of activity is conveyed by the participles, 'modelling', 'seizing', 'spinning', 'tugging' and 'pushing'. The beetles seem to be impelled by some powerful imperative that exists in their small world, so that although they are described humorously, their total absorption in their task gives them a convincing seriousness. The observer is excluded from their busy world. They have a sense of mission and purpose which the girl lacks. Her frustration at their repeated attempts and repeated failures however, leads her to intervene:

> I took a large leaf, slipped it under the ball of dung and the beetles, and lifted this unit away to one side, away from the impossible and destructive mountain.
>
> But when I slid the leaf from under them, they rested a moment in the new patch of territory, scouted this way and that among the grass-stems, found their position, and at once rolled their ball back to the foot of the mountain where they prepared another ascent (p.186).

No matter how carefully the girl tries to intervene, and no matter how clear it is to her that it is a better position for them, they still prefer their own, impossible route up the rock. This indicates that human logic cannot be applied to this form of life. They have their own imperative, their inner compulsion which human beings cannot reach or understand. Lessing brings this out in the humorous mock heroic tone, using words such as 'scouted' and 'prepared another ascent' to suggest an expedition to Everest. The girl may feel an intellectual superiority to them as she sees their 'stupid' mistakes, but what comes through most strongly is that she doesn't understand their world and is excluded from it. There is an 'unbridgeable gulf', between the small, wild world of the beetles and the human world.

Being so firmly excluded from their world, she turns to a book for assistance: an encyclopaedia. However, the entries from the encyclopaedia are not very helpful because they contradict the reality which the girl witnesses:

> Again I lifted them, dung and beetles, away from the precipice, to a clear place where they had the choice of a dozen suitable gentle slopes, but they rolled their ball patiently back to the mountain's foot.
> 'The slope is chosen, ' says the book, 'by a beautiful instinct, so that the ball of dung comes to rest in a spot suitable for the hatching of the new generation of sacred insect' (p.187).

This 'beautiful instinct' must be read ironically, in the light of the refusal of the beetles to accept 'a dozen suitable gentle slopes'. The slope that the beetles choose gives them endless trouble, and the ball of dung ends up as a 'small puff of dusty grass'. Thus we have another gap to be bridged: that between textbook knowledge and experiential knowledge. The book does however provide a counterpoint between past and present societies. The actions of the beetles observed by this colonial girl in Southern Africa recall the ancient civilization of Egypt, and the scarab symbol. The beetles were regarded as sacred in Egypt because of their function of ensuring that fertility was returned to the soil. The ball of dung, being round, was associated with the sun, the source of light and life.

Through contact with this seemingly insignificant example of the small creatures of the natural world, the story makes a connection between human cultures: between the ancient culture of the Egyptians, the prehistoric world of the Bushmen, and the more recent world of the African tribes of the colonial era. In referring to Bushman art at the beginning of the story, Lessing suggests that the art and culture of the Southern African people is half hidden and forgotten, and it is overlooked by the adults of the settler community. It is only marginal players like this girl who are drawn by nature to the margins of habitation, who uncover these aspects of African history. While human cultures change, the forces of nature remain the same. The sense of timelessness in nature is referred to by Eve Bertelsen in 'Veldtanschauung: Doris Lessing's Savage Africa'(1991). In her analysis of *The Grass is Singing* she is interested in the mediating influence of 'a particular traditional and literary view of Nature'. She writes:

> A further effect of literary tradition involves the displacement of social contradictions via *metaphor* onto a timeless plane where material problems are recast as part of an immutable order of Nature (1991:648).

It seems to me that in both of these stories there is a sense of the 'immutable order of Nature.' In the boy's story, the cruelty of the evolutionary narrative, the 'survival of the fittest', is manifest. In the girl's story, we have the powerful, unchanging imperative of the insect's instinct which has existed over the ages, and which survives human intervention. Set against this timeless narrative is the world of colonialism, with its social contradictions. And the nexus between these two planes is the attempt at intervention. It is central to both stories, and it is fundamental to the colonial enterprise.

The girl's repeated intervention in the lives of the beetles should be measured against Hunter's claims for the relatedness of the feminine impulse. Although she does try to understand and relate to the creatures she watches, she also tries to dominate them by trying to deflect them from their path. In the boy's case, it is not certain whether or not he did shoot and wound the buck that was attacked by ants. When he sees the buck suffering he decides not to intervene. Far from dominating the situation, he empathizes with the buck to such an extent that he feels the buck's pain:

> He gripped the gun between his knees and felt in his own limbs the myriad swarming pain of the twitching animal that could no longer feel, and set his teeth, and said over and over again under his breath: I can't stop it. I can't stop it. There is nothing I can do (p.31).

Here we see his powerlessness over the situation with which he is confronted. The control, which he is so sure of at the beginning of the story, is shown to be superficial in the face of the strong forces of destruction in nature. He sees the ugly face of wildness in the fate of the buck. If he is guilty of shooting and wounding the buck originally, then he has to admit that he cannot control the destructive chain of events that follow. In both cases he is stripped of his confidence and his power to control things. The effect of the encounter with wildness for the boy is painful. He learns about death and finds it difficult to face the possibility of his culpability.

When comparing the boy with the girl I think it must be said that the girl dominates the natural world more than the boy does. She tries to relate to the alien world of the beetles and to see the world from their perspective, but her empathy is not as intense as the boy's. The girl is presented as having a more leisurely and less traumatic contact with wildness. The narrative of her observations of the beetles is interspersed with entries from a text, which changes the atmosphere of the story. It seems more like a natural history experiment than a life-changing experience. However both of them show that there is a gap between the world of humans and the world of animals and insects that is difficult, if not impossible, to bridge.

In the girl's story there are very few references to adults. The girl is alone throughout the story, engrossed in her observation of the beetles. She refers to the people in previous ages who occupied that space but she doesn't interact with any human beings.

The boy in 'A Sunrise on the Veld' is also alone in the story, but he makes a significant departure from his parents, early in the morning. He is conscious of them sleeping and he sees himself as being different and somewhat superior to them at first. However, through his experience with wildness he is chastened and returns home with a much more subdued attitude.

The contrast between the boy and his parents is not a major aspect of this chapter, but in the next chapter we will be considering three stories where such contrasts occur. Some of the adults in the chapter make a powerful impact on the children and others come into conflict with them. We will consider whether there is an 'unbridgeable gap' between adults and children.

Chapter three: Adults, Children and Wildness

'The Old Chief Mshlanga'

'Flavours of Exile'

'Traitors'

Adults and children are the focus of this chapter. The relationship between the boy and his parents in 'A Sunrise on the Veld' is hinted at but not fully developed. In this chapter we will focus on the differences between the children and their parents or other adults in relation to wildness and show what implications this has for Lessing's representation of the colonial situation. Young girls are the protagonists in these stories and the events are focalized or narrated by them.

The role that children play in Lessing's stories is similar to that played by children in other postcolonial literature. An article on Pauline Smith's *Platkops Children* by Margaret Lenta shows that 'children's stories from the colonies can constitute fictional commentary on postcolonial history' (2000:41). She compares the discourse of the child narrator in *Platkops Children* to that of *Huckleberry Finn*:

> Twain, by his use of a child narrator whose discourse marks him as marginal in his community, has gained both distance from, and a fresh view of, his subject, the life of the late-nineteenth-century American South (2000:34).

Like Smith, Lessing uses child narrators and focalizers to give a 'fresh view' of the colonial situation. These children occupy a marginal position in the adult world. We often find that they are not included in conversations but listen to them from the sidelines and respond to the atmosphere that is created. They lack experience in the adult world, but this can sometimes be an advantage as they also lack the prejudices that the settlers bring with them from England. This enables Lessing to develop critical distance through control of the child's point of view. The child's view of this world often shows up the assumptions and prejudices of the adults of which the adults might not be aware. In this way

Lessing is able to build in a subtle level of internal criticism in the stories.

All three stories selected for this chapter show girls exploring nature in different ways. The extent to which they encounter wildness varies, for instance, the girl in 'Flavours of Exile' spends a great deal of time out of doors, but mainly in the cultivated areas of the farm. Her exploration takes on a different form from that of the others. The girls in 'Traitors' venture out from the domestic space around their house and explore the wild areas of the farm. Similarly, the girl in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' walks out alone on the farm with her gun and her dogs and on one occasion goes beyond the borders of the farm into unfamiliar territory.

In spite of the gender stereotyping in settler society, where the boys were expected to be the hunters with guns and the girls were expected to play house, Lessing often used to go out into the bush with a gun as a young girl. In her autobiography she writes: 'I might be asked by my mother to shoot her eight to ten pigeons for a stew or pie' (1994:112). Lessing used to walk freely all over the farm and even beyond its borders. Similarly, the girl in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' has great freedom of movement as we see in the opening sentence of the story: 'They were good, the years of ranging the bush over her father's farm which, like every white farm, was largely unused, broken only occasionally by small patches of cultivation' (p.13). This sentence indicates that large tracts of African bush remain untouched on these colonial farms. This evokes a very different picture from a typical English farm, where the land, in Hopkins' terms is 'plotted and pieced'. The farm in Lessing's story is largely untamed, apart from the fencing and the 'small patches of cultivation'. In generalizing this farm to 'every white farm', Lessing offers a critique of colonialism at the outset. The land is not fully utilized by the white farmers and yet the black inhabitants such as Chief Mshlanga have lost their rights to it.

Before the girl's encounter with Chief Mshlanga, she is described against the backdrop of the African landscape:

> And a jutting piece of rock which had been thrust up from the warm soil of Africa unimaginable eras of time ago, washed into hollows and whorls by sun and wind that had travelled so many thousands of miles of space and bush, would hold the weight of a small girl whose eyes were sightless for anything but a pale willowed river, a pale gleaming castle – a small girl singing: (p.13).

In this passage Lessing creates a sense of the vastness in time and space that is Africa. One is made aware of the volcanic upheavals in past ages that have gone into the making of the shapes of the rocks. All the energy and power of the sun and wind transforms the rock into a resting place, a refuge for the small girl who is held and protected by it. One could compare this scene with the extract from *Great Expectations* quoted in the last chapter. Pip, too, is described against a backdrop of a wild landscape, and yet there is no sense of refuge or protection for him. The girl is unaware of her actual surroundings: 'her eyes were sightless' for anything except the images from the fairy tales, which have captured her imagination. Pip, on the other hand, is acutely aware of his surroundings and is so frightened by them that his sense of identity is reduced to 'a bundle of shivers', which he names as Pip. In contrast to his fear, the girl shows no fear.The image of the huge 'jutting' rocks holding her gives the impression to the outside observer that she is small and vulnerable, but she doesn't seem to have this feeling as she sings happily and sees castles and willow trees. She does not articulate a sense of identity or name herself in the way Pip does. Not only is she unaware of her surroundings, but she is unaware of who she is. Her imagination is filled with the landscape of her European cultural heritage and her identity is bound up with this heritage. In this way Lessing sets the stage dramatically for the girl's journey of discovery, of finding out who she is in terms of her African heritage. At the outset, her world is dominated by the books she has read:

> Pushing her way through the green aisles of the mealie stalks, the leaves arching like cathedrals veined with sunlight far overhead, with the packed red earth underfoot, a fine lace of red-starred witchweed would summon up a black bent figure croaking premonitions: the Northern witch, bred of cold Northern forests, would stand before her among the mealie fields, and it was the mealie fields that faded and fled, leaving her among the gnarled roots of an oak, snow falling thick and soft and white, the woodcutter's fire glowing red welcome through crowding tree-trunks (p.13).

The girl is in physical contact with the mealie plants and she feels their texture and their strength as she pushes past them in the field. Both her kinetic sense and her visual sense are involved in the experience – as is her sense of the texture of the 'packed red earth underfoot' – and yet all this sensory input is powerless to arrest her imagination which transforms the mealie leaves touching overhead into the enclosed space of the trees of the cold Northern forest. Thus the human imagination, and the cultural identity which forms it, determines what is seen in nature. As Marjorie Hope Nicolson puts it: 'What men see in Nature is a result of what they have been taught to see – lessons they have learned in school, doctrines they have heard in church, books they have read' (1959: 3). The books the girl reads block her ability to register the natural surroundings through which she walks. Lessing uses third person narration here, which creates distance between her and the girl and emphasizes the girl's alienation from Africa:

> This child could not see a msasa tree, or the thorn, for what they were. Her books held tales of alien fairies, her rivers ran slow and peaceful, and she knew the shape of the leaves of an ash or an oak, the names of the little creatures that lived in English streams, when the words 'the veld' meant strangeness, though she could remember nothing else.
>
> Because of this, for many years, it was the veld that seemed unreal; the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language.
>
> The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were an amorphous black mass, mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles, faceless, who existed merely to serve, to say 'Yes, Baas,' take their money and go (p.14).

In this passage Lessing juxtaposes the protagonist's alienation from the land with her alienation from the indigenous people. Her alienation from the land is caused by her cultural framework, and her alienation from the people is caused by colonial attitudes. She is immersed in her parent's world where the only black people they interact with are their servants or labourers. These people have no individual identity for the girl: they are 'faceless'. Her mother teaches her to avoid interaction:

> It was even impossible to think of the black people who worked about the house as friends, for if she talked to one of them, her mother would come running anxiously: 'Come away; you mustn't talk to natives.'
>
> It was this instilled consciousness of danger, of something unpleasant, that made it easy to laugh out loud, crudely, if a servant made a mistake in his English or if he failed to understand an order – there is a certain kind of laughter that is fear, afraid of itself (p.15).

This extract shows us how the prejudice of the mother influences the child. We will see later in 'Traitors' that the mother transmits a message to the children that is vague in substance but strong in emotion: something unpleasant, which the children absorb but do not understand. In this story Lessing shows that these messages and the prohibitions that accompany them, breed fear: 'fear, afraid of itself'. From the way the mother reacts to the girl's natural impulse to communicate with the people around her, we are made aware of the mother's fears and her prejudice and by implication the general attitudes of settler society.

It is only when she is fourteen that the girl has an encounter that offsets the influence of her mother. She meets Chief Mshlanga on one of her solitary walks on the farm. His dignity and self-respect as well as his courtesy towards her put her off balance, as these are qualities she has not encountered from 'a native' before. His lack of subservience makes her begin to question her right to the land she so confidently walks on – and her parents' right. Thus it is that the whole burden of colonial occupation is uncovered for her. She researches the history and background of the Chief, and her perceptions of her surroundings change. Her manners improve towards 'the natives', and she becomes more connected to Africa: 'When I saw a native approaching, we offered and took greetings; and slowly that other landscape in my mind faded, and my feet struck directly on the African soil' (p.17). Here human interaction affects the way in which she perceives the non-human. The cultural effect of her European stories is then weakened by the change in the girl's attitude towards the indigenous inhabitants of the land. Thus it is only when that 'other landscape' in the girl's mind fades that she can see and feel the landscape of Africa. So, on the one hand, human interaction influences interaction with nature, but on the other hand, nature can also affect human behaviour.

This is most obvious when the girl decides to go to look for Chief Mshlanga's homestead, beyond the border of her parents' farm. While she is walking in this area she enters a 'completely fresh type of landscape' (p.19). It is a green valley with a river, birds, soft grass and tall trees. It seems as lush and unspoilt as the Garden of Eden as it has 'never been cultivated by white men' (p.19). In spite of the beauty, she experiences an overwhelming fear:

> I had read of this feeling, how the bigness and silence of Africa, under the ancient sun, grows dense and takes shape in the mind, till even the birds seem to call menacingly, and a deadly spirit comes out of the trees and the rocks. You move warily, as if your very passing disturbs something old and evil, something dark and big and angry that might suddenly rear and strike from behind......Fear possessed me. I found I was turning round and round, because of the shapeless menace behind me that might reach out and take me; I kept glancing at the files of kopjes which, seen from a different angle, seemed to change with every step so that even known landmarks like a big mountain that had sentinelled my world since I first became conscious of it, showed an unfamiliar sunlit valley among its foothills (p.20).

Her fear is a fear of the non-human and not of the human. She has walked for years all over the countryside and has never been afraid of the human inhabitants of Africa. She says: 'I had learnt an easy friendliness for the Africans I might encounter' (p.20). She describes this fear as an inexplicable feeling that creeps into her and makes her hair stand up. It transforms the way she sees the world: '....the sun....appeared to have moved into an eastern slant, shedding the sad yellow light of sunset' (p.20). A sense of loss is suggested here, even in the sunlight, which is usually associated with the reassurance of day.

The young girl's experience is reminiscent of the terror of the boy in Wordsworth's 'The Prelude', who goes to row his boat on the lake at night and sees a huge peak emerging on the horizon as he rows:

> I struck and struck again
> And growing still in stature the grim shape
> Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
> For so it seemed, with purpose of its own

> And measured motion like a living thing,
> Strode after me. . . .
> . . .   But after I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days, my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
> There hung a darkness, call it solitude
> Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
> Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
> But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
> Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
> By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.
> (lines 380 – 400: 426)

The boy is haunted by this incident for a long time afterwards. His 'act of stealth/And troubled pleasure' leads to deep anxiety and disquiet, as he tries to come to terms with his experience. Lessing's reference to the menace of the 'deadly spirit' in the trees and rocks is similar to Wordsworth's mysterious phrase, the 'unknown modes of being'. So powerful is the memory of the experience for the boy that it blocks out all that is familiar and 'normal.' Even the grass of the fields loses its colour as he finds himself in the grip of that nightmare vision. In both cases, the children feel the immensity of nature, and its menacing presence, as it seems to move threateningly towards them. Again, Wordsworth's influence on Lessing is clear, and the colonial context gives the encounter with nature a different slant.

The fear that the girl feels might also remind us of the boy's fear in 'The Sunrise on the Veld' when he sees the ants devouring the buck: 'as he drew in his breath and pity and terror seized him, the beast fell and the screaming stopped' (p.31). Fear is indeed part of the experience of wildness in many of the stories. Maria S. Suarez-Lafuente argues that 'The most frequent word in Lessing's African narratives is *fear*' (1987:5). The girl's fear causes her to lose bearings. The sense of security which is provided by the landmark of the mountain, vanishes. It is the change in the familiar landscape that disorientates her and undermines all her unconscious assumptions about the known world. In an article entitled 'Para-images: The Shapes of Identity in *The Grass is Singing*' (1999), Christopher

Bruner cites Gaston Bachelard's notion of knowing oneself in terms of 'a sequence of fixations in the spaces of [one's] stability' (1999:14). The protagonist in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' is destabilized by changes in the natural surroundings and hence has to readjust her sense of being. This profound experience with nature shakes her to the core and makes it impossible for her to have the same confidence as she had previously. She has to come to terms with the implications of her position as the daughter of a settler in a way she has not been prompted to do before. The sense of alienation which she feels underlines her growing sense of the settler's presence as intrusion.

This is confirmed by the cool reception she gets when she goes on to Chief Mshlanga's homestead. She is uncomfortably aware that she is seen as an intruder in that setting. The landscape itself seems to confirm this: '..there was now a queer hostility in the landscape, a cold, hard, sullen indomitability that walked with me, as strong as a wall, as intangible as smoke; it seemed to say to me: you walk here as a destroyer (p.23).

This disturbing and unsettling relationship with the non-human world affects the protagonist's relationship with the human world, and in particular with the 'other'. Because it undermines her sense of identity, it makes her more open and more vulnerable when she goes to the Old Chief's homestead. It is as if her experience of alienation from the natural environment contributes to her growing sense of insecurity about her position on the land. In contrast to her confidence in her right to walk on the farm at the beginning of the story, she is now very aware of the rights of the Chief, from whose people the land was taken. Thus the development of a critical awareness of colonization is facilitated in the girl by her interaction with the wildness of the African landscape.

The mother's anxious and narrowly over-protective world is thrown into relief by the girl's engagement with the world of the African. The courtesy and respect with which the girl is treated by the Chief and his men show the hollowness of her mother's fears. On the other hand, we are shown how rudely the girl behaves towards them, at least initially, and the peremptory manner in which the mother treats the son of the Chief as he works in her kitchen. Gradually the contrast between the mother's view of the world and the girl's view develops. Because the girl breaks through social barriers in her contact with Chief Mshlanga, she can give a 'fresh view' of colonial society.

In 'Flavours of Exile', the relationship between mother and daughter takes a different form. The girl is set against the mother from the start but is gradually transformed to be like her mother, at least superficially. The rebellion of a girl against her mother is a theme which has a firm basis in Lessing's life. We read in her autobiography: 'My fourteenth was a make or break year, a sink or swim year, a do or die year, for I was fighting for my life against my mother. That was how I saw it. That was how it was' (p.155). The girl in 'Flavours of Exile' is probably a similar age, although she is younger when the story begins.

The central trope in this story is the garden. Wildness is generally seen in opposition to cultivation, and hence not part of a garden. However, it can also be taken to mean 'natural'. The 'natural' approach to a garden would be to find a location suitable to the terrain and to plant fruits and vegetables that grow easily in that climate. This is the approach that is taken by the father and the daughter in the story. The 'unnatural' approach to the garden would be to situate it in a place that is difficult to maintain, far from water for example, or where the soil is stony. The choice of exotic plants unsuited to the conditions of Africa would also constitute the idea of an 'unnatural' garden. This is the type of garden that the mother wants. The result is that the mother and daughter are set apart by their different reactions towards the gardens: the first near the house where the soil is thin and the second at the foot of the hill where the soil is deep.

The retrospective first person narrator describes the vegetables from the second garden in lavish terms of abundance and sensuous beauty: 'rich chocolate earth studded emerald green, frothed with the white of cauliflowers, jewelled with the purple globes of eggplant and the scarlet wealth of tomatoes' (p.124). This description performs several functions: it gives evidence of the immense fertility of the African soil; it gives a heightened and nostalgic view of the narrator's childhood world and it shows up the mother's perversity and blindness: 'For her, that garden represented a defeat' (p.124). The reason for this view is that the mother is dominated by her idea of what a farmyard should look like:'She had in her mind, perhaps, a vision of the farmhouse surrounded by outbuildings like a hen sheltering its chicks' (p.125). She is a first generation settler and her mental constructs determine how she sees nature and how she shapes nature. This image conveys a sense of maternal closeness and protectiveness which indicates that the underlying reason for the mother's insistence might be her need to mother and protect. There are no artificial hindrances to the girl's appreciation of the abundance of the lower garden, whereas the mother goes against nature by trying to make something grow in an unsuitable location: 'she toiled and bent over those reluctant beds' (p.125).

The contrast between the mother and her daughter will be developed in relation to three sets of plants: carrots, gooseberries and pomegranates. The narrator describes how she as a young girl would eat carrots raw in the garden: ' I ate my allowance of these before the cook could boil them and drown them in the white flour sauce without which – and unless they were served in the large china vegetable dishes brought from that old house in London – they were not carrots to my mother '(p.124). This exemplifies a major difference between the mother and her daughter. The girl responds to the raw flavour of Africa. She eats the carrots straight from the earth, directly, whereas the mother has to change them to fit in with her cultural habits and expectations. She has to process the flavour, deaden the texture, cover them with sauce and enclose them inside an artifact of civilization, the china bowl, before they have a recognisable identity for her.

In addition to being fixated on the customs and ideas from England, the mother is also insistent that certain types of plants are superior to others, because they come from England. This is the case with gooseberries. The children pluck and eat the fruit while they lie under the wild gooseberry bushes. This is a time of friendship and unity with the boy, William. They play and laugh and quarrel with the unselfconsciousness of pre-adolescent children, and enjoy the tangy fresh flavour of the gooseberries.

The mother, however, refuses to acknowledge that they are gooseberries: "Cape gooseberries!' she said bitterly. 'They aren't gooseberries at all. Oh, if I could let you taste a pie made of real English gooseberries' (p.125). She eventually manages to procure a tin of English gooseberries, ironically from a Greek store. Her chosen fruits are from another continent, processed and packaged, sold by a person from another country and then cooked in a pie before they can be eaten. In contrast to this, the young girl simply lies on her back and stretches out her arm to pick the fruit. She is natural, easy and direct in relation to nature, unlike her mother whose colonial palate cannot allow her to experience Africa directly or to allow for the possibility of enjoyment. Whereas the child is at home in Africa, the mother is at home in England and Africa is a place of exile.

The Cape gooseberries occupy a space on the margin between wildness and cultivation. Although they can be cultivated and sold commercially, in this instance they have needed no human agency to plant them – they were 'seeded by wild or vagrant plants' (p.125). They are intruders, wandering out of the realm of the wild and into the realm of 'the garden'. Since children occupy a marginal space in colonial society, it is appropriate that they relate easily to this marginal fruit. It reflects their natural connection with the land they have grown up in. However, just as the gooseberry enters the cultivated area of 'the garden', the children too are poised to enter 'civilized' adult society. The fruit that represents this transition into adulthood is the pomegranate.

In 'Interpreting 'Flavours of Exile' (1983), Orphia Jane Allen connects the pomegranate with the Kore myth. In the myth Persephone is carried to the underworld by Hades where she eats a pomegranate and consequently must return to it for a third of each year. Her mother, Demeter 'searches mournfully' for her while she is away, and when she returns their reunion becomes in effect a transformation of Persephone into Demeter, signalling a change from maidenhood into womanhood. Allen writes:

> In Lessing's story 'Flavours of Exile' the pomegranate is a symbol of transformation. It is symbolic of a transformation that exiles the narrator from the vivid world of her childhood to the faded world of nostalgia in which her mother and the other grown-ups live (1983:8).

The pomegranate belongs to the mother's 'faded world of nostalgia' because she remembers the time when she lived in Persia: '...we used to drink pomegranate juice with the melted snow water . . . nothing here tastes like that. The soil is no good' (p.127). All the other fruits and vegetables that the mother longs for are from England, but this one comes from another stage in her colonial past and, perhaps because it is exotic for her mother, the girl feels more able to relate to it. A few trees are planted in the garden. Two die immediately, one is eaten by white ants and the fourth is stunted but at last produces fruit which becomes a focus of attention for the young girl.

Whereas the fruit takes the mother back into the past, it takes the girl into the future. For the girl, the pomegranate seems to hold the secret of her sexuality. It signals a rite of passage into womanhood:

> I went to the tree every day and lay under it, watching the single yellow fruit ripening on its twig. There would come a moment when it must burst and scatter crimson seeds; I much be there when it did; it seemed as if my whole life was concentrated, and ripening with that single fruit (p.129).

The 'crimson seeds' of the pomegranate are clearly a symbol of sexual maturation for the girl. She makes this explicit: 'pomegranates like the red of blood' (p.128). As in the Kore myth, the girl is in the process of becoming a woman, becoming her mother.

While the transformation is in progress in the life of the girl, there is a significant change in her relationship with the boy, William. Their relationship is also related to the garden. They have an innocent, childish relationship in the beginning of the story, where they eat gooseberries together in the garden, lying on their backs and looking at the sky. Later, when they are subjected to eating bitter little brussels sprouts by her mother's nostalgia for England, William pretends to like them, whereas she responds truthfully: 'I said scornfully that I couldn't see what all the fuss was about' (p.126). She sees William's pretence as a betrayal. The sense of unity they shared when opposed to the older generation in the matter of the gooseberries, is lost. William begins to move away from her as he tries to find acceptance in the adult group. His move away from childhood seems to be motivated by a need to be regarded as adult by the social group, whereas hers is motivated internally by physiological and emotional changes.

In spite of William's estrangement from her, the girl falls in love with him. She desperately wants him to be with her when the pomegranate bursts and she watches it ripening continuously. Lessing uses images of pregnancy and motherhood to describe the fruit: 'The rind was thin, so soft that the swelling seeds within were shaping it. The fruit looked lumpy and veined, like a nursing breast' (p.130). These images build up the significance of the fruit for the girl as a symbol of her burgeoning womanhood. At one stage the twig holding the fruit to the branch starts to split off because of the weight of the fruit, and the girl fetches a bandage and straps the twig to the branch: 'Then I wet the bandage, tenderly, and thought of William, William, William' (p.129). Her incantations of the boy's name have a mystical quality, as if she is trying to work a magic charm to bring him to her. There is a similar incident in Lessing's childhood, which gives another dimension to the action, connected to her father who had lost one of his legs in the war:

> When I was in love with one of the little boys, I forget which, and dreaming of

> him, I broke a small branch or twig, near the platform in the treehouse, and bandaged it, then wetted the bandage, murmuring his name. This confession, I know, is of the deepest psychological importance, but more interesting to me now than my needing a wounded lover, like my father, is that this was magic, an act of magic-making, when I knew nothing about it, was the child of parents committed to being rational. Instinct was instructing me how to cajole circumstances, how to manipulate the outside world by means perhaps millions of years old. Any shaman would have understood what I was doing (p.102).

The girl in the story tries to manipulate events on the day when she thinks the pomegranate will burst by getting her mother to invite William's family over for tea. William however is unwilling to participate in what he sees as her childish games. Although he appears to have moved over to the adults' social group, he does not seem to have matured sexually in the way that the girl has. He refuses to acknowledge her womanhood by destroying the pomegranate:

> He was looking about him in the grass. He reached down and picked up a stick.
>
> 'No,' I cried out, as he hit at the tree. The pomegranate flew into the air and exploded in a scatter of crimson seeds, fermenting juice and black ants.
>
> The cracked empty skin, with its white clean-looking inner skin faintly stained with juice, lay in two fragments at my feet.
>
> He was poking sulkily with the stick at the little scarlet seeds that lay everywhere on the earth (p.132).

The violence of his action and the sexual imagery conveys the idea of a symbolic rape of the young girl. He destroys her dream and causes her to enter the 'sensible' world of the adults, which she does, pretending that the pomegranate means nothing to her.

Significantly, it is the 'exotic' fruit that creates this 'unnatural' division between the boy and the girl. It is the effect of society which turns him away from her – the wish to be like the grown ups, and to adopt their norms and values. Whereas the other fruits, the natural, wild Cape gooseberries, cause no divisions between male and female. One could say that the girl in this story is exploring unfamiliar territory. She is becoming a woman and entering the adult world of romance, with all its pitfalls, joy and pain. The exotic, unfamiliar fruit is symbolic of this new experience. The non-human element in this story is instrumental in revealing the differences between the older and the younger generation in settler society. It also is a pivotal focus for the process of crossing the boundary between childhood and adulthood: between innocence and experience.

Both 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' and this story involve transitions. In the former, the girl makes a transition from the fairytale world of her childhood to the harsh world of politics and power. She moves from an unselfconscious dreamlike state to the sharp awareness of her role in the process of land usurpation by colonials. The other girl in 'Flavours of Exile' also moves from unselfconsciousness to selfconsciousness, couched in terms of sexuality and romance. Both traverse unfamiliar terrain, although the one is geographical and social whereas the other is physiological and emotional. Wildness plays a role in both stories, influencing the girl's actions in the first story and forming an outward focus for internal developments in the second story.

The little girls in 'Traitors' are the youngest and least sophisticated of all the girls in these stories. They do not move into the sphere of political awareness or adolescent sexuality. The adult world is mysterious to them, as is the geographical terrain of the 'bush'. As they venture into the wildness on the farm they simultaneously begin to discover the hidden secrets of adult settler society. Their innocent view of adult society highlights the pressures and prejudice inherent in the contested area of adult relationships.

Lessing uses retrospective first person narrative to give the perspective of a child as remembered by an adult. The narrator is a young girl who includes her sister in the communal 'we'. The narrative style imitates the gradual dawning of understanding in these girls, like a process of uncovering secrets. In this way the reader is taken through the experience of the child, and is invited to make the connections and interpretations that finally lead to a picture of the adult members of setter society. Kay McCormick has remarked:

> The author does not use the type of long narratorial intervention which occurs in 'The Antheap'. She relies instead on ironic summary of the adult behaviour that

> the child witnesses and on a sympathetic account of the psychologically isolated child's attempt to come to terms with the tensions surrounding her (1985:18).

This is similar to the type of narration that occurs in the other two stories in this chapter. The girl in 'Flavours of Exile' is certainly isolated in her transition to adulthood. Her only friend, William becomes estranged from her, she cannot communicate easily with her mother, and she has no sister figure with which to share her thoughts and dreams. 'Traitors' is one of the few stories that features two sisters, but in spite of their companionship they are both isolated from the adult world.

The tensions surrounding the children in 'Traitors' involve the previous owner of their parents' farm, Mr Thompson. Through overheard conversations the children sense that there is something shameful about Mr Thompson, but they are not sure what it is. It appears that he lived alone on the farm for many years until his house burnt down. He then left for England, married and returned later, buying a new farm and selling his old farm to the father of the girls. During their explorations of the wild areas of the farm, the children discover the site of Thompson's house and they go there to play until a black woman appears one day and frightens them by staring at them and laughing in a way that they don't understand. When the Thompsons visit the farm the children are forced to take them to the place where the old house was.

Complicated issues of loyalty and betrayal arise in the story, as the title implies. The girls' mother feels a great deal of sympathy for Mrs Thompson, and for settler women in general, and she tries to instill in the girls her sense of resentment against males in general. This is evident when the parents talk about Mr Thompson, and the mother becomes irritated with her husband:

> It was no good; she disliked not only Mr Thompson but Father too, that evening; and we were on her side. She put her arms round us, and looked accusingly at Father. 'Women get all the worst of everything,' she said (p.88).

At the end of the story she reiterates this feeling: '"It's no life for a woman, this," she said, her voice breaking, gathering us close' (p.92). Both of these statements show that the mother, and by implication, settler women in general, see themselves as victims of the men who bring them to Africa and cause them to live under difficult circumstances. The mother blames her husband, Mr Thompson, and all men for the loneliness that women suffer, and she tries to make the girls feel the same way. Physically and emotionally she draws them close to her, so that they can be 'on her side'. It is this alignment that changes during the course of events and that turns the children into 'traitors'.

The emotional pressure put on the girls by their mother touches on the concern already mentioned of Lessing's relationship with her mother. In her autobiography, Lessing says: 'I was in nervous flight from her ever since I can remember anything, and from the age of fourteen I set myself obdurately against her in a kind of inner emigration from everything she represented' (1994:15).

Generally, the space which the mother represents in Lessing's fiction is the house, surrounded by the garden, whereas the space represented by the father is the veld and the bush. Thus we find in many stories the protagonists crossing the border between these two spaces in an attempt to balance the male and the female imperatives in their lives. In an article on motherhood in *Under My Skin*, Victoria Rosner has written:

> Figuring her adolescent rebellion as an 'emigration,' a journey out of the mother-country to unknown parts, Lessing illustrates the unexpected reciprocity of maternity and colonialism, a relationship most clearly played out in border skirmishes fought by mother and daughter across the all-important boundary between house and bush (1999:12).

Just such 'border skirmishes' occur in 'Traitors'. The boundary between the house and the bush is crossed with much trepidation and excitement by the little girls, in spite of their knowledge of their mother's disapproval. Thus wildness takes on a complex emotional significance in the story, as it represents the male domain as opposed to the female. It is a challenge which calls them away from the known spaces to the unknown:

> When we had tired of our familiar acre we explored the rest of the farm: but this particular stretch of bush was avoided. Sometimes we stood at its edge, and peered in at the tangled granite outcrops and great ant-heaps curtained with Christmas fern. Sometimes we pushed our way a few feet, till the grass closed behind us, leaving overhead a small space of blue. Then we lost our heads and ran back again (p.83).

Here, we first see the children from the outside, as it were, standing on the margin between 'cultivation' and wildness. They seem to be small and vulnerable in relation to the unknown bush with its 'granite outcrops' and great ant-heaps. Again one remembers how intimidated Pip is by the wild landscape. The girl in 'Old Chief Mshlanga' can also be recalled, being held by the 'jutting rock' while she sings her songs. These little girls do not seem to be as obviously influenced by books as that girl is, and they seem to be more active and adventurous than Pip. The secretive character of 'the wild' is suggested by 'curtained'. We imagine the curtain being drawn to hide all the secrets of the bush – the unknown, the unfamiliar.

After seeing the children from the outside, we are suddenly swept into the immediacy of the child's experience, as the grass closes around us, and we see with a child's eyes, the 'small space of blue' overhead. For the familiar wide expanse of blue to be reduced to a 'small space', is to feel the claustrophobia and insecurity that the restricted space implies. There are echoes of the girl's experience in 'Old Chief Mshlanga' where she walks in the mealie field with 'the leaves arching like cathdrals veined with sunlight far overhead'. The feeling of being small is captured by the sense of being surrounded by tall grass or other plants.

It is interesting to note that the girls see themselves as active antagonists with regard to the bush. They are not simply responding, but are throwing out a challenge themselves: 'we realized we had to challenge that bush' (p.83).

Wildness is something which they feel they have to conquer and bring under their control, but at the same time they allow themselves to be led by a bird, in a manner reminiscent of *Hansel and Grettel*:

> The guinea-fowl were clinking ahead of us in the grass, and we caught a glimpse of a shapely dark bird speeding along a path. We followed, shouting with joy because the forbidding patch of bush was as easily conquered and made our own as the rest of the farm (p.84).

The children seem to imitate the act of colonization as they seek to conquer and possess the African terrain. When they venture into the bush, however, it reveals not the secrets of the wild, but the secrets of the past, of the human world rather than the non-human. The magical bird takes them not to a gingerbread house, but to the ruins of Mr Thompson's house where the wildness of nature is in the process of erasing all traces of the human, except for the trees that were planted by him years before: 'It was then that I saw the paw-paw tree. I must have been staring at it for some minutes before it grew in on my sight; for it was such an odd place for a paw-paw tree to be '(p.85). This example of perception illustrates the idea that nature is a human construct: we see what we expect to see. Because they venture into wild terrain, they do not expect to see a fruit tree. The tree has to 'grow in on my sight', and it takes some time for the brain to register what it is that she sees. In the same way, it is only by the body's physical sensation of hardness that the children realize that what they are lying on is an old floor. It is their physical immersion in the unfamiliar world that leads them to make the discovery of the old house, long abandoned.

The 'discovery' of the old site by the children mirrors the social 'discoveries' which they make in the course of the story. As the perception of the paw-paw tree 'grows in' on the sight of the children until they see it, so the perception of adult relationships, although obscure at first, grows in on the children, and hence in the reader. The children are exposed to scraps of 'barely understood' conversation between the adults about Mr Thompson. Their mother speaks of Mrs Thompson in low undertones, and pities her, as if there is something hidden and shameful about Mr Thompson. These negative associations created by the disapproval of their mother and her friends instill fear in the girls and transform their perception of the surrounding wildness:

> 'The old Thompson house,' we whispered.
>
> And all at once the pigeons seemed to grow still and the bush became hostile. We sat up, frightened. How was it we hadn't noticed it before? . . .
>
> It was desolate, lonely, despairing; and we remembered the way our parents had talked about Mr Thompson who had lived here for years before he married. Their hushed, disapproving voices seemed to echo out of the trees; and in a violent panic we picked up the gun and fled back in the direction of the house (p.85).

The intrusion of the adult world in the form of the remembered conversations distorts the natural. The pigeons are 'silenced' – nature closes its doors, cuts off its communication with the human. The feeling of being at ease in nature disappears when the girls recall their mother's tone. The power of the social world, which is always mediated to the children through the mother, dominates their minds at this point. Secrecy and shame make a powerful impact on the receptive minds of the children, especially because they do not understand the situation as well as the adults do.

I have said that wildness, epitomized by the bush, provides a space for the girls to escape from their mother's influence, but here we see that her influence is not contained by the domestic spaces. It makes itself felt while the girls are far away. However, as McCormick argues, the children are not as yet committed to either the male or the female 'side', and when they create a 'home' on the site of the old house, 'they play in both men's and women's roles' (1985:13). The appearance of the black woman, however, upsets them as she hints at a relationship with Mr Thompson that is beyond their understanding:

> We waited for her to go, drawing together; but she came close and stared in a way that made us afraid. She was old and fat, and she wore a red print dress from the store. She said in a soft, wheedling voice: 'when is Boss Thompson coming back?'
>
> 'Go away!' we shouted. And then she began to laugh. She sauntered off into the bush, swinging her hips and looking back over her shoulder and laughing (p. 87).

The children have been play-acting Mr Thompson when this woman appears, but they stop after this encounter as their basis for knowledge of him changes: 'We no longer knew him: That laugh, that slow, insulting stare had meant something outside our knowledge and experience' (p.87). The children cross the boundary between the domesticated space and the wild space in the beginning of the story, and here, with this woman, they face a social boundary. It is in some ways similar to the girl's encounter with the Old Chief in the previous story, although the woman's behaviour is very different from the Chief's. The similarity is that the woman is untainted by the subservience of the domestic worker. She communicates in her non-verbal gestures, her sense of power and superiority over these representatives of the white community. In her physical movements she suggests the sexual nature of her relationship with Thompson. The children have to try to understand suggestions and innuendo from both sides – from the black and the white adults which they encounter, as when they overhear the parent's conversations.

The wildness of the environment plays a role in the final denouement of the story. During the visit by the Thompsons to the farm, the children change allegiance from Mrs Thompson, (and by implication, from their mother and females in general) to Mr Thompson, (and their father). Although they have been prepared by the mother's comments to dislike Mr Thompson, they find that he is the one deserving sympathy, not his wife. The non-human world is used as a reference point to show why their sympathies change. Mrs Thompson is compared, unfavourably, to a bird: 'She was a large, blonde, brilliantly coloured lady with a voice like a go-away bird's. It was a horrible voice' (p.89). The shrill voice and suggestion of heavy make-up make it difficult for the children to feel pity for her, as they expected to do.

On the other hand, Mr Thompson, whom they have been prepared to see as a villain as a result of the social gossip referred to by their mother, is seen by the children as an 'old dog' – harmless, 'shaggy and shambling'. The image suggests that he is altogether a more comfortable type of person than his wife. It may be that the children are able to overcome the prejudice that has been planted in them by their mother and respond to Mr Thompson in a positive way, because of their openness to the natural world. Their perception of him as 'an old dog' releases them from their fear of him, so that they are able to cross the gender boundary and sympathize with him, in spite of his transgressions:

> The profound and dangerous pity, aroused in us earlier than we could remember by the worlds of loneliness inhabited by our parents, which they could not share with each other but which each shared with us, settled now on Mr Thompson. Now we hated Mrs Thompson. The outward sign of it was that we left Mother's chair and went to Father's (p.89).

This passage shows how the problems of adult relationships are imposed on children. The difficulties that the parents have in communicating with one another result in the parents laying the burden of their loneliness on their children. The word 'dangerous' gives a narrative comment, drawing attention to the damage this can do to the child.

As a result of this shift in allegiance, the girls decide to make it as difficult as possible for Mrs Thompson to go to the site of the old house. She is clearly trying to make a point against her husband in this mission: 'She kept saying, smiling ferociously at Mr Thompson: "I have heard such *interesting* things about that old place. I really must see for myself where it was that my husband lived before I came out . . . " And she looked at Mother for approval' (p.89). Mrs Thompson is eager to find evidence of her husband's previous misdeeds, and she looks for female support in her mission. Mrs Thompson's 'horrible voice' and 'ferocious smile' are understandably offensive to the children, who try to resist her attempt to find out about her husband's past by delaying her progress through the bush:

> I took them the hardest, longest way I knew. We had made a path of our own long ago, but that would have been too quick. I made Mrs Thompson climb over rocks, push through grass, bend under bushes. I made her scramble down the gully so that she fell on her knees in the sharp pebbles and the dust. I walked her so fast, finally, in a wide circle through the thorn trees that I could hear her

> panting behind me (p.90).

The narration changes to singular here because the one sister offers to take them and then runs off into the bush, leaving the other sister to lead the adults. This girl manipulates the situation using her privileged knowledge of the wild terrain. Although there is an easy way to the site, she does not take her this way, as it would have been 'too quick'. She wants to make it difficult for Mrs Thompson, to punish her perhaps for her self-righteousness and aggression. In this situation the children have an opportunity to gain control in the adult world because of their knowledge of the bush. In most other situations, the children are marginalized as their access to knowledge about the adult world is out of their control. As we will see in 'No Witchcraft for Sale', a similar strategy is used by a black servant to punish a group of whites for putting difficult demands on him.

The impact of wildness on Mrs Thompson is powerful. She loses confidence and comes close to tears when she finds that there is no house: 'She stood quite still, looking about her, and we knew the silence and the desolation had got to her, as it got us that first morning' (p.90). This woman obviously has had limited interaction with 'the bush'. She is used to being indoors, in the realm of the house. The 'male' realm of 'the bush' is foreign to her and she undertakes this excursion into the wild only in order to put her stamp on her husband's other 'house'. While this domain remains dimly in the past, it threatens her, whereas is she can lay claim to it and possess it, she can dispel the clouds of uncertainty gathered around it. Because 'the house' is felt to be the woman's domain, she must be in control of it in the present as well as in the past. And yet she has not been prepared for the influence of the wild, which changes her on a deeper level of consciousness.

The treachery implied in the title, 'Traitors', is a multi-layered treachery. There is the shift in allegiance by the girls from the Mother to the Father, female to male; there is the implied treachery of Mr Thompson towards Mrs Thompson, (even if it is retroactive), and there is also the perceived treachery of white males towards white females in general as a result of inter-racial relationships. Loneliness and isolation emerges from many of these stories as the most profound experience of the white female settlers on these farms, and it is compounded by the intimacy of white men with black females rather than them.

At the personal level, children are subjected to the pressures of the adult world and its problems. They are faced with the dilemma of having to side with either one parent or the other on the basis of issues which are not yet clearly understood by them. The wild terrain provides the setting against which these conflicts are acted out, and it also plays an active role in supporting or undermining the human interaction which occurs. The children have a particularly fresh and unbiased view of adult society. Tensions between males and females are highlighted and brought under scrutiny because of the way the children react to these emotional situations. Although the children are subjected to pressures from adults, they are sometimes in a superior position to the adults. This is because of the children's relationship with nature, and especially wildness. Their temerity in penetrating the bush enables them to be major role-players in the adult drama.

What does Lessing achieve by centering the children in this, and in many other stories? The children are a foil against which the adult world is shown up. As the women try to negotiate a path through the tangled undergrowth of inter-racial relationships, they lean on the children for support and sympathy. This habit points to the women's inadequacies, and their sense of outrage and resentment at the independence of men in this situation. Men are shown as being strait-jacketed by white society's norms and values. Like Mr Thompson, they sometimes take reckless steps like a hasty marriage in order to satisfy the demands of respectable society but this does not bring happiness. Nostalgia for the previous 'lone' life is clearly demonstrated in the way Mr Thompson looks back at the ten years he spent on this farm. He seems to long for that life of freedom even though it brought him social censure and led to his drinking problem.

The children in this story are like the guides of Greek mythology, leading the adults to the underworld of settler society: the secret intimacies between black and white. On the surface they are kept socially separate, but in the underworld, behind the 'curtains of Christmas fern', there is a hidden world which is not acknowledged by the settlers. The undertones and innuendoes of adult conversation point to the existence of this underworld – as obscure and hidden as the remains of the house. The children find access to these hidden worlds through their contact with nature because they are able to cross the boundary from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the wild. In this way they gain knowledge from wildness which helps them deal with the complexities of the adult world.

As Lenta claimed of Twain, these children provide a 'fresh view' of colonialism. In 'Traitors', what is shown up clearly is the way the women in settler society become very bitter and resentful towards men because of the loneliness and isolation of their lives on the farms. They draw inwards, into a small space closed off against the wildness beyond and they try to get their daughters to follow their example. At the end of the story the mother scolds the girls: 'She looked at us crossly and said, "I don't like you wandering over the farm the way you do. Even with a gun"' (p.92). The mother feels abandoned by them, as if they have joined the male 'side'. What she really wants is for them to rejoin her and give her their sympathy, which is the emotion that seems to predominate amongst the female members of the society. The children understand what is required of them: 'Once again we were swung dizzily from one camp to the other. "Poor Mother," we said, "Poor, poor Mother"' (p.92).

In Henry James's novel, *What Maisie Knew*, the child becomes a medium through which the bitterness between her parents is expressed:

> What was clear to any spectator was that the only link binding her to either parent was this lamentable fact of her being a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed. They had wanted her not for any good they could do her, but for the harm they could, with her unconscious aid, do each other (1966:13).

This is certainly an extreme case, and one cannot accuse the parents in Lessing's story of being as vicious, but the seeds of this type of conflict and this type of exploitation of the child can be seen in this story. The father, in general, escapes censure. It is the mothers who seem to do the most damage because of the type of society they are living in. They put their daughters under a great amount of emotional pressure to give up wildness and conform to their narrow, prejudiced lifestyles.

In these last two stories Lessing is showing us two cases of children being drawn into adult society while at the same time exposing the limitations of that society. The girl in 'Flavours of Exile' is faced with a similar dilemma. She turns away from her childhood world of rich profusion towards the paucity of her mother's world with its bitter little cabbages and tinned fruits. One is left with the feeling that adult settler society is a draining, constricting and deadening force. In 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' the position of the girl is slightly different because she seems to be more critical of the society. She makes a conscious effort to learn about Chief Mshlanga through the medium of text, and she is struck by the respect that the explorers and prospectors had for him in earlier times. The narrator uses the term, 'usurped ownership', which shows that there is a greater level of awareness on the part of the young girl of colonial culpability in this story. However, Kay McCormick points out, the protagonist

> . . . does not use her insight as a basis for challenging her parents' position. She reports her mother's continued abrasiveness and added strictness in her handling of the chief's son, as well as her father's and the policeman's responses to the Chief's requests, but there is no report of overt criticism or defiant action by the girl. A telling silence (1985:13).

What McCormick seems to be looking for is active resistance to the colonial situation. Yet there is very little. The girl watches, and reports, but does not interfere. When Chief Mshlanga comes to plead for his people's goats, she observes:

> It was now in the late sunset, the sky a welter of colours, the birds singing their last songs, and the cattle, lowing peacefully, moving past us towards their sheds for the night. It was the hour when Africa is most beautiful; and here was this pathetic, ugly scene, doing no one any good (p.24).

Lessing captures the tragedy of Africa by showing the beauty of its landscape and the ugliness of the relationships in colonial times. The conflict in the human world clashes with the harmony of the natural world. The narrator points out the pathos and ugliness but can do nothing to change it except to record it.

In 'The Old Chief Mshlanga', Lessing shows us how education and culture influences a child's perception of wildness and the natural environment in general. Through focussing on a child she makes us aware of the impact of negative influences such as prejudice and racism. On the other hand she shows how an important encounter with an individual can change a person's way of looking at the world – the social, political and historical context as well as the way of relating to the natural environment. The child's 'voyage' of discovery is juxtaposed with the adult's static positions. The mother is seen as anxious and narrow-minded and the father is more concerned about the practical matters of the farm than with thinking about the past, exploring or re-examining issues of land rights. Experience of wildness prompts the child to think more deeply of these matters.

'Flavours of Exile' extends the theme of wildness by showing that the natural environment is not simply divided into wild and cultivated areas, but that there is more complexity in the gradation of wildness. There are plants that grow naturally and easily in Africa, and exotic plants that struggle as they are not meant to be grown in these conditions. With these distinctions forming the focus for the story, the intricate relationships between mother and daughter and between the girl and her friend unfold. Issues of transition from girlhood to womanhood are integral to the story, and the focus on the non-human environment gives it a symbolic significance. The contrast between the mother and her daughter with regard to the fruits and vegetables that make up the gardens offers a critical commentary on settler attitudes.

Lastly, 'Traitors' gives the most sustained example of interaction between adults and children. Although the girls are initially on the margins of the adult world, they become progressively more involved in it. Wildness forms part of the world of the children and it helps them to deal with the difficulties of the adult world. The children's observation and interpretation of adult relationships gives a revealing view of settler society.

In the last story, we are given a glimpse of some of the tensions that arise in settler society in relation to marriage. The brief and enigmatic appearance of the black woman indicates that inter-racial relationships are an unresolved issue in that society. The link between wildness of the environment and the relationships between men and women needs to be investigated further, and this is what will be attempted in the next chapter.

Chapter four: Men, Women and Wildness

'Leopard George'

'The Story of a Non-Marrying Man'

'Plants and girls'

In the last chapter I looked at the division between adults and children and their different ways of relating to wildness in the natural world. This chapter will consider relationships between men and women and the influence of wildness in nature on these relationships. In each of the three cases, the men are very aware of the wildness in the African environment. It attracts them and claims them in different ways. This complicates their relationships with women, whether these be sexual, romantic or marriage relationships.

The protagonist in 'Leopard George' is George Chester who is a second generation settler. Born and brought up on a farm in Rhodesia, he has spent five years fighting in the war in Europe before coming back to buy a farm of his own. The title of the story immediately draws attention to his relationship to leopards. Using prolepsis, the narrator first tells us about George as he is at the end of the story – a hunter of leopards. His body is covered with scars as a result of many fights with them, and the local newspapers report every week on the number of wild animals he kills. These reports are partially responsible for expressing the 'communal voice' of the district. Lessing uses similar narrative strategy in *The Grass is Singing*, which begins with a newspaper report of Mary's murder. This gives an outside view of the event and stimulates the reader's curiosity about what caused it. In a similar manner we are told about George's hunting successes, and only later find out what led up to them:

> There was a period of years when the District Notes in the local paper were headed, Friday after Friday, by a description of his week-end party: 'The Four Winds' Hunt Club bag this Sunday was four jackals and a leopard' - or a wild dog and two leopards, as the case might be. All kinds of game make good chasing; the horses and dogs went haring across the veld every week after whatever offered itself. As for George, it was a recognized thing that if there was a chance of a leopard, the pack must be called off its hare, its duiker, its

> jackal, and directed after the wily spotted beast, no matter what the cost in time or patience or torn dogs (p.172).

There are two levels of commentary in this passage. The newspaper report gives an 'objective' view of the hunting parties, mainly counting the number of animals killed, but it also distinguishes George from the rest of the community. Clearly there are many people who join him in his hunting expeditions, as he has established a Hunt Club on his farm, Four Winds. The claim that 'all kinds of game make good chasing' seems to express the general attitude of the farmers, whereas for George, the leopard is the ultimate prey. We learn that 'George's passion for hunting leopards is more than a hobby' (p.172). It leads him to risk his life in ways that his fellow hunters think is unduly risky. Whereas for them, hunting leopards is an enjoyable sport, for George it is an obsession.

The extract from the newspaper is prefaced with an overview, 'there was a period of years', which indicates that this has not always been the case. George's life is divided into phases and we discover that in an earlier phase of his life, he was totally against hunting:

> ...he was considered mildly crazy because he would not allow an animal to be touched on his farm; and any native caught setting traps for game would be beaten by George himself and then taken to the police afterwards: George considered the fine that he incurred for beating the native well worth it (p.182).

These images of the man are so divergent that we are curious to find out what has lead to the change in him. We also see in the above extract that George's earlier aversion to the setting of traps on his farm is also something out of the ordinary for most farmers. They think he is 'mildly crazy' because they enjoy hunting themselves and therefore turn a blind eye to the practice of trapping. In both 'phases' of his life, George does not behave according to norms of his community. In fact, this 'communal voice' is used throughout the story to indicate the distance between George and the rest of the settlers.

In order to understand the major change in George's attitude to hunting and more broadly to wildness, we are invited to go back to the time when he first returned to Africa. The estate agent takes him around to rich, well-established farms which have been 'tamed', but these farms make him restless. Eventually he is taken to Four Winds, which is 'all rocky outcrops, scrubby trees and wastes of shimmering grass, backed by mountains' (p.175). He buys this farm without hesitation, showing that it is wildness that he prizes above any other considerations.

How is this attraction to wildness to be understood? On the one hand it could be said that he is privileging wildness over 'civilization' out of a respect for wildness and a wish to conserve and protect it so that it remains unchanged. On the other hand, it could also be said that he is searching for 'virgin bush' in order to be able to put his stamp on it and change it himself:

> He slouched comfortably all through that day over those bare and bony acres, rather in the way a dog will use to make a new place its own, ranging to pick up a smell here or a memory there, anything that can be formed into a shell of familiarity for comfort against strangeness (p.175).

The *process of becoming familiar with a new place is an interactive process.* A dog leaves its smell on a new place, to mark its territory, and the place yields its smell to the newcomer. Memories can be created, and a new place can yield memories to someone who is attuned to wildness. A claim made in David Abrams' book, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997:176), is that the visible topography of the land not only has a mnemonic power for indigenous oral cultures, but that this may be more broadly true of the human organism. George may also be able to interact with a wild environment in this way, responding to the landscape mnemonically, because he seems so opposed to 'civilization'. The image of the dog marking its territory strongly reinforces the idea that he is laying claim to the land, and making it his own.

The communal voice is expressed through various people in the story, for example, the estate agent who sells him the house. The agent warns him that his nearest neighbour will be fifteen miles away, but George answers: 'This part of the country is opening up, isn't it?' (p.175). This shows that George sees himself as being in the forefront of settlement in the district and that he is not averse to having closer neighbours in the future. The narrator comments: 'He was no recluse after all, or at least, not in the way the agent had suspected' (p.175). The narrator's qualification of the agent's opinion leaves open the question of George's future participation in settler society. He chooses a remote farm to live on and yet cannot quite be written off as a recluse. However, it is clear from the agent's remark that the category of 'recluse' is a familiar one in settler society. It is closely connected with the idea of having 'gone native':

> When people heard that George had bought Four Winds, a bare, gusty rocky stretch of veld on the side of a mountain, they remarked, 'Good luck to him,' which is exactly how they speak when a returning traveller says: 'There is a man on the shores of Lake Nyasa who has lived alone in a hut by himself for twenty years, ' or 'I heard of someone who has gone native in the Valley – he goes away into the bush if a white person comes near him.' There is no condemnation, but rather a recognition of something in themselves to which they pay tribute by proxy (p.176).

Here we are made aware of the fact that George is seen by the community as someone who has chosen to isolate himself from the rest of the farming community and is therefore something of an eccentric. By using the pronouns 'themselves' and 'they', the narrator distances herself from the community. This is sometimes done seriously, and sometimes done humorously, in order to maintain a critical position, and to find a different centre of consciousness from which she can look at the reactions of the community. The prime motivation for 'going native', suggested by the community, is a negative one: to escape white society. The question remains whether there is also a positive motivation, such as the attraction of the wild, and how this attraction might affect human relationships.

The communal voice is again evident with regard to George's personal life. It takes the form of gossip, and probably emanates from the female community because it involves romance:

> There was a rumour in the district that George had a broken heart over a woman in England; and this explanation did as well as any other for George's cheerful but determined self-isolation, for there are some people the word

> loneliness can never be made to fit. George was alone, and seemed not to know it (p.180).

The role of nature in the lives of men, in general, seems to be different from the role it plays for women. As we will see in the next chapter, it can help women deal with loneliness. But for George, loneliness is not an issue. He chooses to be isolated and is 'determined' about it. This suggests that attempts are made by members of the community to draw him out of his isolation, but they fail. Hence the women have to find an explanation for his behaviour that conforms to their stereotyped picture of a single man.

The narrative technique of reporting the communal voice shows us how the local people see George. He is focalized as being enigmatic and puzzling in his apparent lack of any need for socialization. This of course reflects amusingly on the community and their speculations. It is not 'normal' for a person not to want to socialize. The community tries to ascertain what effect the farm Four Winds has on him:

> Four Winds, lifted high into the sky among the great windswept sun-quivering mountains, tumbled all over with boulders, offering itself to storms and exposure and invasion by baboons and leopards – this wilderness, this pure, heady isolation, had not affected him after all.
>
> For when the valley had been divided out among new settlers, and his neighbours were now five miles, and not fifteen, away, he began going to their houses and asking them to his (p.182).

The description of Four Winds in this passage conveys the dramatic beauty of the mountain landscape where the farm is situated. The land exposes itself to invasion by every aspect of nature, but the unwritten corollary is that it is closed to white society, or 'civilization', at least initially. Here the narrator seems to be conveying the way George sees the farm. However, the voice of the community is also heard in the passage. For them there is a deep ambivalence about the man because on the one hand he chooses an isolated, wild landscape to live in, which leads people to expect anti-social behaviour from him, and on the other hand he begins to entertain in fine style, giving swimming parties every Sunday. We are told that he has many servants, who are the envy of the farmers' wives: 'This is what people found it difficult to forgive him, the perfection of his servants' (p.182). His well-run household keeps the female white community out. There is no need to be kind to him, or to offer him help, as he has everything under control:

> He was nothing, if not a catch; and it was his own fault that he was regarded, coldly, in this light. He would sometimes look at the women sprawled half-naked around the swimming pool under the bamboos – sprawling with deliberate intent, and for his benefit – and his eyes would narrow in a way that was not pleasant. Nor was it even fair, for if a man will not allow himself to be approached by sympathy and kindness, there is only one other approach (p.183).

The narration here is complex. Observations such as 'his eyes would narrow in a way that was not pleasant' suggest narrative distance both from George and from the women who lie 'sprawled half-naked' around the pool. The narrator sees the predatory aspect of the drama being played out on both sides, with both parties trying to trap each other. There is coldness, from both sides. The women regard him as a 'catch', as he is a wealthy farmer. He 'narrows his eyes' as he would if he were hunting an animal. The women do not seem to count as real human beings for him. With the exception of one woman, Mrs Whately, there is a lack of 'shared understanding' between George and this group of women.

By contrast, the other 'closed group', the black community, seems to feel 'at home' on George's farm. We are told that they build a 'proper native village, and not the usual collection of shambling huts about which no one cared, since no one lived in them long enough to care' (p.183). He has a trusted 'bossboy', old Smoke, who has worked for George's father. Because Smoke has family loyalty towards George, he brings his brothers to work on his farm. George and Smoke have a fairly intimate relationship, within the 'master – servant' framework:

> Nor was old Smoke afraid of becoming stern, though reproachful, as if he momentarily regarded himself as George's father, when he said: 'Little Baas, it is time you got married. It is time there was a woman on this farm.' And George would laugh and reply that he certainly agreed that he should get married, but that he could find no woman to suit him (p.179).

What happens is that George becomes sexually involved with black women from the compound instead. The first is one of Smoke's daughters. She appears unbidden at one of the swimming parties, demanding to be acknowledged by George. After this embarrassment, George sends her away to a mission school. Her place is taken by another woman from the compound - Smoke's youngest wife. This time George does not let the woman sleep the night at his home but sends her back to the compound while it is still dark. On one such occasion she is killed by a leopard. George then goes out and kills the leopard and old Smoke leaves the farm. From then on George becomes the hunter of leopards, and finally marries Mrs Whately.

Where George is concerned, the racially closed circles overlap, although in a hidden way. Whereas most people, white and black, stay within the racial boundaries with regard to their private lives, George disregards these boundaries. This behaviour is not approved of by either the whites or the blacks. Old Smoke sees the danger to his people:

> 'Aie, aie,' sighed the old man, openly reproachful now, 'this is not good for our women, baas. Who will want to marry her? ......These girls, what happens to them? You have sent the other one to the mission school, but how long will she stay? She has been used to your money and to....she has been used to her own way. She will go into the town and become one of the loose women. No decent man will have her (p.191).

One of the ironies of the story is that although George is so vehement about protecting wild life, not allowing snares on his farm, he doesn't see that he is the biggest snare. He catches women with his money, and exploits their youth, their naivete and their low social status.

The merging of the two social realms, black and white, in George's personal life is reflected in his natural surroundings, where the boundary between wildness and cultivation becomes blurred. As he walks towards the wild area of his farm, he passes the place where 'his garden merged imperceptibly, in the reaching tendrils of the creepers, with the bush' (p.198). The 'reaching tendrils' seem to be trying to get back to the bush, to wildness. George allows these two entities to mix and interact in his garden, just as he interacts with women from both black and white communities. The problem is that he does so in a secretive way. He takes up the pretence of being 'one of them', that is, the white farming community, and this puts him in the false position of having to publicly deny his relationship with the black woman. It is for this reason that he sends his second girl home at night, even when she begs him not to:

> With the moonlight pouring over him, showing how his lips were momentarily curled back from his teeth, he pulled the girl roughly towards him out of the shade, turned her round so that she faced the compound, and said: 'Go, now' (p.194).

His lips 'curled back from his teeth', have a distinctly menacing, animal-like quality. It is as if George is like a wild animal, and the young girl is his victim. He seems to foreshadow the leopard's attack on her, and even take on the identity of the leopard for an instant. Described in this way, he is shown as the destroyer of these women. The killing by the leopard is a metaphor for the destruction he perpetrates by his treatment of them. When George sends the girl off into the darkness, he cannot understand why she is frightened:

> George, looking towards the compound, which in this unreal glinting light had shrunk back, absorbed, into the background of tree and rock, without even a glow of fire to indicate its presence, felt as he always did: it was the feeling which had brought him here so many years before. It was as if, while he looked, he was flowing softly outwards, diffused into the bush and the moonlight. He knew no terror; he could not understand fear; he contained that cruelty within himself, shut safe in some deep place. And this girl, who was bred of the bush and of the wildness, had no right to tremble with fright. That, obscurely, was what he felt (p.194).

Like his garden which merges into the bush, he feels no definite boundary between himself and the wildness. He does not hold himself and his identity away from the bush – he feels more at home in the wildness than in polite society. His relationship to the wildness around him is not that of 'self' and 'other'. It is not even self and 'another' in Murphy's terms. His sense of self has the 'other' within itself. One of the reasons why he prefers to be intimate with black women is that they are 'of the wildness'. He tries to combine the wildness of his private life with the 'civilization' of his public life amongst the white settler community.

However, it is the intervention of the non-human element, the leopard, that changes the human situation decisively. When a house servant comes to tell him about the girl being missing, and presumably killed, a change takes place in him:

> In that moment, while he stood following the direction of his servant's eyes with his own, a change took place in him; he was gazing at a towering tumbling heap of boulders that stood sharp and black against a high fresh blue, the young blue of an African morning, and it was as if that familiar and loved shape moved back from him, reared menacingly like an animal and admitted danger – a sharp danger, capable of striking from a dark place that was a place of fear. Fear moved in George; it was something he had not before known; it crept along his flesh with a chilling touch, and he shivered. It was so new to him that he could not speak (p.197).

As George's eyes follow the gaze of the servant's, he is forced to admit to himself what has happened to the girl. At that moment the landscape, which comprises the 'familiar and loved' landmarks of his everyday life, takes on a threatening quality: it 'reared menacingly like an animal'. It is the most benign setting – a 'fresh blue' sky of the morning, but this suddenly becomes alienated from him. Strangely, it is not he who is recoiling from nature, but it is nature which 'moves back from him'. Nature seems to be telling him that he is the one who has committed the transgression.

George's relationship with humans closely affects his relationship with nature. He brings about disharmony in his human relationships by being cold and brutal to the people with whom he is physically intimate, and by trying to impress others with whom he has no real closeness. The consequences of this behaviour are destructive, both for the girl who is killed, and for him. He experiences a sense of distance and alienation between himself and his most familiar surroundings. Whereas before he had a sense of containing the wildness inside him, he now has to go out and destroy that wildness. It is as if he has to destroy part of himself, his own identity:

> All he knew was, when he had laid down his coffee cup, and rung the bell for the servants, and gone outside to the veranda, that there the familiar landscape was outside of him, and that something within him was pointing a finger at it. In the now strong sunlight he shivered again; and crossed his arms so that his hands cupped his shoulders: they felt oddly frail. Till lately they had included the pushing strength of the mountains; till this morning his

> arms had been branches and the birds sang in them; within him had been that terror which now waited outside and which he must fight (p.198).

When George goes out that night to hunt the leopard, he finds it easily. By instinct he knows where it will be. He kills it with one shot. There is no struggle. And it is this easiness which upsets and disappoints him:

> Anger sprang up again in George: it had all been so easy, so easy! Again he looked in wonder at his rifle: then he kicked the unresisting flesh of the leopard, first with a kind of curiosity, then brutally. Finally he smashed the butt of the rifle, again and again, in hard, thudding blows, against the head. There was no resistance, no sound, nothing.
>
> Finally, as the smell of blood and flesh began to fill him, he desisted, weak and helpless. He was let down. He had not been given what he had come for (p.200).

The new fear that George experiences when he realizes that the girl has been killed might be a fear of the leopard. But in that case, would he not have been jubilant and victorious at killing it so successfully? What has George come for, that he has not received? The answer to this question is bound up with George's sense of identity. The leopard epitomizes wildness, and wildness is part of his identity. Therefore, to kill the leopard is to kill himself. This explains the reaction of anger and frustration that he feels when he kills it. He wants it to be difficult – he wants resistance. It is not a simple act of revenge, he is destroying his own identity. The protector of wildness is now destroying wildness. The killing brings no satisfaction for him: 'George was still left empty, a hungry man without possibility of food. He did not know what satisfaction it was he needed' (p.200). Once he takes the step of becoming a hunter of wild animals, he can no longer claim that special relationship he had with nature before. There is no other way in which he can get it back.

George kills a symbol of his existence and it leaves him empty. He has destroyed and betrayed the only human being he ever really cared about, old Smoke, but more importantly he has destroyed and betrayed wildness. From this time onwards, it seems as if leopards become 'things' to George. He moves from an 'anothering' relationship with them to an 'othering' relationship. He now receives the name Leopard George, at the precise time that his real identity is separated from leopards. They are now objects to be hunted, not protected. The killing of the leopard creates a distance between them which is not possible for him to bridge. He defeats the wildness within, and loses the kinship he once had with that wildness. Through the exploitation of the human, he destroys his intimate relationship with the non-human.

In 'Leopard George' Lessing is showing us a man who transgresses the norms of settler society by crossing racial boundaries. She makes extensive use of the communal voice so that we have an outside view of George and at the same time we are made aware of the limitations of the society in which he lives. These limitations are again shown up in 'The Story of a Non-Marrying Man', whose protagonist, Johnny Blakeworthy, also transgresses the norms of his society, though in a different way to Leopard George. This story is told in retrospective adult narration, conveying the view of a child. Indeed, the presence of the child in the story seems to give a softer focus to Johnny, compared to the rather harsh picture of George in the previous story. Again we see that the child's view exposes and complicates Lessing's representation of settler society.

As in the previous story, naming is important. As mentioned above, wildness is inextricably linked with the identity of George, yet the name Leopard George is ambiguous – it could suggest courage and heroism or danger and savagery. On the other hand, Johnny Blakeworthy's name directly conveys the idea of worthiness, of respect, and the diminutive form, Johnny, has connotations of endearment or boyish innocence. He is later given additional titles by the black community: Angry Face. 'They also called him Man Without a Home, and The Man Who Has no Woman' (p.46). Lessing foregrounds his marital status in the title of the story, arousing our interest and suggesting an attitude of unconventionality or rebellion in the man.

'Wildness' is an important factor in both cases. In 'Leopard George', the man searches for a wild place to buy a farm and to build his house. Johnny Blakeworthy, however, rejects the idea of ownership of land altogether. He rebels against the idea of domesticity, and the obligations which go with it, including marriage. He is only drawn back to the domestic world occasionally for a meal or a wife! The narrative of Blakeworthy's life is revealed slowly in the manner of fitting pieces of a puzzle together. There are different levels of narration. The first person narrator recounts her meeting with him on her parent's farm when she was a child, and then later as a young women her reading stories in a newspaper about him. Chance meetings and conversations thread the different pieces together. This method of narration creates the sense of the gossip of a community, and it also distances Johnny from them. He is an elusive and ambiguous figure because his genteel good manners are combined with a predilection for living a rough outdoor life.

Briefly, the story of his life is that he stays with a number of different women at different times, stays with them for a few years and then leaves. He is genuinely married to the first woman, but thereafter only pretends to marry, falsifying the documents. He always writes a polite note to the women he leaves, thanking them for their kindness. This is something that angers them more than the fact of his desertion. Finally he goes to a native tribe in the north and asks to be allowed to live with them. They agree, and later decide that he needs a wife, whom they select for him. He lives with this woman 'in kindness' for the rest of his life.

There seems to be a continual conflict in this man between 'civilization' and wildness. This wildness is evidenced by his tendency to sleep in the bush, and to eat the kind of food which is considered by the settlers as 'native':

> The presence of the maize-flour was a statement, and probably ambiguous, for the Africans ate maize-meal porridge as their staple food. It was cheap, easily obtainable, quickly cooked, nourishing, but white men did not eat it, at least, not as the basis of their diet, because they did not wish to be put on the same level as Africans (p.33).

Doris Lessing characteristically exposes the impulse towards racial superiority in the settler's mentality through the ironic tone of the narrator. The narrator's parents demonstrate their gastronomic superiority by presenting a feast of different foods to Johnny Blakeworthy when he chances by their farm one day. He does not seem to feel deprived in eating his humble diet of maize meal and a corresponding hunger for their food. A different type of hunger is displayed during the meal:

> But by the end he had eaten very little, and hadn't spoken much either, though the meal gave an impression of much conversation and interest and eating, like a feast, so great was our hunger for company, so many were our questions. Particularly the two children questioned and demanded, for the life of such a man, walking quietly by himself through the bush, sometimes, twenty miles or more a day, sleeping by himself under the stars, or the moon, or whatever weather the seasons sent him, prospecting when he wished, stopping to rest when he needed – such a life, it goes without saying, set us restlessly dreaming of lives different from those we were set towards by school and by parents (p.34).

Here we see that the price paid for the security and comfort of the settled person is often dullness and boredom. Even though Johnny Blakeworthy lives a solitary existence most of the time, he has the advantage of seeing many different places and people. His attitude to nature is one of complete acceptance: he takes 'whatever weather the seasons sent him'. Unlike George, he does not try to mould the wildness in any way, but leaves it untouched. He is open to the elements, and subjects himself to the rigours of outdoor life. The reward he has is the freedom to come and go as he likes. This freedom is what attracts the children to him and his way of life. They are not settled into a conventional pattern and a routine in the way that the adults are. Because the adults are mostly first generation settlers, they find it necessary to establish a strict routine in order to 'keep up standards' (which have been set in England), in order to maintain their identity. In contrast, the children are more flexible, and open to new ideas and possibilities. They are therefore able to respond to Johnny's 'wildness' in ways their parents cannot.

Another point of connection between George and Johnny Blakeworthy is that both of them are considered to be 'going native' by the settler community. Although Johnny Blakeworthy does end up living with an African woman, the term is applied to him before he does so, and it seems in some ways inappropriate. In the above extract we see that he lives in the open, without shelter, 'under the stars, or the moon.' The 'natives' do not live like that – they build huts, and generally live a settled existence. They in fact note the oddity of his existence by calling him 'Man Without a Home'. Only a colonial settler would be sophisticated enough, as it were, to break free of the bonds of society. Indeed, it may be that colonialism itself sets up contradictions within some individuals so that they no longer feel at home anywhere except under the stars. This is not the norm, but Lessing does mention that the landscape of Africa creates space for eccentric behaviour. It may be that Lessing draws her prototype from the Romantic tradition in literature with its solitary figures in nature.

The reasons for Johnny Blakeworthy's restlessness, however, seem to lie deeper than the reasons mentioned above. He rejects the root of 'civilized' society – the burden of materialism. One of the things that drives him away from the domestic environment is the wasteful way of living of the settlers. He sees no reason to eat cake, chocolates, heavy meals and puddings. He sees no reason to have curtains in the windows. His philosophy is: 'If you don't spend a lot of money then you don't have to earn it and you are free' (p.47). He finds white settler society characterized by unnecessary consumerism, and it suffocates him. When he is reprimanded by a wife for being out late and for not having washed, he says, 'Don't try to housetrain me' (p.42). He feels that his wife is trying to domesticate him as she would a pet. There is clearly a sense of the wildness within which he is protecting against this woman. He rebels against the constraints of the warm, stuffy rooms, and leaves again, soon after supper. We read: 'it was after midnight when he came back, with a stardazed look, bringing a cold draught of night air into the hot lamplit room' (p. 42). The contrast between the starlight and the lamplight, the cold night air and the hot room, reflects the contrast between the man and the woman, and the spaces which they occupy. In terms of Chaffee's spatial patterning, there is very little intersection between these two spaces.

Johnny Blakeworthy epitomizes the conflict between wildness and domesticity. He has the impulse to be in the wild, in nature, but he also has the opposite impulse to live in a home, like other humans do. This is not a simple binary because the human community is racially and culturally divided. The traditional African community that he finally comes into contact with is not yet affected by this consumerism, and he finds peace there, and a woman with whom he lives 'in kindness'. He is basically in conflict with the settler women because their values are so different to his. What emerges from the story is a man who is quiet and thoughtful, and who is sensitive to his natural surroundings. He sees very little need for extraneous things in his life, and the 'impedimenta that went with being a white man' (p.36).

Lessing changes the focalization to alternate between the outside view of him, and an inside view. One of his children is a daughter, named Alicia, who speaks to the narrator about him:

> He was a bad husband to Mom, said Alicia. Terrible. Yes, he brought in money, it wasn't that. But he was a cold hard-hearted man. He was no company for them. He would just sit and read, or listen to the radio, or walk around by himself all night. And he never appreciated what was done for him.
>
> Oh how we schoolgirls all hated this monster! What a heartless beast he was.
>
> But the way *he* saw it, he had stayed for four long years in a suffocating town house surrounded by a domesticated garden (p.46).

There are echoes of 'Traitors' in this passage as the girl, Alicia, is obviously indoctrinated by her mother to be critical of the man. The retrospective narrator evokes the exaggerated, self-righteous schoolgirl view with humour and irony. One can imagine the girls throwing themselves whole-heartedly into the campaign to hate Alicia's father. This attitude clashes substantially with the yearning admiration the children on the farm felt for this man at the beginning of the story. In retrospect, the narrator remembers how she became part of the school group, without realizing at the time that the man in question was Johnny Blakeworthy. It is only much later that she makes this connection. The 'sins' which Alicia recounts, (reading and listening to the radio), serve to point to the inadequacies of the mother, who is unable to allow him this freedom. The female point of view is given dramatically, but the italicized '*he*' marks the change to his point of view. It is clear that there is little hope of them being able to accept the other's way of life and so it becomes a 'stalemate' where the only escape is to leave, as he does. But he obviously values a domestic situation because he does not choose to give up human company altogether and become a hermit. The only way he can reconcile these seemingly incompatible needs is to live with Africans. Their lifestyle is suited both to the environment and to his needs. It is basically outdoors, in contact with the elements. In this way he manages to live with human company, but without the trappings of 'civilization' that make the life of a settler intolerable to him.

He is also seen as a liar and a deceiver as he lives with many different women at different times, and pretends to marry them, but then abandons them one by one. His behaviour and the different responses to it raises questions about what being civilized really means. Johnny Blakeworthy is obviously a man who has been well brought up, as he always writes polite thank you letters to whoever gives him hospitality. This is considered 'civilized' behaviour. And yet he repeatedly chooses wildness over domesticity.

The controlling narrative focus is that of the young girl, who is fascinated by the man when she is a child, and through whose portrayal the more positive picture emerges, in opposition to the general opinion. It is partly his relationship with the non-human world that redeems him. That is what makes him attractive to women, but it is also what drives him away from them. It is the alliance with nature which gives him a free spirit, but also which dooms him to restlessness in the closed domestic environment of the white community. It is only the cross-cultural experience that brings balance and peace to his life.

In this story, we can see the process of 'anothering' as well as 'othering' occuring. Johnny Blakeworthy, although part of the dominant colonial culture, does not have an 'othering' experience with the colonized people. He takes a subservient role at the end of the story, and asks them to allow him to live near them. He enters into an 'anothering' relationship with that community, and with the particular woman who is chosen for him. Significantly, he does not impose his own choice or behave in an underhand manner as George does.

Nature, too, is experienced by him in an 'anothering' relationship. He does not centre himself and dominate nature – he opens himself to it, and lives with it. Nature in fact dominates him in the sense that it affects his facial expression.

The glare of the sun causes him to develop an instinctive reaction : 'He kept screwing up his eyes, as if in sunlight, and then, in a remembered effort of will, letting loose his muscles, so that his face kept clenching and unclenching like a fist' (p.33). He becomes so accustomed to being in the open, that he brings that automatic reaction inside with him when he enters a house. One feels that he needs the same effort of will to allow himself to be domesticated. The automatic reaction of tensing his face against the sun becomes habitual for him – so much so that the Africans refer to him as 'Angry Face'. Interestingly, it suggests that it is only the face, not the man himself, which is angry. It takes an effort of will for him to break the habitual reaction to his exposure to nature – even when he is not exposed to it. And so nature has shaped him. It gives him his identity: 'Angry Face'.

So far we have two men whose patterns of behaviour with women are almost opposite. George first goes through a phase of having sexual relationships with a series of black women, and then finally marries a white woman and stays with her. Johnny on the other hand, goes through a series of marriage relationships with white women, none of which satisfy him in his longing for wildness and freedom. He then commits himself to living with a black woman and stays with her in an African community. The third example I wish to consider briefly is a man who has difficulty relating to women altogether.

'Plants and Girls' is a strange story, with an undefined setting: 'There was a boy who lived in a small house in a small town in the centre of Africa' (p.163). The setting removes the story from a specific location to a nameless, generalised place which makes it slightly dreamlike or mythical. It is different from Lessing's more autobiographical stories that deal with her own experiences as a young girl on her father's farm. What is important about the setting is that the protagonist, a boy, lives on the border between wildness and 'civilization'. His house is 'the last in the street, so that he walked straight from the garden, across a railway line, and into the veld' (p.163). He spends most of his childhood wandering round the veld and the kopjes, and he develops a very close relationship with nature. Yet when the town expands, and his access to the wildness is blocked, he finds it difficult to come to terms with the situation:

> He was a lethargic boy, and it seemed to him as if some spell had been put on him, imprisoning him for ever in the town. Now he would walk through the new streets, looking down at the hard glittering tarmac, thinking of the living earth imprisoned beneath it. Where the veld trees had been allowed to stay, he stood gazing, thinking how they drew their strength through the layers of rubble and broken brick, direct from the breathing soil and from the invisibly running underground rivers. He would stand there, staring and it would seem to him that he could see those fresh, subtly-running streams of water moving this way and that beneath the tarmac, and he stretched out his fingers like roots towards the earth (p.163).

One would not expect people living in a new suburb to think too much about the earth beneath the new roads, and yet this boy is acutely sensitive about what he imagines as the imprisoning effect of the tar. Through him, Lessing conveys a picture of the earth as a living being, suffocated by this 'hard, glittering' substance which coats it, almost in the way oil slicks coat sea birds and beaches. To a person whose eyes are accustomed to the soft earth-brown colours of dirt roads and the grass of the veld, the glare of the 'glittering' black road is harsh and painful. One can appreciate the boy, Frederick's imaginative sensitivity to all that lies beneath the surface of the earth, and yet it does seem a little strange that he spends so much time feeling that connection. The last line, 'stretching out his fingers like roots', brings his alignment with the trees too close. It is not surprising that Lessing places an opposition to this attitude in the story, in the form of the noisy house next door with cheerful people. The 'girls' in the title come from this house.

It is not only wildness that affects Frederick's relationships with girls. His family situation seems to be typically Freudian, even Lawrentian. His mother is a dominant force in his life, but his father resists him:

> He [the boy] would go into the room where she sat sewing, and sit near her, in silence, for hours. If his father came into the room he began to fidget, and soon went away. His father spoke angrily about his laziness and his unnatural behaviour.
>
> He made the mother fetch a doctor to examine the boy. It was from this time that Frederick took the words 'not normal' as his inheritance (p.164).

The boy accepts the label of not being normal without protest. After his father dies we read that his mother 'lived for him' (p.165). His relationship with her remains close. Some years later the boy begins to spend his evenings standing next to a veld tree outside his house:

> There was a big veld tree that stood a short way from their gate in a space between two street lamps, so that there was a well of shadow beneath it which attracted him very much. He stood beneath the tree, listening to the wind moving gently in the leaves, feeling it stir his hair like fingers. He would move slowly in to the tree until his long fingers met the rough bark, and he stroked the tree curiously, learning it, thinking: under this roughness and hardness moves the sap, like rivers under the earth (p.166).

He is aware of the texture of the tree and the contrast between the hardness of the bark on the outside and the moving liquid within. His mother accepts his attachment to the tree but when he begins to get involved with a girl, she becomes angry: 'Soon he knew, because of the opposition of his mother, that he had a girl, as ordinary young men have girls' (p.168). Finally his mother falls ill and demands all his attention so that the girl leaves him. We read: 'It was like a tight string snapping from him, so that he reeled back into his own house with his mother' (p.169). He seems to identify his mother with the tree because when she becomes old and is dying, he stands next to the tree and thinks: 'It's an old tree, it's too old. If a leaf fell in the darkness he thought: The leaves are falling, it's dying, it's too old to live' (p.169).

The boy's relationship with wildness changes after his mother dies and the old tree is cut down. More trees are planted along the road: 'The authorities had planted new saplings, domestic and educated trees like bauhinea and jacaranda' (p.171). Yet the new tree which was planted outside his house cannot take the place of the old tree, 'it was too slight and weak and there was no shadow around it' (p.171). It seems that he is looking for something hard and rough and solid, as the old tree has been, something he can depend on like his mother. When he has a second relationship with a younger sister of the first girl, he tries to feel the bones inside her body:

> His fingers pressed and probed into her flesh. 'Here is the bone, under is nothing only bone,' and the long urgent fingers fought to defeat the soft envelope of flesh, fought to make it disappear, so that he could grasp the

> bones of her arms, the joint of her shoulder; and when he had pressed and probed and always found the flesh elastic against his hands, pain flooded along her as the teeth closed in on her neck, or while his fist suddenly drove inwards, under her ribs, as if the tension of flesh were not there (p.173).

Finally he kills her, murmuring 'Your hair, your leaves, your branches, your rivers' (174). In his psychologically disturbed state brought on by the loss of his mother and of the tree that seemed to represent her, he tries to find the elements of hardness and roughness which he has known before, and which has satisfied him. This young girl is obviously identified with the new 'educated' and exotic trees that take the place of the wild one.

This story seems to be dealing with the loss of wildness in the process of urbanisation. One of the questions it raises is 'what is natural behaviour?' The father sees the boy as unnatural because of his over-attachment to his mother, and this opinion seems to be validated by the way he reacts to girls. His attachment to the plants also seems unnatural, but is it really? It does become distorted but at first it is presented in a positive light. This suggests that it is society that constrains people's range of response to nature. Through the slightly retarded and disturbed boy Lessing is going beyond society's accepted ways of relating to nature.

All three men in this chapter have a strong affinity for wildness. With Leopard George it is the animals, as well as the wild terrain of the farm. The story shows how wildness affects his relationship with the white settler community, setting him apart from them physically, with the isolation that he chooses, and emotionally as they watch his obsession with leopards. Compared to 'Traitors' where we are given a brief glimpse into the relationship between Thompson and the black woman, this story gives us more insight into the way inter-racial relationships develop. Yet whereas the motivation for Thompson's relationship is loneliness, evidenced by his drinking problem, there is no such reason in the case of George. His restlessness with the white settler society stems from his kinship with wildness and consequently the black community, being 'of the bush', seems to suit his temperament. The negative outcome of his relationship with wildness points to individual and communal limitations.

George is limited by his lack of insight into the destructive nature of his treatment of black women. He also lacks the courage to go against the norms of white society and live openly with a black woman as Johnny Blakeworthy does. He is unable to mesh the demands of white society with his inner kinship with the wild. The story also shows the limitations of the settler group as they are unable to consider the possibility of relationships of equality across the colour line. In a sense they are out of harmony with their surroundings.

Johnny Blakeworthy needs the freedom of the open air and seems to become claustrophobic when he is shut up in a domestic space for too long. Wildness for him means freedom. It is the weight of commitment to the consumer society that sends him away from the white society. This story shows that the only successful inter-racial relationship takes place when the white person repudiates his people and takes on another culture and way of life. The presence of the child narrator in this story sets it apart from the other two stories and gives it a more sympathetic framework.

The inter-racial component is missing from the last story, but it is different from the other two by having the mother figure as a powerful force. She is identified with wildness in the form of the tree by the boy. His relationship with girls is negatively affected by the possessiveness of his mother, and because he identifies her with wildness, this strange and obsessive relationship with trees if finally damaging to the girls that try to love him. All of the men have difficulty in finding satisfactory relationships with women. I don't think Lessing is blaming wildness for this, but she is perhaps drawing our attention to the way society shuts out wildness from our lives, and makes it difficult for people to enjoy both wildness and human relationships at the same time.

Thus far the examples taken from the settler group have been mainly English-speaking. The complexity of the settler group has not yet been taken into account. In the next chapter we will see how wildness sets people apart and shows up their differences, even though it may also show what they have in common.

Chapter five: Cross-culturality and wildness

'The De Wets come to Kloof Grange'

'The Second Hut'

'No Witchcraft for Sale'

> But we were England's, still colonials,
> Possessing what we still were unpossessed by
> Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
> (Frost, 'The Gift Outright': p.224)

In this extract Robert Frost conveys some of the complexity of the colonial's relationship with the land. He sees that the early American settlers owned the land in America in a political or legal sense before they were psychologically 'owned' by the land. Their minds were still in England, in the home that they had left, while they were physically in America. This type of discordance between the minds and hearts of settlers and their actual surroundings can be seen in many of Lessing's stories. Her settlers, however, are a differentiated group and their attitudes towards their surroundings vary considerably. The English and the Afrikaans-speaking subgroups, for example, are 'possessed' differently by the land.

The first two selected stories have a similar situation where an English-speaking farmer employs an Afrikaans-speaking man to help him to manage the farm. In the first story conflict arises across the cultural barrier between the English woman and the Afrikaans couple. However, there is also gender conflict which renders the two women allies for a time. Wildness serves to highlight differences between individuals in much the same way as it does in the case of adults and children. The way in which an individual relates to the natural environment is often indicative of the manner in which that individual will relate to other human beings. In the final story the conflict is cultural as well as racial. Wildness is the cause of the crisis in the story, as well as a solution for the crisis. It is functions as a means of solving the cultural conflict which arises from a difference in outlook from members of closed groups.

Briefly, the first story, 'The De Wets come to Kloof Grange', involves an elderly British couple, Major and Mrs Gale, who own the farm Kloof Grange. Major Gale employs a young Afrikaans-speaking man, Mr De Wet, to help him run the farm. He brings his newly-wedded wife with him, who soon suffers from the loneliness and isolation of farm-life, and hides away one night, but is eventually found after a search party has been sent out to look for her. Much of the story revolves around Mrs Gale's relationship with this young woman, and the conflicts that arise between the different characters in the story.

The concept of cross-cultural interchange can be seen in the name of the farm. We are told that the Gale's bought it from two South African brothers, who named the farm Kloof Nek, an Afrikaans name. Mrs Gale alters it: 'The first thing she did on arriving was to change the name of the farm from Kloof Nek to Kloof Grange, making a link with home' (p.80). From this example one can see that Mrs Gale is still 'possessed' by England, although she retains half the name, perhaps as an acknowledgement of the immediate history of the farm and her presence in Africa.

Robert Balfour describes the garden in colonial Africa as, 'the European translation of an alien space' (1995:8). This description applies to the various gardens we find in these stories. The mother in 'Flavours of Exile' struggles to grow fruits and vegetables unsuited to Africa in her garden, but Mrs Gale is more successful in making a garden which reflects England, but makes concessions to Africa. She surrounds her house with rose bushes, lawns and fountains but includes in it some flowering African shrubs. It is as if she 'tames' the African plants by putting them in the context of an English garden. She controls the amount of wildness she allows in her garden, so that the garden still reflects the English style and creates a buffer between herself and the 'the wind-bitten high veld' (p.83) beyond its borders.

The cultural background of Mrs Gale is first made evident in the description of her watching the sunset with her husband from their verandah which 'was lifted on stone pillars, and jutted forward over the garden like a box in the theatre' (p.75):

> There sat Major Gale and his wife, as they did every evening at this hour, side by side trimly in their deck chairs, their sundowners on small tables at their elbows, critically watching, like connoisseurs, the pageant presented for them (p.75).

What is notable here is their passivity. They simply sit back and wait for the show to be 'presented' to them. The theatre-box image is easily associated with aristocratic refinement, and with the culture of Europe. Their relationship with the surrounding land is clearly indicated by their separation from it and their elevation above it. There is a sense in which they do not want to be tainted by the mess and dirt of the earth, but nevertheless wish to have it at their feet as they contemplate the sunset. They are critical observers, accustomed to being entertained, as the 'pageant' metaphor suggests. This conveys an attitude towards nature typical of the custodian, Judeo-Christian approach, which places human beings at the apex of the pyramid, in charge of the natural world.

Control seems to be an important issue in this story as we see from the way this couple adheres strictly to their evening routine. They are determined to keep a tight control over themselves. This impression is reinforced by the narrative comment inherent in a word such as 'trimly'. It suggests the neatness and precision which is a particularly strong characteristic of Major Gale, as we will see later. His appearance 'seemed to say that it was no easy matter not to let oneself go, not to let this damned disintegrating gaudy easy-going country get under one's skin' (p.77). It is important for them to 'keep up standards', and to exercise self-control as well as control over their environment. Everything is arranged for their utmost convenience: 'their sundowners on small tables at their elbows'. They do not have to expend too much energy in reaching for their drinks because it is fairly obvious that they have well trained servants in the background. Although there is companionship in the seating arrangement, 'side by side', there is also distance between them. It becomes clear in the story that their relationship is at a stage where they have ceased to have physical contact with each other, and the separation between them as human beings is mirrored by their separation from nature. What is most noticeable about the couple's relationship to nature is the distance they keep from it. They are observers, enjoying the spectacle of the sunset from the comfort of their home.

Similarly, and significantly, the most important thing about the garden for Mrs Gale is the view it affords her of the mountains across the valley. She sits on a bench in her garden watching them:

> They were *her* hills: that was how she felt. For years she had sat here, hours every day, watching the cloud shadow move over them, watching them turn blue with distance or come close after rain so that she could see the exquisite brushwork of trees on the lower slopes. They were never the same half an hour together. Modulating light created them anew for her as she looked, thrusting one peak forward and withdrawing another, moving them back so that they were hazed on a smoky horizon, crouched in sullen retreat; or raising them so that they towered in a brilliant cleansed sky. Sitting here, buffeted by winds, scorched by the sun or shivering with cold, she could challenge anything. They were her mountains; they were what she was; they had made her, had crystallized her loneliness into a strength, had sustained her and fed her (p. 84).

Through this dramatic internal focus, we are made aware of how much the hills mean to Mrs Gale. Her first response is that of possession: 'they were *her* hills'. This may sound like the voice of colonialism laying claim to the land, but in fact it is a psychological or spiritual claim that she is making, like the claim of a poet or an artist on the land. According to one of America's foremost nature writers, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a poet's claim transcends that of the landowner:

> The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of all these men's farms, yet to this their land-deeds give them no title (1984: 303).

According to Emerson, the poet or artist's claim on the land is one which no one can dispute. This aesthetic aspect of Mrs Gale's claim is developed by the painterly terminology used to describe the scene: 'the exquisite brushwork of trees'. Together with the previous reference to the world of theatre, this clearly conveys Mrs Gale's cultural heritage and educational background. She sees the mountain landscape in terms of what she has been taught to see. In describing the 'modulating light', changing the appearance of the hills, the narrator is drawing on terms developed during the time of John Constable. J.M. Coetzee refers to this in 'The Picturesque and the South African Landscape' :

> The great technical achievement of John Constable was to create means of rendering transitory effects of sunlight on surfaces – what he called 'the evanescent effects of nature's chiaroscuro' (1988:43).

The 'transitory effects' of the light on Mrs Gale's hills are dramatized by phrases such as 'thrusting one peak forward' and 'crouched in sullen retreat'. These images have an aggressive force and sinister power which are reminiscent of the descriptions of the wild African bush in *The Grass is Singing,* which are given when Mary first comes to the farm: 'Listening in the complete silence, innumerable little noises rose from the bush, as if colonies of strange creatures had become still and watchful at their coming and were now going about their own business' (p.62). In both passages there is a sense of a presence in nature which is conscious of the human beings, and which is *either watching them or locked in suppressed combat with them.*

Yet it is clear that Mrs Gale is not afraid of the people of Africa, even when she walks outside alone at night beyond the boundaries of her garden:

> She did not like going outside her garden at night. She was not afraid of natives, no: she had contempt for women who were afraid, for she regarded Africans as rather pathetic children, and was very kind to them. She did not know what made her afraid (p.80).

Apart from Mrs Gale's obviously paternalistic attitude towards the 'natives', this passage also conveys her fear of something unknown in nature. It is the 'empty space of veld' between the houses that unnerves her. At night it takes on a mysterious and threatening quality. There are deep black shadows next to each tree along the moonlit road. We read: 'she moved through the pits of shadow, gaining each stretch of clear moonlight with relief, until she came to the house' (p.81). The word 'pits' suggests that she senses those areas of darkness as something she could fall into and disappear. She is unlike Frederick in 'Plants and Girls' who feels no fear of the shadow of the tree: 'There was a big veld tree that stood a short way from their gate in a space between two street lamps, so that there was a well of shadow beneath it which attracted him very much' (p.166). For him, for Johnny Blakeworthy, it is domestic space that carries a threat. Mrs Gale's attitude to wildness is a careful one. She can appreciate the wild mountain landscape if she is securely placed within the bounds of her garden. She holds onto the 'known' in Africa because she feels the menace of the unknown.

It is not only the aesthetic and dramatic aspects of the mountain landscape which moves Mrs Gale, however. The landscape is something which 'sustains and strengthens' her. She attributes her survival to them, her ability to live through the isolation of being a settler farmer's wife. The mountains determine her very identity: 'they were what she was'. To use Frost's terms, Mrs Gale is, in fact, 'possessed' by the mountains. Although she is partly 'possessed' by England, with her garden and her English pen friend, she has adapted to some extent to the land of Africa, and has developed a strong relationship with this particular aspect of it.

So important is this landscape to Mrs Gale that she endures a considerable amount of hardship in order to watch it daily. Like the boy in 'A Sunrise on the Veld' who exposes himself to the cold of the winter morning in order to see the sunrise, she too braves extreme weather conditions, voluntarily: 'buffeted by the wind, scorched by the sun'. Mrs Gale goes against the natural impulse to seek shelter because of a higher calling. It is almost a religious experience for her, to undergo a certain amount of suffering in order to be made whole, to be strengthened and sustained by that which is beyond her. The mountains become for her an expression of the sublime – an attitude which is firmly based in the European cultural tradition, as Nicholson explains.

While the mountains uplift Mrs Gale with their strength and beauty, they stay in their place, leaving her immediate space inviolate. It is the human world that threatens to violate that space – in the form of Mrs De Wet, the young Afrikaans-speaking wife of the new farm manager. Mrs Gale fears that the couple will have lots of children, who will disturb the peace of her garden: 'She simply couldn't put up with a tribe of children – for Afrikaners never had less than twelve – running wild over the beautiful garden and teasing her goldfish' (p. 81). Wildness is something Mrs Gale keeps out of her garden, except for the African shrubs: for her, the very concept of garden stands in opposition to wildness. Even the fish which she places in her garden pond are exotic fish, brought in for decorative purposes. She knows nothing of the wild fish in the river below, unlike the young Mrs De Wet who goes down to the river in the valley, catches fish and eats them. In fact, the garden is a focus in the story which sets the two women apart:

> 'You are fond of gardens?' she [Mrs Gale] asked. She could not imagine anyone not being fond of gardens.
>
> Mrs De Wet said sullenly: 'My mother was always too busy having kids to have time for gardens' (p.93).

Their responses to the idea of gardens show up the differences between the two women. The ironic repetition of 'fond', particularly, exposes Mrs Gale's narrowness of experience. Added to this, her prejudice about Afrikaners which was revealed in the previous extract make one question Antony Beck's comment that Lessing dislikes Afrikaners and tolerates the English upper class because of 'social aspiration'. I feel that he has mistaken the subject positioning of Mrs Gale as authorial comment, and perhaps missed the humour with which she is portrayed. In the following passage, for example, we find Mrs Gale becoming self-conscious about the way she speaks of the mountains:

> Mrs Gale, seeing that all this beauty and peace meant nothing to her companion that she would have it mean, said, playing her last card: 'Come and see my mountains.' She regretted the pronoun as soon as it was out – so exaggerated.
>
> But when she had the girl safely on the rocky verge of the escarpment, she heard her say: 'There's my river.' She was leaning forward over the great gulf, and her voice was lifted with excitement. 'Look,' she was saying. 'Look, there it is' (p. 93).

Mrs Gale is obviously embarrassed about using the pronoun 'my' as it reveals her possessiveness about the mountains and exposes her secret to a stranger, and an Afrikaans stranger as well. The emphasis given to 'so' by the italics captures Mrs Gale's prim, and fussy tone. In contrast, the young girl has no self-consciousness about using 'my' to describe the river. She does not worry about anyone knowing that it is her special place, least of all Mrs Gale. She is more open and direct than Mrs Gale.

The young woman's preference for the river shocks Mrs Gale, who regards it as a source of danger, rank odours and disease. The difference between these two women's responses to the environment marks a fundamental difference between them with regard to their physicality. This is reflected in the way Mrs Gale enjoys viewing the mountains from a distance, whereas Mrs De Wet enters into her river physically, dangling her legs in the water as she sits on a rock and watches the fish and birds. This is also a function of the difference in their ages. Mrs De Wet is a young girl of seventeen, while Mrs Gale is elderly. The physical side of the De Wet's marriage is obviously strong as they are newly-wed, whereas Mrs Gale thinks with relief that her husband no longer 'loved' her: 'Ah, that 'love' – she thought of it with a small humorous distaste' (p.78)

Although the two women respond differently to the wildness of the environment, it must be acknowledged that Mrs De Wet is as excited about 'her' river as Mrs De Wet is about 'her' hills. Both find solace and support in nature though they lay claim to different aspects of the environment. In spite of the age and cultural differences between them wildness performs a similar function in their lives.

Even though these women do not automatically become friends, as Major Gale assumes they will, simply because they are both female, they do have something in common as they are both affected by the isolation of being a settler farmer's wife. Mrs Gale has become accustomed to it over the years but Major Gale does not realize this: 'she had learned to love her isolation, and she felt aggrieved that he did not know it' (p.78). Mrs De Wet, however, having been in a family of thirteen, finds it difficult to be alone all day and she runs to Mrs Gale for help when her loneliness becomes too much to bear. The tension between the two women, which resulted from the difference in culture and background, is forgotten for a time as they become allies against the men. The cultural conflict turns into a gender conflict, where Mrs Gale attacks Mr De Wet verbally for his offensive behaviour and for neglecting his wife. The result of this conflict is that the girl hides away under the bed and the whole farm is woken up at night to search for her. When they have been looking for the girl all night without success, Mrs Gale turns against her garden:

> That night Mrs Gale hated her garden, that highly-cultivated patch of luxuriant growth, stuck in the middle of a country that could do this sort of thing to you suddenly. It was all the fault of the country! In a civilized sort of place, the girl would have caught the train to her mother, and a wire would have put everything right. Here, she might have killed herself, simply because of a passing fit of despair (p. 100).

At this point the cruelty and danger of the wildness of Africa has overwhelmed Mrs Gale, and the way she sees the garden changes. Instead of being a secure space from which she looks out to the wild, it becomes a futile piece of make-believe which is powerless to protect anyone against the wildness which can come upon you and destroy you unexpectedly. Remembering 'Leopard George', whose girl was killed by the leopard, this is not an unfounded fear on Mrs Gale's part. As she imagines Mrs De Wet being hurt, killed by an animal or caught in a trap, she ends by thinking: 'worse than any of the actual physical dangers was the danger of falling a victim to fear: being alone on the veld, at night, knowing oneself lost: this was enough to send anyone off balance' (p.100). Her greatest fear is fear itself, the fear of being utterly exposed to the wildness with no hope of returning to her protected space which she nurtures so carefully. There is also a humorous suggestion in the passage that Mrs Gale herself probably wanted to pack her bag and go home to mother many times in the past.

The final outcome of the story is played out through physical conflict. Mr De Wet beats his wife for hiding away, Mrs Gale is enraged and tries to beat De Wet with her fists, and she is then pushed away by Mrs De Wet. The gender conflict gives way once more to the cross-cultural conflict, and to make matters worse, Mr De Wet mistakenly calls her 'Mrs Major', underlining the cultural gap that lies between them. Major Gale looks on helplessly and tries vaguely to pacify his wife who is offended and outraged by the encounter. The cultured refinement of the theatre and the arts is brought down to the level of a round of fisticuffs for Mrs Gale. In trying to pacify his wife, who is accused by De Wet of causing all the trouble, Major Gale says: 'It was no one's fault', and this statement contains the truth of the whole story. Through her sympathetic insight into all of the characters, and her humorous handling of the conflict situation, Lessing shows us what motivates each person, so that we can understand how the conflict arises. The farming situation puts a strain on the men, as the work is all-absorbing and also on the women who are left alone all day with nothing to do. Wildness is a powerful factor in their lives and can help to strengthen individuals or threaten to destroy them, but in both cases it sheds light on the complexity of the colonial situation and indeed of the human condition in general.

The cross-culturality in this story involves two elements, the English and the Afrikaans-speakers. The crucial difference between this story and the next one, 'The Second Hut', is that the latter involves three cultural groups: English, Afrikaans and 'native'. A further difference is that the farmer's position with regard to his farm is far more precarious than Major Gale's, who is quite a successful farmer. In 'The Second Hut' Major Carruthers has to call in the Afrikaner, Van Heerden, to help him to save his farm from bankruptcy.

In her autobiography, *Under My Skin,* Lessing reveals that this story is based on a certain period in her childhood. Referring to her father, she writes: 'For some months he had an assistant, a Dutchman with many children. The story 'The Second Hut' was written from memories of that year' (p.67). Lessing is sympathetic towards her father at that time because they had very little money, he was busy trying to 'stump' the farm (that is, clear it of trees for cultivation), and his wife had taken to her bed, leaving him to look after the two small children. She is less sympathetic towards her mother:

> My mother decided she had a bad heart. All her life she knew she had a bad heart and might die at any moment. In the end she died at the respectable age of seventy-three, of a stroke. Even as a small girl I understood the psychological advantages of a bad heart, and believed she was inventing it to get sympathy. I believed too that my father was not convinced by this heart.
>
> Now I understand why she went to bed. In that year she underwent that inner reconstruction which most of us have to do at least once in a life. You relinquish what you had believed you must have to live at all. Her bed was put into the front room, because of the windows and the view to the hills (1994:64).

The relationship between Lessing and her mother is a complex one, as we can see from the dry irony with which she refers to her mother's death in the first paragraph, although her cynicism about her mother's condition mellows in the next paragraph. As Lessing grows older she is able to look back with understanding at a situation which she found intolerable as a child. A point to note is that her mother's bed was placed at the window with 'the view to the hills.' Although she takes to her bed, she is still able to interact with the natural environment by looking at a landscape. Lessing seems to write different aspects of her mother into various characters in her stories, for example Mrs Gale, who also derives strength from the hills and Mrs Carruthers in 'The Second Hut', who seems to be directly modelled on Lessing's mother:

> The room where his wife lay, in a greenish sun-lanced gloom, was a place of seedy misery. The doctor said it was her heart; and Major Carruthers knew this was true: she had broken down through heart-break over the conditions they lived in. She did not want to get better. The harsh light from outside was shut out with dark blinds, and she turned her face to the wall and lay there, hour after hour, inert and uncomplaining, in a stoicism of defeat nothing could penetrate (p.44).

The similarities to Lessing's mother are clear, though unlike her, this woman turns away from nature altogether. Sunlight seems to hurt her, cut into her, as 'sun-lanced' suggests. The 'dark blinds' erase the natural distinction between day and night, so that she lives in limbo, reminding one of Dante's *Inferno*. This reflects her psychological state. She is 'putting her life on hold' until she can return to England, where she might live again. In Africa she neither lives nor dies, but occupies a space between.

As we have seen, the women in Lessing's stories have different degrees of physical interaction with the natural environment. The young Mrs De Wet goes to the river and actually touches the water. Mrs Gale is an observer. She doesn't get close to the mountains but she does expose herself to the elements by sitting outside in the garden. Lessing's mother goes to bed, but watches the hills from her room, in a semi-state of withdrawal from nature. Mrs Carruthers withdraws completely, turning her face to the wall, away from the light.

Chaffee points out that while the man's consciousness is generally fixed on outward space, the woman's world is limited to the house or the garden, or in extreme cases, it 'shrinks to a point within herself' (p.131). She writes:

> The man, having chosen a country life because he felt enclosed in an office and cramped in town, feels himself expand as he surveys his land, organises his labourers, and gradually tames the wild space, seeing it take the shape he plans for it, thus filling it with himself . . .His consciousness, fixed on outward space, becomes alien to small spaces or to inner space (p.130).

While Mrs Carruthers is described with compassion by the narrator, indicating that Major Carruthers is sympathetic towards his wife, his consciousness does seem to be 'fixed on outward space' as he tries to make his farm succeed. The small space of his wife's room and her inner space become increasingly alien to him:

> What kind of miraculous release was she waiting for? He wondered, as he delicately adjusted her sheets and pillows and laid his hand gently on her head. Over the bony cage of the skull, the skin was papery and bluish. What was she thinking? He had a vision of her brain as a small frightened animal pulsating under his fingers (p.55).

The image of the small frightened animal conveys both his tenderness and his pity for his wife. However, it also conveys his distance from her. This animal needs his protection and care, but it is not an equal partner with whom real communication is possible. The vividness of the image of the 'bony cage of the skull' is shocking in its direct intimation of death. The pitiful existence of this woman, whose determination to see herself as being trapped by Africa, makes her own body a cage. The horror of the cage image is that it is self-imposed and that it cages her husband in turn. She sees him as the obstacle to her freedom, because of his response to Africa. She chooses the cage: she chooses to imprison herself in her room and to shut the light out. For her, Africa is a cage, keeping her from England. The only route out of this prison is through her husband, and his relinquishing of his African 'dream'. Yet for him, a return to England would be a defeat, a different kind of cage – an exile from his life and his work in Africa.

The cross-cultural aspect of this story is seen at the outset in the way Carruthers reacts towards the man he employs, Van Heerden. Chaffee's 'closed groups' are strongly in evidence here, as well as 'spatial patterning.' When he first sees Van Heerden, Carruthers places him outside his 'closed group': 'Major Carruthers instinctively dropped his standards of value as he looked, for this man was an Afrikaner, and thus came into an outside category' (p.47). Major Carruthers decides to accommodate Van Heerden in a thatched hut at some distance from his house:

> He could not have the man in the house: the idea came into his head and was quickly dismissed. They had nothing in common, they would make each other uncomfortable – that was how he put it to himself. Besides, there wasn't really any room. Underneath, Major Carruthers knew that if his new assistant had been an Englishman, with the same upbringing, he would have found a corner in his house and a welcome as a friend (p.48).

The two men do in fact have a great deal in common. The farm business and all that it entails occupies them most of the time. However, it is clear that 'upbringing', education and cultural values are factors which Carruthers finds more important than these common interests. The difference in economic class is an perhaps the most pertinent factor which influences the Englishman. Lessing here is underlining the prejudice which exists in many 'upper class' English families, and demonstrating the complexity of human society as a whole.

The title of the story points to the decisive event when the second hut, built to house Van Heerden's large family, is burnt down, killing one of his babies. The incidents leading to this tragic event involve the relationships between the three 'closed groups'. There is resentment amongst the labourers about the building of the second hut and it becomes a flashpoint between them and Van

Heerden. As in the previous story, attitudes towards wildness serve to highlight the differences between individuals from the various groups and this helps to show why and how situations of conflict develop.

The differences between the two men, Van Heerden and Carruthers emerge in relation to the natural environment. When Carruthers first takes Van Heerden to see the hut where he will live, they find that it is already inhabited – by a spider.

> In the confusing shafts of light from the door, a thick sheet of felted spider web showed itself, like a curtain halving the interior, as full of small flies and insects as a butcher-bird's cache. The spider crouched, vast and glittering, shaking gently, glaring at them with small red eyes, from the centre of the web. Van Heerden did what Major Carruthers would have died rather then do: he tore the web across with his bare hands, crushed the spider between his fingers, and brushed them lightly against the walls to free them from the clinging silky strands and the sticky mush of insect-body (p.48).

The spider's web spans the width of the hut, indicating that the space is occupied by this non-human 'other'. The 'curtain' suggests that the unknown, non-human world lies hidden, away from the light and from interfering human activity. It is a predator's lair, filled with the evidence of its prey. The sinister image of the 'butcher bird's cache' combined with his 'vastness' and the threatening nature of his 'red eyes' give him a monstrous quality. This insect monster is an image which is used extensively in Lessing's later novel, *Mara and Dann* to provide obstacles to the children in their adventure and their quest. Here it is Carruthers who sees it as an obstacle. His refined English sensibilities are humorously portrayed by Lessing. Compared to Van Heerden, who has no qualms about swiftly crushing the spider with his fingers, Carruthers is fearful and squeamish. His reluctance to have physical contact with this aspect of the natural world is similar to Mrs Gale's revulsion for the river. The language used to describe their attitudes is also similar: 'so exaggerated', and 'would have died'. Carruthers is intimidated by the way in which the spider 'colonises' human space, but Van Heerden quickly destroys both the insect and its habitat and establishes dominance over the non-human world. In this way, wildness sets these men apart. The differences do not seem important at this stage of the story, but in fact they become crucial later on.

Van Heerden's action in crushing the spider is indicative of his dominant behaviour in general. It makes him a good cattle man, but a bad manager of people. He seems to treat the African labourers in a way that establishes authority over them, but they resent it bitterly. Carruthers, on the other hand, treats the labourers in a more respectful, 'anothering' way. He has a good reputation for being a fair employer and does not have any labour problems on his farm until Van Heerden arrives. A crisis in the management of the farm arises when the 'bossboy' on the farm comes to Carruthers with a complaint about Van Heerden:

> It was a glittering blue day, with a chill edge on the air, that stirred Major Carruthers' thin blood as he stood, looking in appeal into the sullen face of the native. All at once, feeling the fresh air wash along his cheeks, watching the leaves shake with a ripple of gold on the trees down the slope, he felt superior to his difficulties, and able to face anything ' Come', he said, with his rare, diffident smile. 'After all these years, when we have been working together for so long, surely you can do this for me. It won't be for very long.'
> He watched the man's face soften in response to his own (p.54)

The natural environment plays an important role in this interchange. The narrator conveys a sense of the weakness or timidity of Carruthers in the detail of his 'thin blood'. In spite of this, and in the face of all his difficulties, he is able to speak to the man in a way that transforms his 'sullen' face to a 'softened' one. He allows the beauty of the autumn sky and the 'glittering' light to feed into his inner being and gains the courage to 'face anything'. We might be reminded at this point of Mrs Gale in the previous story, and see that it is not only women who are strengthened and sustained by the environment. As with Mrs Gale, there is no rational explanation for his being filled with confidence suddenly. It is something about the poignancy of autumn, the change in the air bringing the hint of winter, the 'ripple of gold on the trees', that affects the man. Again we have an example of the mysterious connection between the human and the non-human – the mute appeal of the trees, the light, the air, that influences the man's relationship with the human world. He turns to his 'bossboy' and wins him over. It is as if the harmony which

Carruthers experiences between himself and the natural world is translated into harmony in the human world.

Images from nature are used to convey another important difference between Carruthers and Van Heerden in their attitude towards children. Carruthers has two children who are away at boarding school and he is very careful of their welfare. When Van Heerden first comes to the farm, he hides the fact that he has nine small children, cramming them all into the single hut. Carruthers becomes aware of this, and it calls up a nightmare landscape in him:

> Fear rose high in him. For a few moments he inhabited the landscape of his dreams, a grey country full of sucking menace, where he suffered what he would not allow himself to think of while awake: the grim poverty that could overtake him if his luck did not turn, and if he refused to submit to his brother and return to England (p.50).

The threat of poverty that hangs over Carruthers is made visible in the Afrikaner. It causes this 'other' landscape to come alive and to engulf him. It is a landscape without colour, and with an unexplained power that can suck him in and destroy him. It is of course ironic that only another white man's poverty causes this nightmarish landscape to come up for him. The poverty of black people seems to hold no such fear for him. Perhaps they are beyond his reach of imaginative empathy, or perhaps because they are indigenous inhabitants of the land he does not use the same yardstick for them. His inner landscape of fear is so strong that it blots out the outer landscape:

> Walking through the fields, where the maize was now waving over his head, pale gold with a froth of white, the sharp dead leaves scything crisply against the wind, he could see nothing but that black foetid hut and the pathetic futureless children. That was the lowest he could bring his own children to (p.50).

As the girl in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' fails to see the maize fields because of the stories of her cultural upbringing, so Carruthers fails to see these fields because he has been brought up to believe that he has to provide a certain lifestyle for his children, and living in a hut would mean that he had failed them. When Carruthers is in tune with his surroundings, he focalizes everything around him, but here he cannot see the outer landscape. The narrator sees, and describes the delicate beauty of the 'pale gold with a froth of white', and Major Carruthers is seen against this background. It forms a stark contrast with the darkness of his inner landscape, 'that black foetid hut'. Van Heerden forces him to confront his own possible future if his farming enterprise fails, and even the beauty of the natural world surrounding him cannot wrench him out of this horror.

In contrast, Van Heerden's does not seem to be crushed by his poverty. Like Mr Thompson in 'Traitors' he is described in terms of a dog. In this particular context it is an image which suggests benign, good-natured playfulness. Carruthers 'found him sitting on a candle-box in the doorway of the hut, playing good-naturedly with his children, as if they had been puppies, tumbling them over, snapping his fingers in their faces' (p.56). Although he uses his fingers in good-natured, teasing interaction with his children, one is reminded of his swift, ruthless crushing of the spider with those fingers, and one feels that in contrast to Carruthers there is a directness, a rough aggression and a vitality that is missing in the other man. Carruthers cannot understand how this man is able to laugh and play light-heartedly with his children in this way, in the face of his poverty. Even more difficult for Carruthers to comprehend is Van Heerden's wife. Like her husband, she is described in terms of an animal: 'She reminded him of a sow among her litter, as she lifted her head, the children crowding about her, and stared at him suspiciously from pale and white-lashed eyes' (p.50).

The analogy indicates the kind of gap that exists between the English and the Afrikaans-speaker at this point in the story – and perhaps between the two groups in general. There is a sense of antagonism in Carruthers' unflattering image of the sow. It emphasizes the difficulty Carruthers has in communicating, a difficulty which is both linguistic and conceptual, for they appear to have different attitudes to many aspects of life, including poverty, children, and death. The image stresses the fertility of the woman, whom he describes later as being 'the symbol of fecundity, a strong, irresistible heave of matter' (p.57). She seems to him 'less a human being than the expression of an elemental, irrepressible force' (p.57). For Carruthers, communication with such a force is even less possible than communication with the animal world. She is described in such a way as to be quite threatening to the human, an 'irrepressible force', which seems able to swamp and destroy the refined and sophisticated human world.

In the end it is the 'unbrigeable gap' between Carruthers and Van Heerden that causes Carruthers to write to his brother in England and give up his farm. When the baby dies after the hut is burned down, Van Heerden simply buries it without ceremony and waits for his wife to give birth to the next one. The shock of the death of the child brings on labour. Carruthers is also shocked, but in his case it is by the matter of fact way in which Van Heerden says: 'Well, one comes and another goes':

> Major Carruthers leaned back against the wall of the hut and took out a cigarette clumsily. He felt weak. He felt as if Van Heerden had struck him, smiling. This was an absurd and unjust feeling, but for a moment he hated Van Heerden for standing there and saying: this grey country of poverty that you fear so much, will take on a different look when you actually enter it. You will cease to exist; there is no energy left, when one is wrestling naked with life, for your kind of fine feelings and scruples and regrets (p. 65).

The grey landscape of Carruthers's fears is held up in front of him and he realizes that he is not able to deal with it. His identity will not withstand the demands made on it by this country: 'you will cease to exist'. His culture, with its 'fine feelings, scruples and regrets', is not made for this type of struggle and the type of existence that Van Heerden knows. The cultural mirror that Van Heerden holds up for him to see makes him realize that he is totally inadequate and should therefore resign and leave for England.

Ultimately Carruthers is defeated – not by the wildness of the African terrain or by the indigenous people with whom he comes into contact, but by an Afrikaner – the one who came to help him out of his troubles. Although Van Heerden fills this role unwittingly, it is the tensions between him and the labour force that have led to his hut being burnt down. Lessing shows us the complexity of a situation where it is not easy to place the blame on any one element and yet their combination makes a tragic outcome inevitable. The previous story has a similar sense of inevitability about it, but where there is a comic ending to that situation, there is a tragic one here.

In the third story to be discussed in this chapter, 'No Witchcraft for Sale', the role that wildness plays in the relationship between whites and blacks is even more crucial. The setting is similar to the other two stories: a white-owned farm, with a complex set of relations between the farmer and his labourers. Here, the whites' relationship with domestic servants comes to the fore, specifically that between the Farquar family and Gideon. The story explores in fascinating ways the role of wildness in this relationship.

In this story there is a strong relationship between Mrs Farquar and her cook, Gideon. This is a situation that we do not find in either of the other two stories in this chapter. No doubt Mrs Gale has a cook, but she is never shown interacting with him. Her only 'friend' is the one to whom she writes in Britain. In 'No Witchcraft for Sale', Lessing shows us the curious form a friendship takes within the 'master-servant' framework. One is reminded of another relationship between 'madam and servant, and that is between Mary and Moses in *The Grass is Singing.* There are, however, many factors which make the Gideon/Mrs Farquar relationship different from the Moses/Mary one. Firstly, one is never given Mrs Farquar's first name, which indicates that their relationship always stays formal and correct. Significantly, we are never given Gideon's surname. This is a typical feature of the inequality inherent in the structure of the madam/servant relationship.

A second difference from the Mary/Moses relationship is the presence of the child, Teddy: 'Mrs Farquar was fond of the old cook because of his love for the child' (p.35). A sense of family operates in both Gideon and Mrs Farquar's lives, which keeps the relationship of the level of family and work, rather than romance or intimacy. A third important element in the relationship between Gideon and Mrs Farquar is religion. They share a faith in God, and this binds them together, although it also binds them into the colonial status quo. Lessing is ironical as she shows this aspect of their religion. When Gideon and Mrs Farquar's children reach out towards each other to investigate their differences, we read:

> Sometimes a small piccanin who had been born the same time as Teddy, could be seen peering from the edge of the bush, staring in awe at the little white boy with his miraculous fair hair and northern blue eyes. The two little children would gaze at each other with a wide, interested gaze, and once Teddy put out his hand curiously to touch the black child's cheeks and hair.
>
> Gideon, who was watching, shook his head wonderingly, and said: 'Ah, missus, these are both children, and one will grow up to be a Baas, and one will be a servant'; and Mrs Farquar smiled and said sadly, 'Yes, Gideon, I was thinking the same.' She sighed. 'It is God's will,' said Gideon, who was a mission boy. The Farquars were very religious people; and this shared feeling about God bound servant and masters even closer together (p.36).

Lessing is obviously criticising the role of the Church in the colonial system. By representing the role of religion in the relationship between Gideon and Mrs Farquar, Lessing demonstrates the role of religion in colonialism as a whole. Mrs Farquar's sadness and sighing at Gideon's words shows that she feels some sense of guilt at the inequality of the situation, but that she lacks the vision to see that a different kind of dispensation is possible. Gideon also seems to lack a sense of wrong or of resentment, but accepts the way he has been taught life should be, although one wonders whether he is saying what he thinks he should say. The image of the little black boy 'peering from the edge of the bush' links wildness with the black inhabitants of the land. It is their area, it is where they come from, it is the place where they derive the means to heal and save lives. However, it is also an area from whence danger emerges, as we see later in the story.

All through the stories Lessing highlights the conflicting nature of wildness: its capacity to build, to strengthen and to heal as well as its ability to destroy. Here the destructive element makes a dramatic entrance in the form of a snake which spits deadly poison into Teddy's eyes. Mrs Farquar tries to remedy the situation by bathing his eyes with permanganate, but it has no effect. This is where Gideon, the traditional healer, comes to the rescue. He goes quickly to the bush and fetches a root which acts as an antidote to the poison:

> Without even washing it, he put the root in his mouth, chewed it vigorously,

> then held the spittle there while he took the child forcibly from Mrs Farquar. He gripped Teddy down between his knees, and pressed the balls of his thumbs into the swollen eyes, so that the child screamed and Mrs Farquar cried out in protest: 'Gideon, Gideon!' But Gideon took no notice. He knelt over the writhing child, pushing back the puffy lids till the chinks of eyeball showed, and then spat hard, again and again, into first one eye, and then the other (p.38).

Gideon totally dominates this situation. All his movements are swift and sure. The words, 'grips' and 'presses' show the force he uses on the child and it emphasizes the urgency of the situation. He takes control, and ignores Mrs Farquar's helpless protests. The overriding consideration for Gideon is of course to save Teddy's eyes and he has to act quickly in order to do that. What gives him authority is the knowledge he has of medicinal herbs, of the indigenous plants of the area. It is this 'alliance' between the human and the wildness of the environment that gives him the power to heal. In fact, it seems more than an alliance, it is as if he takes on the identity of the wild as he imitates the action of the snake by spitting repeatedly into Teddy's eyes.

Gideon's actions demonstrate the love he has for the little boy. In spite of their different positions in settler society, he simply reacts out of concern at a basic human level. Before this incident, the relationship between him and Teddy has been undergoing a process of alienation. When he is a baby, Gideon treats him as one of his own children, carrying him and playing with him. He also names him, 'Little Yellow Head' in his own language. However, as Teddy grows up he becomes socialized into seeing himself as superior to little black boys like Gideon's children, and this saddens Gideon and leads to his withdrawal from Teddy:

> The baby had lain in his arms and smiled up into his face: the tiny boy had swung from his shoulders, had played with him by the hour. Now Gideon would not let his flesh touch the flesh of the white child. He was kind, but there was a grave formality in his voice that made Teddy pout and sulk away. Also, it made him into a man: with Gideon he was polite, and carried himself formally, and if he came into the kitchen to ask for something, it was in the way a white man uses towards a servant, expecting to be obeyed (p. 37).

In this extract Lessing demonstrates how social roles, which are defined in accordance with the norms of the society, create distance between two people who have been close. Gideon withdraws partly for the sake of his own self-respect, as Teddy has insulted one of his children, but he is also 'educating' Teddy, and making him 'into a man', so that he can take up his role as an adult in that society. However, the constraining aspect of colonialism is put aside rapidly in the face of the crisis in Teddy's life.

The story might have ended happily at this point, with Teddy's eyes being healed by Gideon and disaster being averted. However, this is not the main point of the story, as is manifest by the title. Lessing is particularly concerned with the reaction of the whites to this demonstration of knowledge and power by a black person. The narrator tells us that the story of the healing was passed around the district, and she gives this comment:

> The bush is full of secrets. No one can live in Africa, or at least on the veld, without learning very soon that there is an ancient wisdom of leaf and soil and season – and, too, perhaps most important of all, of the darker tracts of the human mind – which is the black man's heritage (p.38).

Wildness is represented as a source of power to the 'black man', as he has inherited it from many years of living in Africa and thus gained an advantage over the whites in a situation of crisis such as this one. If the whites should gain access to this knowledge of the wild it would be possible for them to take this power for themselves, and thus rob the black community of the advantage they have in this regard. When a scientist arrives and asks to be shown the healing plant, Gideon interprets the situation in these terms but the Farquars do not. They are simple people, and want to share their good fortune with the rest of the world. Thus they try to put pressure on their servant to give up his secret:

> He lifted his head, gave a long, blank angry look at the circle of whites, who seemed to him like a circle of yelping dogs pressing around him, and said: 'I will show you the root.'
>
> They walked single file away from the homestead down a kaffir path. It was a blazing December afternoon, with the sky full of hot rain clouds. Everything was hot: the sun was like a bronze tray whirling overhead, there was a heat shimmer over the fields, the soil was scorching underfoot, the dusty wind blew gritty and thick and warm in their faces. It was a terrible day, fit only for reclining on a veranda with iced drinks, which is where they would normally have been at that hour (p.41).

Lessing's dog image in this context is significantly different from the amiable shaggy dog image in 'Traitors' or the playful father dog image in 'The Second Hut'. Here the plural form is used to suggest a pack, which are 'yelping' as they would when cornering an animal they want to kill. One is also aware of the negative connotations of 'dog' in the black community: it is extremely insulting for them to describe a human being as a dog as it conveys the idea of something that has lost its humanity. This is how Gideon sees the people around him.

The narration changes in the passage from a focalization of Gideon to an outside view of the party of whites being led by Gideon into his territory: the bush. It calls to mind the way the young girls in 'Traitors' led the group of adults into the bush to see the Thompson's old house. The children were similarly bullied into doing something they did not want to do, and had a similar advantage to Gideon of having knowledge of the bush.

The image of the 'bronze tray whirling overhead' is almost surreal as it overturns the usual way the tray is used, serving iced drinks on a hot day. The whites' comfortable colonial lifestyle is upset, but they have forced the situation on themselves and are now under Gideon's control because of their ignorance of the secrets of the wild. Here they experience the impact of the heat of the day without any protection from a shady, cool veranda. From their scorching feet to their faces, buffeted by the dusty wind, they are exposed to an aspect of the natural environment of Africa which they would normally be able to avoid. While Gideon ostensibly agrees to show the scientist the root, he actually has no intention of doing so. He takes them out into the bush and allows the wildness to have its effect on them. In doing this one could say he is punishing them but he is also escaping from their pressure in a way that is not open revolt. He uses wildness to give him a way out of a dilemma where he is being asked to be disloyal either to his employers or to the tradition of herbal medicine which he has inherited from his ancestors. He is also using the bush to educate them as he used withdrawal to educate Teddy earlier.

This story raises the important issue of the ownership of indigenous knowledge systems. The scientist in the story represents western medicine, and he tries to track down the remedy which is contained in the wild. He has no qualms about laying claim to this knowledge. On the other hand, Gideon represents traditional healers and demonstrates that this knowledge is not 'for sale'. Gideon has two roles, two sets of identity: that of the servant and that of the traditional healer. The servant role comes with colonialism, whereas the other role belongs to his traditional society. Most of the time he is able to keep these two roles separate, but because of the crisis in the white family, he plays both roles simultaneously. This enables him to help the boy, but it also results in his dilemma because the authority he has in his society as a healer, he does not have in the domestic working situation.

In Chaffee's terms, the closed groups of black and white overlap briefly in response to the child's distress. The closely-guarded secrets of the African herbalists are made available to the settlers in order to help them. But as soon as the boy is out of danger, the groups move back to their original positions. The indigenous knowledge systems are kept apart from the western knowledge systems, and they cannot be forced to intersect. We read that Gideon feels that the Farquars have betrayed him by trying to get him to show the scientist the root. However it seems to me to be insensitivity and ignorance on their part rather than deliberate betrayal that causes them to do so. Their motives are not mercenary, although the scientist's might well be. The Farquars want to help other people in the way that they have been helped, but they fail to understand that indigenous medical practices are different from western scientific practices. It is said that if a herbalist tells strangers about the plants he may destroy the power of the plant to heal. Gideon also fails to understand the openness of scientific knowledge, where remedies are spread around to people whom the scientists do not know. The conflict comes about because of a misunderstanding of each other's cultures, and at the centre of this is the contested area of wildness.

Wildness takes different forms and plays many roles in the stories we have looked at in this chapter. It takes the form of a mountain, a river, a sunset sky, or a moonlit, shadowy road through the veld. It is a cool breeze, a ripple of golden leaves, a grey landscape, and a spider with red eyes. It is a poisonous spitting snake and a small plant of the veld. It is reflected in images of dogs, pigs, and butcher birds. Wildness sustains and strengthens lonely white women and draws attention to their cultural differences. It forms part of an inner landscape of fear and dread as a farmer faces the spectre of poverty and failure. It facilitates interaction between black and white when farmers are open to the effect of the surroundings but also creates conflict between blacks and whites when it holds the secrets of healing. In each case wildness affects people and either sets them apart or draws them together. It emphasizes cultural differences between groups but also shows what they have in common. Finally it highlights aspects of the colonial process and the misunderstandings which can be brought about between people who as individuals are close to each other.

In the next chapter this discussion will be concluded by looking at what the analysis of wildness had revealed about Lessing's representation of the colonial world.

Chapter six: Conclusion

> That was the last year when I was part of the bush, its creature, more at home there than I've been since in any street or town.
> (Lessing, *Under My Skin*, 1994: 195)

In simple terms, two questions stand out with regard to the way wildness is constructed in Lessing's *African Stories*. What do human beings do to wildness? And secondly, what does wildness do to human beings?

The first question involves the issue of human intervention in the natural world. During the period of exploration and colonial expansion, wildness in Africa came under pressure. The metanarrative of human progress entailed the taming of the wild and intervention was expected and taken for granted. This issue is addressed in the writing of Elspeth Huxley, a slightly older contemporary of Lessing, who describes her childhood on a farm in Kenya in her autobiographical novel, *The Flame Trees of Thika*. An extract from this text serves to highlight the differences between her attitude towards human intervention and Lessing's:

> The Kikuyu, as a rule, were not much interested in their surroundings. Although they had a name for all the shrubs and trees and birds, they walked about their country without appearing to possess it – or perhaps I mean, without leaving any mark. To us, that was remarkable: they had not aspired to re-create or change or tame the country and to bring it under their control. A terraced Italian landscape or an English farming county is a very different matter from the stretch of boggy forest first provided as the raw material; it is the joint creation of nature and man. The natives of Africa had accepted what God, or nature, had given them without apparently wishing to improve upon it in any significant way. If water flowed down a valley they fetched what they wanted in a large hollow gourd; they did not push it into pipes or flumes, or harass it with pumps. Consequently when they left a piece of land and abandoned their huts (as eventually they always did, since they practised shifting cultivation), the bush and vegetation grew up again and obliterated every trace of them, just as the sea at each high tide wipes out footprints and children's sandcastles, and leaves the beach once more smooth and glistening (1959: 46).

The first sentence of this extract makes an interesting comment on the poem by Frost which was quoted in the last chapter. The western attitude of possession is characterized by people marking their territory, putting up fences and making boundaries. Here, the people who really do belong to the land, the Kikuyu, don't 'appear to possess it'. They own the land communally and therefore do not make boundaries. The narrator interprets this attitude as showing a lack of interest. She concedes that they do know the names of plants and animals, but gives them very little credit for this. The word 'remarkable' can be read in a negative or a positive way. It could mean odd or peculiar or it could mean interesting. 'Aspired', too, could be read ironically but the fact that she goes on to praise the sophisticated cultivation of a 'terraced Italian landscape' as opposed to a 'boggy forest' suggests that she does see the Kikuyu as lacking in 'aspiration'. Cultivation of the land, changing the terrain, is seen as something to aspire to, with the unwritten corollary that those who do not do so are considered lazy. She sees the European farmer as a creator: 'it is the joint creation of nature and man'. This constitutes a sanctioning of the activity of marking the land, although there is a sense of humour and irony when she writes about the water pump. She is witty about 'harassing' the water, suggesting that nature might prefer to be left in peace. The irony may be directed at herself, or at Europeans in general, but it also reflects back on the Kikuyu as inferior to those who modify nature. The beauty of the image of the glistening beach suggests that the narrator cannot help but admire some aspects of the 'non-interventionist' mode of relating to the land. However, one must remember that what the sea washes away is children's sandcastles. They are insubstantial, childlike. The narrator is partly attracted to the Kikuyu life-style, but does not seriously criticize the European way of leaving their mark on the land.

Lessing, on the other hand, is more explicit in her condemnation of people who mark the land and ruin it. For example, in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' we read,

> I was used to our farm, whose hundreds of acres of harsh eroded soil bore trees that had been cut for the mine furnaces and had grown thin and twisted, where the cattle had dragged the grass flat, leaving innumerable criss-crossing trails that deepened each season into gullies under the force of the rains (p.19).

Here Lessing draws an extremely negative picture of mismanagement of the land by the colonial farmer. The trees are cut down and the lands are overgrazed. She wants to show up the iniquities of colonialism as she gives by contrast 'a completely fresh type of landscape':

> Beyond our boundaries on that side the country was new to me. I followed unfamiliar paths past kopjes that till now had been part of the jagged horizon, hazed with distance. This was Government land, which had never been cultivated by white men; at first I could not understand why it was that it appeared, in merely crossing the boundary. I had entered a completely fresh type of landscape. It was a wide green valley, where a small river sparkled, and vivid water-birds darted over the rushes. The grass was thick and soft to my calves, the trees stood tall and shapely (p.19).

The young girl discovers this 'unknown' territory in her search for Chief Mshlanga's kraal. While the point about exploitation of the land is self-evident in the contrast between the two passages, it is interesting to note how the change strikes the protagonist. She says: 'at first I could not understand why it was that it appeared, in merely crossing the boundary'. The retrospective adult narrator realizes that the difference in the land can be attributed to the fact that the land had never been cultivated by whites, but the child protagonist presents us with her 'normal' or 'natural' expectations, namely that the land will have similar characteristics in a similar geographical area. It would only be factors like height above sea level and different rainfall patterns that would change the quality of the land naturally. It is unnatural for the land to change so dramatically in a small space, unless the change is wrought by humans. The girl only knows her father's farm and she thinks that this is how nature is. It is only when she sees the untouched utopia on the other side of the boundary that she realizes what potential the land holds, and consequently, what riches have been lost to the greed of the colonizer.

Even more extreme is the image of the mine in another story, 'The Antheap', where Lessing draws a grotesque picture of exploitation of both nature and people. She describes a valley where the owner, Mr Macintosh, virtually turns the landscape upside down to get at the gold:

> He simply hired hundreds of African labourers and set them to shovel up the soil in the centre of that high, enclosed hollow in the mountains, so that there was soon a deeper hollow, then a vast pit, then a gulf like an inverted mountain. Mr Macintosh was taking great swallows of the earth, like a gold-eating monster, with no fancy ideas about digging shafts or spending money on roofing tunnels (p.357).

This man is known to the blacks as 'The Gold Stomach'. Images of avarice and gluttony abound in the representation of the exploiters of people and the land. If we compare Lessing to Huxley, I think we could say that Lessing gives some extreme examples of environmental exploitation in her stories, whereas Huxley treats the subject with humour and irony.

Lessing's sensitivity to the environment can also be seen in 'Plants and Girls' where the wildness of nature is covered up, smothered by the tar of the new roads and rubble. Even the wild trees are rooted out and substituted with 'educated' trees like jacarandas. The bringing in of exotic plants and trees has come under scrutiny in recent years amongst environmentalists, but it was accepted as normal practice for many years by colonials. Lessing is ahead of her time in this respect.

Making a garden may seem a benign form of intervention in nature, although from the point of view of this study, the question of whether to plant exotic or indigenous plants remains important. This issue is illustrated in Mrs Gale's garden in 'The De Wets come to Kloof Grange'. She spends most of her energy and time on the cultivation of this garden:

> Inside the fence were two acres of garden, that she had created over years of toil. And what a garden! These were what she lived for: her flowering African shrubs, her vivid English lawns, her water-garden with the goldfish and water lilies. Not many people had such a garden (p.80).

Most of the wildness of Africa is banished from this enclosed space except for the African shrubs which are carefully selected to contrast with the English lawns. This type of intervention does not damage the environment, but valuable natural resources have to be used for its upkeep: 'Her water-garden was an extravagance, for the pumping of the water from the river cost a great deal of money' (p.83). This is similar to the situation in 'Flavours of Exile' where the mother insists on having a garden near the house on the hill and the water has to be brought up at great cost:

> 'Water is gold,' grumbled my father, eating peas which he reckoned must cost a shilling a mouthful. 'Water is gold!' he came to shout at last, as my mother toiled and bent over those reluctant beds. But she got more pleasure from them than she ever did from the exhaustless plenty of the garden under the hill (p.125).

We see in this passage that human intervention by cultivation of the soil can take different forms: it can go with the natural energy of the wild and produce 'exhaustless plenty' or it can go against the natural growth and produce 'reluctant beds'. Lessing gives us a sense of the enormous reservoir of fertility in the soils of Africa, which can produce an abundance of food, given the right conditions. The garden 'on the hill' is the wrong location as the soil is thin, but 'under the hill' it produces an abundance of food. In addition, plants such as brussels sprouts and pomegranates struggle to grow because they are unsuited to the climate, whereas other vegetables which are suited to the conditions, grow well in Lessing's story.

Wildness is quick to reclaim land that has been cultivated and then abandoned, as we see with the wild gooseberry plants in 'Flavours of Exile': 'At last, the spaces in the bush where the old beds had been were seeded by wild or vagrant plants, and we children played there' (p.125). As we have seen, the children in these stories are often found in the throw-away places on the margins of the society. Their marginal position gives them special access to wild places and enables them to see society from a different angle.

Lessing presents wildness as a strong force, which reaches out from the confines of the tamed garden area to rejoin the bush. We see this in 'Leopard George': 'George passed the ruffling surface of the swimming pool, picked his way through the rock garden, and came to where his garden merged imperceptibly, in the reaching tendrils of the creepers, with the bush (p.198)'. There seems to be a vital force and an attraction in the plants which pulls them back to the wildness which is their true 'home'. Animals, too, feel this. In 'The Story of Two Dogs', there is a constant force of attraction which draws the domesticated animals back to the wild. At first this manifests itself in the puppy's reaction to the full moon:

> In my tiny bedroom I looked out on to a space of flat white sand that reflected the moon between the house and the farm buildings, and there hurtled a mad wild puppy, crazy with joy of life, or moonlight, weaving back and forth, round and round, snapping at its own black shadow and tripping over its own clumsy feet – like a drunken moth around a candle-flame (p.192).

Two of the connotations of 'wild' are expressed in this passage, that is, natural and mad. The narrator delights in the 'mad' antics of the puppy, who is affected so strongly by the moon - or by its 'joy of life' - that it trips over its own feet. The owner of the puppy's parents says: 'Take no notice of that puppy. It's been stark staring mad with the moon every night this last week' (p. 192). The puppy is endearing and funny, but it is also showing how strong the dog's wild instincts are before being 'trained' out of him. The girl notices how her mother in particular trains the dogs to become domestic animals:

> At first Jock and Bill were locked up in the dining-room at night. But there were so many stirrings and yappings and rushings from window to window after the rising sun or moon, or the black shadows

> which moved across white-washed walls from the branches of the trees in the garden, that soon we could no longer stand the lack of sleep, and they were turned out on to the veranda. With many hopeful injunctions from my mother that they were to be 'good dogs': which meant that they should ignore their real natures and sleep from sundown to sun-up (p.200).

The humour in this passage comes from the narrator's dry irony as she reports her mother's 'hopeful injunctions'. According to the girl, the mother is imposing her own norms of behaviour on the dogs. The girl maintains that this treatment denies their true nature, that is, their wildness, which would make them active hunters and explorers by night. The story opens up the question of whether it is fair to domesticate animals or to judge them by how well they have been able to forget their wildness. She says: 'I adored the graceless puppy, and why did I need a well-trained dog? Trained for *what*? (p.198)'

The girl also shows that her mother uses the dogs as a substitute for her children. 'In fact my brother's dog was his substitute' (p.189). The mother needs someone to nurse and protect because her attentions are rejected by the children and their father, and so she turns her attention to the dog:

> 'Poor old Jock then, yes, you're a poor old dog, you're not a rough farm dog, you're a good dog, and you're not strong, no, you're delicate.'
>
> At this last word my brother protested; my father protested; and so did I. All of us, in our different ways, had refused to be 'delicate'; had escaped from being 'delicate' and we wished to rescue a perfectly strong and healthy young dog from being forced into invalidism, as we all, at different times, had been (p. 190).

The narrator protests against the animal being treated too much like a human being, as well as being smothered by what she calls her mother's 'terrible maternal energy'. The dogs are subtly symbolic of the narrator and her family's relations with the mother. Her mother is using the animals to play out her desired relationship with her family, which is being denied her. This is a clear example of intervention that is to the detriment of the animal concerned.

While one form of intervention in wildness is the taming and domesticating of animals, another obvious form of intervention is hunting. A common figure in these stories is the child out in the veld with her gun and dogs. In 'The Story of Two Dogs' the narrator talks about how she goes out with her brother:

> We were on our way to get food. So we kept saying. Whatever we shot would be eaten by 'the house', or by the house's servants, or by 'the compound'. But we were hunting according to a newer law than the need for food, and we knew it, and that was why we were always a bit apologetic about these expeditions, and why we so often chose to return empty-handed. We were hunting because my brother had been given a new and efficient rifle that would bring down (infallibly, if my brother shot) birds, large and small; and small animals; and very often large game like koodoo and sable. We were hunting because we owned a gun. And because we owned a gun, we should have hunting dogs, it made the business less ugly for some reason (p.202).

There are many similarities between this story and Lessing's autobiography. The passage demonstrates the mixed motives that go with the children's hunting expeditions. They want to believe that they are hunting in the old tradition, for food, but really it is the fact of the new gun that motivates them. The materialism of consumer society has replaced the primitive society's more valid imperatives. Possibly the dogs make a difference to the way they see themselves because dogs are natural hunters and their company gives a kind of sanction to the hunting expeditions.

The story 'Sunrise in the Veld' looks more deeply into the effects of humans on animals in the wild. When the young boy in the story sees the suffering buck, he thinks about shooting it to put it out of its misery:

> It came into his mind that he should shoot it and end its pain; and he raised the gun. Then he lowered it again. The buck could no longer feel; its fighting was a mechanical protest of the nerves. But it was not that which made him put down the gun. It was a swelling feeling of rage and misery and protest that expressed itself in the thought: if I had not come it would have died like this: so why should I interfere?

> All over the bush things like this happen; they happen all the time; this is how life goes on, by living things dying in anguish (p.31).

This line of argument is familiar to anyone who has found a wounded bird in the wild, and who says that it would have died even if one hadn't been there. And yet the real horror of the incident is uncovered when the boy has to face the possibility that the suffering of the buck could have been his own fault as he might have wounded it on a previous hunting trip and made it vulnerable to the ants. What this story seems to be saying is that any interference in the lives of wild animals can have larger consequences than one realizes.

This is obviously the case in 'Leopard George' where the protagonist changes from being one who protects wildness on his farm to one who destroys it. Leopards epitomize this wildness and form the focus of the conflict in the story. They are protected by the man's attitude towards them at first, but later they become the target of his hunting sprees, and are destroyed on a regular basis.

In 'The Sun between Their Feet' the intervention takes a different form. The girl observes and tries to help the beetles with their task, but her assistance is 'declined' each time. The world of the wild is self-sufficient and in spite of what might look like failure and blindness, the beetles manage on their own and resist human intervention.

In considering how nature is acted on by human agency, we should note that the type of intervention that is made reveals the character and identity of the individual who makes it. For example, the mother's over-solicitous treatment of the two dogs reveals her as a fussy, obsessive type of person. It sheds light on the relationship she has with her husband and children. Leopard George's treatment of nature in farming in an isolated area shows initially how independent he is from white society. When he kills the leopard, it reveals his inability to mesh the two sides of his character together: the 'wild' and the 'civilized' side.

If this is how nature is acted upon by human agency, how does nature act upon human beings? Maria S. Suarez-Lafuente in 'The Effect of Nature in Doris Lessing's *African Stories*' takes up this point:

> Nature is characterized in Lessing's work from the very first novel she published, where the grass 'is singing'. Nature commands, sings, plays music: it is always the subject of active verbs, a capacity given to it by the author, attentive only to the point of view of her characters and therefore modulating narrative to fit their feelings and moods (1987: 5).

The claim that nature is 'always the subject of active verbs' is interesting, although I would wish to modify it to some extent. There are obvious exceptions to the rule, as in the example from 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' of erosion and overgrazing, where the trees and grass are passive: 'trees had been cut for mine furnaces' and 'the cattle had dragged the grass flat' (p.19). However, there are indeed many examples where nature takes an active role, especially at dramatic moments in a story. We see, for example, that when Leopard George looked at the landscape, the heap of boulders 'moved back from him, reared menacingly like an animal and admitted danger' (p.197). The sense of menace emerging from the inanimate objects in nature such as rocks and trees is powerfully portrayed in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga':

> I had read of this feeling, how the bigness and silence of Africa, under the ancient sun, grows dense and takes shape in the mind, till even the birds seem to call menacingly, and a deadly spirit comes out of the trees and the rocks. You move warily, as if your very passing disturbs something old and evil, something dark and big and angry that might suddenly rear and strike from behind . . . Fear possessed me (p.20).

The effect of nature in this passage has been mediated by text: the girl has 'read of this feeling'. Lessing shows how the intellect and the emotions are closely intertwined in this experience of wildness. There is a balance between the inner and the outer landscape as the power of the surroundings to 'take shape in the mind' is clearly demonstrated. The external wildness awakens the corresponding inner wildness, and it is this wild hinterland of the self that frightens her. A mystical element is also suggested in 'something old and evil' which is 'disturbed' by the newcomers, the settlers. Earlier the girl sees her environment in terms of European folk tales, and it seems that these influences have an impact on the way landscape is perceived. For example, in 'The Story of Two Dogs' we read:

> The Big Vlei was burnt-out and eroded, and the water-holes usually dried up early. We did not like going there. But to reach the Great Vlei, which was beautiful, we had to go through the ugly bush 'at the back of the kopje'. These ritual names for parts of the farm seemed rather to be names for regions in our minds. 'Going to the Great Vlei' had a fairytale quality about it, because of having to pass through the region of sour ugly frightening bush first. For it did frighten us, always, and without reason: we felt it was hostile to us and we walked through it quickly, knowing that we were earning by this danger the water-running peace of the Great Vlei (p.202).

Again we see the presence of fear, even when there are two children involved, unlike the lone girl in the previous example. Here the fear is experienced in a certain area of the farm only, and it comes from a feeling of hostility emanating from the bush. The ritual quality of the naming of the different areas is probably an influence of children's tales, or perhaps a strategy for finding one's bearings. The 'fairytale quality' of the Great Vlei shows how actively the children's imaginations worked. The danger of the bush is also bound up with fairytales, as we see in another extract from *Under My Skin*:

> The bush was not then the domestic bush it has become. It was full of dangerous noises, owls and nightjars, the crashing leaps of a disturbed buck, but above all, mysterious presences from our fairy tales, released from the pages of books, and at large here all around us, in the trees, behind bushes, running silently beside us in the road (p.107).

The first sentence in this passage seems to be written without irony as it is quite possible that the wildness of the bush has changed over the years. Yet, it is also possible to read it ironically in the light of her wonderful evocation of the child's imaginative world in the rest of the passage. Clearly the child has changed and become an adult, with the loss of excitement, mystery and adventure that that entails. In her growing up the bush has become 'domesticated'. The main point here is that Lessing shows that the effect of wildness on the child's imagination, combined with the stories, is powerful. Without the stories the bush might not hold the terrors that it does, and without the wild the stories might soon be forgotten. The combination of these two elements colours and transforms the child's world in Lessing's stories. This passage also illustrates the point that 'wildness' is a cultural and a psychological construct which changes as a person changes. While the natural phenomena are outside and separate from the human, the interpretation of these phenomena as 'wild' comes from within.

Adults too experience fear in relation to a desolate landscape. There is a powerful sense of menace in the landscape which Major Carruthers imagines when he sees the Van Heerden family living in overcrowded conditions: 'Fear rose high in him. For a few moments he inhabited the landscape of his dreams, a grey country full of sucking menace' (p. 50). Major Carruthers' fear here is a fear of poverty, and it is reflected in a nightmare landscape. The fear is based on a human economic condition, but the vehicle for expressing this fear is non-human. Fear is certainly a dominant emotion in many of the stories and it is often experienced in relation to some aspect of nature.

Lafuente sees fear of nature as something which binds people together: 'The only feeling both Europeans and Africans share is their fear of nature, because nature is beyond man himself and his powers of domination' (1987:5). Of course this is true in some instances, but it is hardly the only emotion that is shared. Nor is fear the only emotion that is experienced with regard to nature. The boy in 'A Sunrise on the Veld' feels joy when he sees the sun rise; Gideon in 'No Witchcraft for

Sale' feels comfortable in the wild world of plants, and can lessen the frightening effect of a snake by finding an antidote for its venom. As I have said earlier, Lessing shows us both the cruelty and the beauty of wildness, and people's emotions respond accordingly.

Nor is fear always shared between European and African. In 'Leopard George', the young black girl being sent home at night is terrified of the wild animals of the bush. George feels no fear, and in fact resents her reaction:

> He knew no terror; he could not understand fear; he contained that cruelty within himself, shut safe in some deep place. And this girl, who was bred of the bush and of the wildness, had no right to tremble with fright. That, obscurely, was what he felt (p.195).

It is true that George experiences fear later in the story, but it seems to issue from the guilt he feels at having indirectly caused the girl's death. The landscape takes on a menacing quality only when he realizes that he has been at fault.

Similarly in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga', the girl experiences fear on a sunny day, in the midst of a beautiful landscape when she is in the process of realizing her individual 'guilt' and the collective 'guilt' of the settlers for taking away the land belonging to Chief Mshlanga. Nature seems to take an active role in accusing her:

> The fear had gone; the loneliness had set into stiff-necked stoicism; there was now a queer hostility in the landscape, a cold, hard, sullen indomitability that walked with me, as strong as a wall, as intangible as smoke; it seemed to say to me: you walk here as a destroyer (p.23).

My point is that it is not always nature that the people fear, but the inner world of fear or guilt that is made manifest in the outer world of nature. Johnny Blakeworthy, for example, does not fear poverty in the way Carruthers does. Nor does he fear nature. His only fear seems to be being shut up in a house. He is quite happy to live in a humble way, to eat the basic food of mealie-meal, and to sleep under the stars, and later to cohabit with an African woman. His example seems to refute another comment by Lafuente:

> But 'going native' is also a synonym for 'outcast,' which means alienation from the community; it does not offer, after all, a solution to the feeling of fear. . . . neither the non-marrying man nor the dogs completely break with their original society; they come back to it from time to time and behave as if they had neither left nor abjured civilization. In fact their personalities are as split and their identities as divided as those of the characters who have let themselves drift into madness (1987: 6).

Blakeworthy does come back to his original society from time to time, but in the end he breaks with it completely:

> Then he drifted North, out of the white man's towns, and up into those parts that had not been 'opened up to white settlement', and where the Africans were still living, though not for long, in their traditional ways. And there at last he found a life that suited him, and a woman with whom he lived in kindness (p.48).

If we take this as the 'final solution' for Blakeworthy, then he is one example of a person having a successful interracial relationship. It contradicts Lafuente's statement: 'The gap between cultures is thus preserved, and any attempt to bridge it is unwelcome on both sides and only brings disaster' (19878:5). Blakeworthy manages to bridge the gap between the cultures although it takes time, patience and respect on his part to win acceptance in the black community. In many of the other cases of cross-cultural interaction there are decidedly negative consequences. One thinks of Leopard George, who disrupts the traditional pattern of the African village on his farm, and ruins the girls who become involved with him.

Another example of the 'gap' between the cultures is the conflict between English and Afrikaans-speaking settlers which was dealt with in the last chapter. 'The De Wets come to Kloof Grange' ends on a humorous but negative note:

> They reached the gate, and entered the garden, which was now musical with birds.
> 'A lovely morning,' remarked Major Gale.
> 'Next time you get an assistant,' she said finally, 'get people of our kind. These might be savages, the way they behave.'
> And that was the last word she would ever say on the subject (p.103).

The natural world, full of music and harmony makes a strong contrast with this example of bigotry and prejudice. Mrs Gale ignores her husband's comment. It is an example of polite evasion of personal issues on his part. She is impervious to the 'lovely morning' because of the anger she feels about the De Wets. In the same way as the beauty of the sunset shows up the ugly conflict between Chief Mshlanga and the narrator's father, the songs of the birds show up the discord of Mrs Gale's snobbishness and racism. Lessing's use of wildness in this way indicates her subtle method of criticising the settler community. She does so by such juxta-positioning, by the watchful eyes of the adolescent observers, and by exposing the adults' innermost thoughts in telling remarks such as Mrs Gale's.

One of the important questions that has been asked in this study is, 'What value is given to wildness in the texts?' Frederik R. Karl, in 'Doris Lessing in the Sixties: the New Anatomy of Melancholy' gives a negative answer: 'Unlike Lawrence, Lessing does not look to nature for renewal and transcendence over the infinite, variable, messy quality of life as it is lived' (1972:45).

Again I refer to Mrs Gale in 'The De Wets come to Kloof Grange', who certainly does look to the mountain landscape for 'renewal and transcendence' over the various problems that face her. Mrs De Wet, too, turns to nature to sustain her in her isolation. She walks four miles to the river every morning to catch fish, watch the birds and pick water lilies. Neither woman appreciates what the other enjoys about the wildness, but they share a similar impulse to turn to it for solace. This does not solve their human problems, but it does not negate the fact that they seek a redemptive value in wildness.

Johnny Blakeworthy also turns to nature for 'renewal and transcendence.' He too finds the human world messy, with its materialistic and consumerist values. He says to one of the women he lives with:

> 'For crying out aloud, why cake all the time, why all these new dresses, why do you have to have new curtains, why do we have to have curtains at all, what's wrong with the sunlight? What's wrong with the starlight? Why do you want to shut them out? Why?' (p.48).

Broadly speaking, one of the main functions or consequences of contact with wildness is that it forces people to confront the issue of identity. The majesty of the untouched landscape of Africa causes the girl in 'Old Chief Mshlanga' to face her role as a European settler. The boy in 'Sunrise in the Veld' sees his life in terms of nature: 'That was what he was: fifteen years of this rich soil, and this slow-moving water'. The narrative often compares him to a buck: 'he cleared the bushes like a duiker' (p.29). He himself has to re-examine his relationship to nature because of the death of the buck and the issue of responsibility connected with it. Both the girl in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' and the boy in this story have to face their identity as 'destroyer' through their contact with nature. Similarly, Leopard George assumes a new identity through his action of killing his first leopard. He goes through a process of transformation in which he changes from being a man who lives in harmony with the wildness of nature to one who kills wildness.

In 'Leopard George' we can read a clear illustration of what Ève Bertelsen describes in 'Veldtanschauung: Doris Lessing's Savage Africa' (1991). In her discussion of *The Grass is Singing*, she says that Lessing has inherited a literary tradition which has a desire

> . . . to invoke 'unspoilt nature' and its simple, uncomplicated representatives as a revitalizing source of energy. But, precisely because they [the writers] are the products of a highly organized and bureaucratic society, 'unspoilt nature' is necessarily conceived of as

> a source that is anarchic, fearsome, and probably impossible, in the end, to control – the antithesis in fact of balance, tolerance, individual autonomy, and the democratic ideal (1991: 650).

The wildness of 'unspoilt nature', Bertelsen says, is not only the wildness of the external environment, but also of our own inner being, 'a terrifying wildness, a madness which, it is implied, lurks just beneath the surface of our extolled civilized controls' (1991:651). Thus in George there is a conflict between his relationship with the African women and his relationship with the settler community which mirrors his 'primitive' dark energies and his rational, 'civilized' side. The incompatibility between these two societies results in his 'killing' his wild side, and becoming at least on the surface an ordinary member of the settler community. However, the powerful sense of loss and sorrow that the man experiences as he kills the leopard emphasises the value that wildness has had for him.

The value of wildness in these stories is thus ultimately an ambiguous one. On one hand, both the men and the women in Lessing's representation of settler society have the ability to draw strength from the landscape. Mrs Gale's mountains sustain and strengthen her, and George's arms have the 'pushing strength of the mountains'. Both adults and children depend to a large extent on the environment for their sense of identity. On the other hand, wildness can be a hostile force which arouses fear in the human beings who come into contact with it. The 'anti-pastoral critique' described in my introduction is only part of the function of Lessing's representation of wildness. It also has its positive counterpart in providing a site for developing a sense of identity. I do not agree with Lafuente when she says:

> No mechanism of self-defence turns out to be valid in the bush; annihilation of hopes, of personality, of relationships always occur in the end; these annihilations are the toll civilization has to pay for sinning against the laws of nature (1987:6).

We have seen that children differ from adults in their responses to the environment as they are often able to work with nature rather than against it, and the contrast in perspective between adults and children with regard to the environment yields valuable insights into the identity of the settler society as a whole. We have also seen adults such as Johnny Blakeworthy and Major Carruthers responding positively to nature.

In this study I have looked closely at the relationship between human beings and the wildness of the natural world. Lessing presents to us a variety of different types of interactions, involving adults, adolescents, men and women. They make a range of different responses, from a close identification with the wildness of Africa and an attempt to intervene in the lives of its creatures to an attempt to shut out wildness or to domesticate it in some way, in order to hold it at bay and to prevent it from breaking down the fragile control the settlers have over their environment.

Most of the cases that have been studied have come from the settler group, with a few exceptions from the black community. What this examination has revealed is that wildness plays a very important role in Lessing's stories. It does not serve merely as a background, but in fact brings the human components of the colonial world into sharper focus, and shows up differences amongst them. The short story genre gives Lessing scope to explore many different types of people as characters and as narrators, as Judith Kegan Gardiner points out:

> The stories provide an arena in which Lessing can enact the interplay between self and other, the individual and her or his circumstances, that can be more detached, playful, and experimental than the more committed long fiction (1989: 85).

This I think gives a true reflection of the way the stories encompass a number of different points of view and yet form a coherent whole. If one sees the 'other' mentioned by Gardiner in a general way as the ividual's 'circumstance', the natural environment is one aspect of that circumstance, and what I have tried to show is how it impinges on the consciousness of the individual players in the stories.

I have also shown that Lessing uses the natural environment deliberately as part of her narrative strategy to represent the settler community. Different reactions to wildness, in particular, clarify distinctions between individuals and between groups. In this way her representation of colonialism is made subtle and complex.

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