

“A Small Voice for the Earth”

– A Romantic and Green Reading of Doris Lessing’s *Shikasta*

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SILTAOJA, RIIKKA: Ekokriittinen ja romanttinen luenta Doris Lessingin romaanista *Shikasta*

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Tutkielmassani tarkastelen Doris Lessingin science fiction-romaanin *Shikasta* (1979) ekokriittisestä näkökulmasta. Pyrin myös osoittamaan sen yhteyden romanttisen luontokirjallisuuden ja pastoraalin perinteeseen. Doris Lessing on tullut tunnetuksi erityisesti vasemmistolaisena kirjailijana, mutta hän on myös tunnettu siitä, miten vaikea hänen töitään on kategorioida. Väitän tutkielmassani, että *Shikastassa* on havaittavissa paitsi Lessingin pettymys kommunismiin ja puoluepolitiikkaan, myös selkeä filosofinen siirtymä 'punaisesta vihreään' politiikkaan.

Ensin tarkastelen *Shikastan* sosialistisia piirteitä pohjautuen Terry Eagletonin etiikkaan teoksessa *After Theory* (2003), erityisesti suhteessa hänen käsitykseensä objektiivisuudesta ja Aristoteelisesta hyveestä, jotka ovat hänen moraalikäsitteensä perustana. Esitän, että *Shikastan* esittämä yhteiskuntamalli sekä moraalikäsite ovat ideologialtaan utopistisen sosialistisia. Ne pohjautuvat erityisesti kollektiiviselle rakkaudelle, sekä ajatukselle itsensä kehittämisestä yksilönä, yksilön moraalivelvollisuudesta sekä vastuusta.

Seuraavassa osassa perustelen lyhyesti *Shikastan* luennan romanttisena tekstinä. Lessingiä ei ole juuri koskaan pidetty romanttisena kirjailijana, mutta mielestäni *Shikastan* romanttiset piirteet ovat varsin huomattavia. Esittelen lyhyesti ja päällisin puolin *Shikastan* romanttisia piirteitä pohjana myöhemmälle analyysille.

Tästä jatkan *Shikastan* vihreään luentaan, jonka aluksi esittelen lyhyesti ekokritiikin tieteenalana, sekä käyn lyhyesti läpi ekokritiikin yleisiä relevantteja piirteitä. Ekokriittinen luentani pohjautuu pitkälti brittiläisen ekokritiikon Jonathan Baten teokseen *Romantic ecology* (1991), jossa hän argumentoi William Wordsworthin olleen radikaalin runoilijan sijaan ensisijaisesti poliittisesti vihreä. Bate pyrkii uudelleen arvioimaan Wordsworthin runoutta tämän näkökulman kautta. Tulkintani *Shikastasta* noudattelee pitkälti Baten viitoittamaa tietä, ja pyrin osoittamaan, että *Shikastassa* on, huolimatta sen selkeistä sosialistisista piirteistä, selkeä poliittinen siirtymä 'punaisesta vihreään.'

Romanttisen ekologian näkemyksen mukaan Wordsworthin tavoite oli opettaa lukijaansa elämään harmoniassa ympäristönsä kanssa. Kyseessä ei siis ole eskapistinen pako arjesta, kuten usein mielletään. Väitänkin, että Lessingillä ja Wordsworthilla on tekstissään sama tavoite: korostaa luonnon ja ihmiskunnan symbioottista suhdetta, sekä saada lukijansa näkemään itsensä uudella tavalla, osana ympäröivää luontoa. Tässä suhteessa molemmat ovat sekä romanttisia, että ekokriittisiä. Wordsworthista poiketen Lessingin lähestymistapa luontoon on kuitenkin hyvin antroposentrinen.

Avainsanat: ekokritiikki, romantiikka, Terry Eagleton, sosialistinen etiikka, Jonathan Bate, romanttinen ekologia

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And all this time the earth was being despoiled. The minerals were being ripped out, the fuels wasted, the soils depleted by an improvident and short-sighted agriculture, the animals and plants slaughtered and destroyed, the seas being filled with filth and poison, the atmosphere was corrupted – and always, all the time, the propaganda machines thumped out: more, more, more, drink more, eat more, consume more, discard more – in a frenzy, a mania. These were maddened creatures, and the small voices that rose in protest were not enough to halt the processes that had been set in motion and were sustained by greed.

Doris Lessing (*Shikasta*, 119)

1. Introduction

Doris Lessing is a popular modern writer, who has achieved both substantial critical attention and large, devoted readerships. She was born on October 22nd in 1919 in Persia to British parents. She spent her childhood years in Persia and in Southern Rhodesia, before moving to London in 1949, where she published her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* in 1950. This was the beginning of her professional writing career, which has continued into the following millennium. Her breakthrough came with her 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*, which is the most critically acclaimed of her novels today. In 2007, at the age of 87, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose note (1988, 25), that “nothing perhaps more clearly heralds a contemporary author’s acceptance by the literary establishment than a critic’s attempt to place him or her in a tradition.” Critics indeed have tried to place Lessing to one tradition or another but her work has continued to defy clear classifications. Concurrent and recurrent themes in her writing are, among others, politics, social relations, cultural collisions and conflicts between individual and collective conscience. The characters in Lessing’s novels are often people caught in the social and political upheavals of the 20th century. Kaplan and Rose (1988, 5) call Lessing, quite poetically, an alchemical writer: “Lessing challenges her readers and changes them; alters their consciousness; radicalizes their sexual, personal and global politics. She writes [...] about certain themes specific to late-twentieth-century consciousness,” themes such as race, the conflicts of the

generations, the man-woman relationship, the problems of the creative artist and, as mentioned before, politics (ibid.).

Academic feminism stirring in the early 1970's has had a strong influence on Lessing criticism. Its effect has been so overpowering that it has nearly overruled other critical approaches to her work. Lessing herself has been frustrated by the fact that most criticism on *The Golden Notebook* concentrated on the theme of war between the sexes, leaving other, more important, topics such as the global destruction, aside (Henstra 2007, 3). Her earlier work has also been studied in the light of radical psychiatry and formal experimentation. Lessing's surprising turn into space with the *Canopus in Argos*-series (a theme that was in fact already introduced in the last novel of the Children of Violence series, *The Four-Gated City* of 1969) again baffled the academics, and for a while quieted some of the critical interest, as science fiction was at the time deemed simply popular literature, not something worth critical attention. Lessing herself defended science fiction and 'space fiction' – as she prefers to call her writing – in her foreword to *Shikasta* (1978, n.p.)¹, by saying that they have

played the indispensable and (at least at the start) thankless role of the despised illegitimate son who can afford to tell the truths the respectable siblings either do not dare, or, more likely, do not notice because of their respectability. They have also explored the sacred literatures of the world in the same bold way they take scientific and social possibilities to their logical conclusions so that we may examine them.²

Some scholarly interest, however, continued and by applying new theoretical and critical tools to interpreting Lessing's work, maintained that “despite her excursion into outer space, [...] Doris Lessing remained pre-eminently a political novelist, simultaneously symptomatic and critical of

¹ Although *Shikasta* was first published in 1979, her foreword to it, titled “Some Remarks,” is dated on the seventh of November, 1978.

² This is in fact a very apt summary and description of *Shikasta* altogether. Lessing's preference for using the term 'space fiction' instead of 'science fiction' is also interesting. It might have something to do with her apparent aversion to scientific rigour, but perhaps a more likely interpretation has to do with the idea of space as 'room.' Lessing's previous work had largely been interested in her characters' inner life, their inner space. In *Shikasta* the surroundings are taken literally into outer space, but her writing still works on both levels.

contemporary ideologies and social relationships” (Kaplan and Rose 1988, 29). It also seems that after her turning into space, many critics have been more interested in *how* Lessing says something, than *what* she is actually saying, resulting in critical focus on aspects such as her narrative techniques.

Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta, Personal, psychological, historical documents relating to the visit by Johor (George Sherban) Emissary (Grade 9) 87th of the Period of the Last Days, Shikasta for short, was published in 1979. It was originally intended to be a single self-contained book, but it grew into a series of five novels, including *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five (1980)*, *The Sirian Experiments (1980)*, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8 (1982)* and *The Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire (1983)*, known together as the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series. My focus will be restricted to the first of the novels, *Shikasta*. *Shikasta* is a story of the final days of a planet called Shikasta, told from the point of view of the Canopeans, the benevolent civilization (presumably from a planet of the star Canopus) that had colonized the planet many centuries before. Canopeans had nurtured the promising species of Shikasta, earlier known as Rohanda (meaning ‘the fruitful’), and accelerated their evolution. When Canopus thinks the Natives of Rohanda are ready, they impose a Lock of astral currents on Rohanda, linking it to the harmony and strength of the Canopean Empire. However, the Canopeans are not the only alien empire on Rohanda. Sirius, the Canopean’s ally, and their mutual enemy, Puttiora, are also operating on different parts of Rohanda. For many millennia the Natives of Rohanda prosper in the Canopean induced climate of peaceful coexistence and accelerated development. But then an unpredicted cosmic re-alignment of the stars disturbs the situation and causes the Lock to weaken. Without the steady stream of SOWF, “a source-of-we-feeling” that the Lock provides, Rohanda faces new problems. Shammat of Puttiora, which had been lying in wait for an opportunity to strike, starts to work on the Natives. The Natives develop a Degenerative Disease, which causes them to think only of themselves, instead of the community as a whole. The

harmony is lost. The evil influence of Puttiora causes the planet to head towards its annihilation. Wars, famine, disease and environmental disasters ravage the planet, and the Canopeans give it a new name: Shikasta, the stricken one. In an attempt to save Shikasta and the plans the Canopeans have for it, they send emissaries to the planet. These emissaries do not have the effect the Canopeans had hoped, and as a last attempt to help Shikastans and save the planet, they send an emissary called Johor, who enters the planet by being born as a Shikastan called George Sherban. It is now the 20th century of Shikasta time, and without the requisite amount of SOWF and under the influence of Shammat, the planet is quickly destroying itself. Famine and unemployment grow and anarchy spreads. On the verge of a major war Sherban and others relocate a small number of promising Shikastans to remote locations in order to save them from the oncoming nuclear holocaust. The war then reduces Shikasta's population by 99%. Shammat, having practically been self-destructed, withdraws from the planet. Canopeans then help the surviving Shikastans to realign themselves with Canopus, the Lock is again established, and harmony and prosperity return to Shikasta.

Shikasta has not been as profoundly studied as some of her other writings but nevertheless it has been critically read from many different perspectives. Previous studies include features such as allusions to the Old Testament and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, narrative techniques, feminism, spirituality, identity, postcolonialism and imperialism, among many others³. As this variety of themes also suggest, Lessing's writing is characterized by its nonconformity to boundaries of one sort or another; it blends everything together. As Lessing herself words it in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971, 165) on the subject of real life and dreams: "It isn't either or at all, it's and, and, and, and, and, and, and..." The same applies for her writing in general. Lessing's

³ Interesting readings include such works as Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis's "The Marriage of Inner and Outer Space in Doris Lessing's *Shikasta*" (1990) and "Navigating the spiritual cycle in *Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Shikasta*" (2007), Alvin Sullivan's "Ideology and Form: Decentrism in the Golden Notebook, *Memoirs of a Survivor* and *Shikasta*" (1988) and Susan Rowland's "Transformed and Translated: The Colonized Reader of Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos* Space Fiction" (2000), to mention but a few.

approach to her themes is philosophical. Gore Vidal (1979, n.p.) describes this combination of Lessing's themes as "something of a philosophical muddle." But there is a strong appeal in this 'muddle', or in other words, in this 'interconnectivity.' It could be argued that this interconnectedness, terminology more often used in fields such as biology and ecology, is an all-encompassing theme in *Shikasta*. Lessing's writing is open to multiple coexisting interpretations and various different approaches, and this is the very strength of her writing. And this definitely applies to *Shikasta*.

Although *Shikasta* features many relevant current themes, as I intend to illustrate in this thesis, it is also very much the product of its time. It was born in the political atmosphere of the 1970s, which was in a sense a continuation of the radicalism of the 1960s. As the Cold War continued, the threat of nuclear war was very real. Especially in the Middle East the violence escalated and terrorism posed an ever-increasing threat. The 1970s oil crisis destabilized the world economies and added to the insecurities of the western world. Environmentalist movements began to grow significantly, as the anxieties over world pollution, overpopulation and restricted natural resources began to spread. Pictures of the earth taken from space had their influence on people's understanding of the earth as a closed and limited ecosystem. In China the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 marked the beginning of a new era, and the economic reforms and military modernization beginning in 1978 would later result in China becoming one of the leading economic powers of the world. The North-South debate, as it became known in the 1970s, drew attention to the increasing division of the wealthy developed countries of the north and the poor developing countries of the south. All these issues are relevant in *Shikasta*.

The aim of my thesis is to read *Shikasta* from an ecocritical perspective and as being a part of the long Romantic tradition of environmental writing. My aim is to examine how Lessing portrays nature in *Shikasta*, and discuss the reasons for representing it in a certain way. In order to do this I also intend to discuss the ethics presented in *Shikasta*. I am also suggesting that there is a

shift from 'red to green' in Lessing's political and ethical ideas as they are presented in *Shikasta*. *Shikasta* is philosophical in tone, rather than pragmatic, so it does not offer political modus operandi in itself for saving the world. Lessing, however, clearly works towards an apparent goal. I suggest that this goal is her ethical endeavour to reach out to her readers and have them see themselves, as individuals and as humankind, in a different way, as a part of a greater whole. I have not been able to find any previous studies from this or similar viewpoint. There have, however, been a few ecocritical readings of Lessing's other works, such as Fiona Becket's "Environmental Fables? The Eco-Politics of Doris Lessing's 'Ifrik' Novels" (2009) and Jayne Glover's "The Metaphor of the Horse in Doris Lessing's *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five: An Ecofeminist Question?*" (2006), to which I will also be referring later in the thesis. I feel the text invites this reading and the continually rising ecocritical awareness makes this reading rather a current issue today. The relationship between humans and nature is one of the underlying themes in *Shikasta*, as the survival of the planet is most concretely connected to the survival of humankind. The planet would most likely do better without humans but it is impossible for humans to survive without the planet, and therefore the systematic destruction of it seems simply illogical.

The 'natural' theoretical framework for my thesis arises from the field of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism has no clear methodology; it is an interdisciplinary viewpoint that aims at raising consciousness about ecological issues. With ecocriticism what is at stake is the whole future of our planet. But as Laurence Coupe (2000, 5) points out, in reality "it is impossible to separate defence of people from defence of the planet, human rights from ecological survival, justice from sustainability." The survival of the planet is linked to several other issues, it all boiling down to questions of ethics. Ethics, also known as moral philosophy, is a controversial subject, to say the least. Humans have reflected on questions of right and wrong for thousands of years and different theories have obtained at different times. In our relativist postmodern world philosophers have had to face the difficult question of whether ethics as a branch of philosophy can survive at all, since

considered strictly logically, objective right is something unattainable. In the aftermath of Derridean deconstructive and fragmented worldview, ethics seemed a rather old-fashioned and outdated topic. However, the current era is fundamentally concerned with ethical questions, new questions, such as animal rights or vegetarianism, arising alongside the old traditional questions (Johnston 1999, 2). Contemporary societies have definitely not abandoned ethics, and different notions have equally fervent defenders. It is therefore the task of ethics to recreate and accommodate itself to the contemporary world, so that it can approach the old and the new ethical questions in a meaningful manner. There have been interesting attempts at doing exactly that, one such discussion leading the way has been Terry Eagleton's discussion of ethics in *After Theory* (2003), which I will be making use of in my interpretation of *Shikasta*.

My aim is not to pigeonhole Lessing, or *Shikasta* for that matter, but to provide yet another viable interpretation to the multitude of interpretations afforded by the text itself. My thesis has connections to previous studies but its basis is still fresh and new. By applying an ecocritical approach to the reading of *Shikasta*, I aim to shine light on yet another critical aspect of the novel that has been overlooked in previous criticism. In the following sections I will introduce the relevant theoretical background for my thesis. In the next section I will discuss ethics based on Terry Eagleton's discussion in *After Theory* (2003), and apply its notions to my red reading of *Shikasta*, which could be said to be of a more traditional kind when it comes to reading Lessing. In the following sections I will move on into a rather unexplored area, and shall first briefly justify my reading of *Shikasta* as a Romantic text. I will then go on into introducing the discipline of ecocriticism and the notion of *Romantic Ecology*, as Jonathan Bate aptly named his influential work of 1991, and I will concurrently apply it to my green reading of *Shikasta*.

2. The Kindness of Strangers – Red Reading of *Shikasta*

Terry Eagleton is a prominent British Marxist critic, who became known for his Marxist readings of English literature. He is a prolific writer and has published over forty works, including such works as *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), *Marx* (1997), and *Why Marx Was Right* (2011). Eagleton contributed to the contemporary discussion of ethics with his – rather controversial – *After Theory* (2003). I aim to introduce his notion of ethics presented in *After Theory*, principally his discussion of virtue and objectivity, which are the foundations of his notion of morality, and to apply this concept of morality in interpreting *Shikasta*. I suggest that there is a shift from red to green in Lessing’s politics – just as Bate argues of Wordsworth, which I will discuss in chapter 4 – but the shift does not cover all of Lessing’s political ideas presented in *Shikasta*.

Lessing also has a communist background. In her “Introduction: Situating Reading” Jenny Taylor (1982, 25) goes through the different ways Lessing was positioned as a white anti-colonial woman writer in Britain in reception and criticism in the 1950s and 1960s, and she notes that Lessing’s involvements with the developments of the communist intellectualism in the 1950s was primarily as an increasingly well-established, even celebrated writer.” Lessing however, grew disappointed with the Party and communism altogether, and left them in mid-1950s. In 1962, when *The Golden Notebook* was published, “[h]er conversion from communism and, indeed, from politics, towards ways of valuing individual choice and conscience and the sanctity of the inner life, was already in progress” (Miller 1998, 141-142). Though she abandoned communism, she retained the socialistic ethical ideals. As the moral nature presented in *Shikasta* is also relevant to its ‘green’ interpretation, I shall address this aspect first. Eagleton’s morality comprises an ethical, Aristotelian kind of socialism, and it is therefore a fitting framework for interpreting *Shikasta*, especially when it comes to the moral and societal ideals Lessing presents us with.

In *After Theory* Eagleton strongly argues against the current postmodern notion of truth and objectivity.⁴ He aims to bring objectivism back into discussion by viewing the idea in relation to the question of human well-being (Eagleton 2003, 110). Well-being is something everyone aspires to, but the problem is what it exactly means. Perceptions of it have changed with the times. “It is because what counts as well-being is far from clear that we need elaborate discourses like moral and political philosophy to help unravel it,” Eagleton says (ibid.). This is where humans differ from other animals. Eagleton points out that, toads, for instance, fulfil their toad natures simply by instinct. A toad-like toad is a good toad, but it is not virtuous (ibid.). Arguing against the predominant postmodern notion of human’s culturally constructed nature, Eagleton suggests we have more in common with the toads than we usually think. “It may be then, that we resemble toads in the sense that we, too, have a nature, in the sense of a way of living which is peculiar to being a successful human, and which, if we are true to it, will allow us to prosper. It is just that we are not sure what it is” (ibid.).

Unorthodoxically Eagleton (2003, 110) suggests that since humans have to work hard in order to fulfil this nature and thus to become human, and since it is possible for us to be false to our natures, there is some virtue in being true to them. Because of language, labour and the cultural possibilities ensuing from them, we are able to transform in a way that is impossible to non-linguistic animals (Eagleton 2003, 111). In order to understand human nature, humans have to ponder on it hard, and during the centuries numerous versions have been formulated on what it means for a human to live well and flourish (ibid.). It is easy to consider happiness, for instance, as something people pursue in order to live well. But the question remains, what exactly is happiness? Happiness is a subjective matter, and what makes one happy, does not make another. People can also be unhappy without them knowing it themselves. And the wicked can be very happy, while the good often are not (Eagleton 2003, 113).

⁴ This is very similar to ecocriticism’s critique of postmodernism discussed later in chapter four. In an analogous manner both aim to bring the bodily existence back into the discussion.

The idea that being a proper human requires more than mere bodily existence is a pervasive feature in Lessing's writing and a strong feature of her ethics in *Shikasta*. Lessing's humans have to work hard for them to succeed in life.

What the Natives were being taught was the science of maintaining contact at all times with Canopus; of keeping contact with their Mother, their Maintainer, their Friend, and what they called God, the Divine. If they kept the stones aligned and moving as the forces moved and waxed and waned, and if the cities were kept up according to the laws of Necessity, then they might expect – these little inhabitants of Rohanda who had been no more than scurrying monkeys half in and half out of the trees, animals with little in them of the Canopean nature – these animals could expect to become men, would take charge of themselves and their world. (*Shikasta*, 40)

Humans have to work hard in order to develop the 'Canopean nature' in them, so that they 'could expect to become men.' It is not a given state of affairs. Being human is more than the bodily existence; in fact, for Lessing the mere bodily existence, though essential, is still almost scornful. She seems to suggest that since humans have the potential to develop themselves, the lack of effort to achieve this development cannot be validated. Just as Eagleton suggests, that since it is possible to be false to our natures, there is virtue in being true to them, and being true to them in fact requires a lot of work. The work required, as described in *Shikasta*, involves material work but also psychological work: people need to work on their minds, develop their mental capacities in order to grow into morally responsible beings.

Following Eagleton's line of thought, the idea of fulfilling one's nature is contrary to the capitalist success ethic. Everything in capitalist society has to have a meaning and a purpose, and if one behaves well, one expects a reward for it, material or spiritual. Eagleton (2003, 117) argues that for Aristotle the situation was different; behaving well was a reward in itself. Happiness is not a reward for virtuousness, but virtuousness is in itself happiness, the kind of happiness which comes from fulfilling one's nature. Being virtuous can also bring unhappiness, but despite that it is a source of fulfilment in itself (ibid.). Aristotle also thought that if you did not act well, you were punished not by the fires of hell but by having to live a damaged, crippled life (ibid.). The idea is quite similar to Lessing's; shikastans are fated to live their complicated lives on Shikasta over and

over again, until they succeed in living a good life. Capitalism expects people to be endlessly adaptable and malleable, and the idea of a certain kind of ‘fixed’ human nature does not fit well in the picture. Although capitalism is on one hand an entirely materialist system, it is on the other hand almost vehemently anti-materialist, Eagleton argues (2003, 118). Aristotle thought that the idea of economic profit was unnatural, since it contained the idea of boundlessness that is foreign to humans. “The economic, for Aristotle as for socialism, had to be embedded within the moral. Once this unnatural economic system known as capitalism was up and running, however, it was socialism which came in time to seem contrary to human nature,” Eagleton continues (2003, 119).

So what exactly is this good life of fulfilling your nature then? It obviously is not to do everything which lies in our power, as there is a lot that humans are capable of, that should never be realized. Aristotle believed there is a way of life that allows humans to be as good creatures as it is possible for them to be. This was the life lived according to the virtues (Eagleton 2003, 122). Judeo-Christian tradition, on the other hand, considered this to be life founded on charity or love (ibid.) What this means is that humans become the occasion for each other’s self-realization, as only through each other’s fulfilment can people achieve their own self-realization. The political form of this is known as socialism (ibid.). Eagleton argues that “[s]ocialism is an answer to the question of what happens when, unlike Aristotle, we universalize the idea of self-realization, crossing it with the Judeo-Christian or democratic-Enlightenment creed that everyone must be in on the action” (ibid.). One reason for socialism’s superiority to liberalism, Eagleton continues, is the belief that humans are political animals, not only in the sense that they have to consider each other’s fulfilment, but in that the deepest fulfilment can only be achieved in terms of each other (Eagleton 2003, 122).⁵

Lessing applies these very same ideas in *Shikasta* and takes them to their ultimate utopian form in the shape of the Canopean Empire. Equality is essential for socialism, and therefore

⁵ He also notes that we have to argue with each other about what this self-realization means, and the whole issue might be too complicated for us to ever reach an agreed solution (Eagleton 2003, 122).

central to the Canopean nature: condescension, pride, considering oneself better than others is not something that belongs to their nature. “[E]very one of us in the Canopean Empire is taught to value ourselves only insofar as we are in harmony with the plan, the phases of our evolution” (*Shikasta*, 55). Considering oneself as an individual is the beginning of all things harmful. “To identify ourselves as individuals – this is the very essence of the Degenerative Disease” (*Shikasta*, 55). Having said this, it is not so that all Canopeans are one and the same or have no individual value. “It is not always realized we are not interchangeable” (*Shikasta*, 17). Recognizing their own individuality as such is not the problem, but considering one’s value above that of the others is. The Canopeans, it is suggested, find their deepest individual fulfilment in fulfilling their purpose in life in unison, this purpose being “the creation of the ever-evolving Sons and Daughters of the Purpose” (*Shikasta*, 52). Collective effort for the collective good begins from an individual level; to consider individual gain is the way of the Shammat and that of eventual destruction.

By love Eagleton (2003, 167) refers to the traditional sense of ‘agape,’ or charity.⁶

Eagleton (2003, 167-168) defines this love as follows:

Love is no respecter of persons. It is remorselessly abstract, ready to attend to the needs of any old body. On this, it is quite indifferent to cultural difference. It is not indifferent to difference in the sense that it is blind to the *specific* needs of people. If it was, it would not be attending to *them* at all. But it is quite indifferent as to whose specific needs it attends to. This is one way in which it differs from friendship, which is all about particularity. Friends are irreplaceable, but those we must love are not. Love is also indifferent in the sense of being unilateral and unconditional. It does not give on the assumption that it will receive. It is unresponsive, too, in the sense that it does not repay injury with injury. [...] All this is why the paradigm of love is not the love of friends [...] but the love of strangers.

Love is the model of a just society, in that “[I]ove means creating for another the kind of space in which he can flourish, at the same time as he does this for you” (Eagleton 2003, 169). Happiness is not finding a fulfilment in the same goal but in being the reason for another’s happiness. Eagleton

⁶ Agape has in fact two meanings, the other referring to the love of God and the other to human love. Agape is a “Greek noun meaning ‘love’ not much used in secular writings but common in the NT for the gracious self-giving love of God shown in Christ; and correspondingly of unselfish human love” (Browning 2009, ‘agape,’ n.p.). Eagleton is apparently referring to the human love here.

maintains that there is politics implicit in this notion, and the political equivalent of this is, as already noted, socialism. “When Aristotle’s ethics of flourishing are set in a more interactive context, one comes up with something like the political ethics of Marx” Eagleton argues (2003, 170).⁷

In *Shikasta* the idea of love is essential. Through the established Lock between Canopus and Shikasta, Canopus feeds Shikasta with a substance called SOWF, the-substance-of-we-feeling. At one point Johor refers to the Lock as “the silvery cord of our love” (*Shikasta*, 90). The SOWF stands for collectiveness in many essential respects in *Shikasta*. The seed of humanity – provided by the breeding programmes inflicted on the shikastans by the Canopeans – provides humans with the potential for higher workings of the mind, but it is the SOWF that provides humans with the sense of unity, which creates the kind of surroundings that enable the inner growth necessary for true humanity.

Shikasta had been an easy pleasant world, where there was little danger or threat. Canopus was able to feed Shikasta with a rich and vigorous air, which kept everyone safe and healthy, and above all, made them love each other. But because of an accident, this substance-of-life could not reach here as it had, could reach this place only in pitifully small quantities. This supply of finer air had a name. It was called SOWF – the substance-of-we-feeling – [...]. The little trickle of SOWF that reached this place was the most precious thing they had, and would keep them from falling back to animal level. I said there was a gulf between them and the other animals of Shikasta, and what made them higher was their knowledge of SOWF. SOWF would protect and preserve them. They must reverence SOWF. (*Shikasta*, 96-97)

SOWF enables the love between strangers, the universal love that does not depend on familiarity or friendship. It is on this fellow feeling that moral values are founded (Eagleton 2003, 156). Love is the very foundation of morality in *Shikasta*. A key concept for socialist thought, Eagleton (2003, 170) maintains, is equality, as mutual self-realization cannot be realized except among equals. Love does not necessarily require equality, but Aristotle’s friendship, ‘*philia*’, does, and is therefore the more appropriate political term (*ibid.*). In *Shikasta* this idea is also present, as though equality is of

⁷ Eagleton calls Karl Marx “a closet Aristotelian of sorts” who created his “powerfully historical critique from this ethic, as did his great mentor Hegel” (Eagleton 2003, 123).

utmost importance amongst the Canopeans, Shikastans are not their equals. They are, however, loved by them.

The idea of love, on a political level, also includes the idea of law. Some courses of action are either so vital or so harmful for the flourishing of human life that they need to be governed by laws and regulations. They are part of the scaffolding of the good life, not goals in themselves. “Any thriving form of life will have its obligations and prohibitions. The only problem is that you may then come to identify morality with the obligations and prohibitions, rather than with the thriving” (Eagleton 2003, 145). In *Shikasta* Canopus is also forced to lay down the Laws to protect the Shikastans, but due to their decaying capacities they fail to understand the laws’ real significance. Eagleton continues that there can be no love without law either (Eagleton 2003, 146). Love in Judaeo-Christian tradition means behaving in a certain material manner, for instance caring for the sick and the imprisoned, and has as such nothing to do with romantic feelings. All this needs at times to be regulated, since the poor need law for their protection. And as love is a notoriously complicated and confused thing, moral language aims to bring the contents of love into clearer focus, Eagleton argues (2003, 146). Laws need to be specific, since ambiguity might result in injustice. This does not, however, imply that laws need to be obeyed to the letter at all times. Law applies equally to everyone, which means that it responds to each individual’s unique situation with equal consideration (Eagleton 2003, 147). Eagleton follows St Paul’s notion of the law and claims that laws are for children and for novices, for those who are not yet morally independent and need the support (ibid.). They have not yet developed a spontaneous habit of virtue, and therefore they “still see morality in superstitious fashion as a matter of offending or placating some higher authority. They have the toddler’s theory of ethics,” Eagleton says (ibid.). Laws can help them grow into independent moral autonomy.

In *Shikasta* the Canopeans themselves do not need this kind of scaffolding, as they are morally mature.⁸ The Shikastans are another matter, and they often consider morality in superstitious manner, as a matter of offending some higher authority, not something related to their own well-being. In *Shikasta* the Canopeans also do as is needed and strive to regulate life on Shikasta in order to create the harmonious state of equality. “[W]e renewed our instructions for safe and wise existence on Shikasta – moderation, abstention from luxury, plain living, care for others whom they must never exploit or oppress, the care for animals, and for the earth, and above all, a quiet attention to what is most needed from them, obedience. A readiness to hear our wishes” (*Shikasta*, 139-140). Johor sums up: “What these rules amount to, I would say, is Love” (*Shikasta*, 13). Harmonious equality aims at the well-being of all, equal chances of success in life, not at individual triumphs. The endeavour is collective, but the effort must be made on an individual level.

Modern capitalist societies are so preoccupied with thinking in instrumental terms that modern moral thinking has also been affected by this model. What it is to live well becomes a matter of acting in a certain way in order to achieve a certain goal, and the problem is that moralists do not agree on what that goal should be (Eagleton 2003, 123). However, not all modern moral thinking is of this instrumental kind. “For Kantians, what matters is not goals, but the purity of will with which we act in a certain way regardless of its consequences, and regardless of its contribution to our happiness. Morality is a question of duty, not of pleasure, fulfilment, utility or social justice” (Eagleton 2003, 124). Eagleton maintains that Kant is right that to act morally should be an end in itself, not just a matter of trying to get somewhere (*ibid.*).

For classical moralists like Aristotle, happiness or well-being consists not only of contentment and continuous pleasure, but of life that could be described as thriving or flourishing. “We live well when we fulfil our nature as an enjoyable end in itself. And since our nature is

⁸ The Canopeans are morally superior, but they are not flawless or above making mistakes. This is something they readily acknowledge themselves. As Johor once points out, “[i]t must be remembered that we servants of Canopus are also in the process of evolution, and our understanding of situations change as we do” (*Shikasta*, 35).

something we share with other creatures of our kind, morality is inherently a political matter” (Eagleton 2003, 124). The good life is then about pleasurable well-being, but it is not its immediate goal. If one wants to live well, the best way to achieve this is to forget about oneself, meaning that the well-being is a result of many kinds of goods (Eagleton 2003, 125). For Aristotle well-being was the consequence of a life of virtue, and it was a worldly affair in that it is not something one is born with but instead a result of practise. It is also an unworldly affair in that success in it is its own reward. Being human is something you have to get good at by practise (ibid). Lessing’s humans practice this over and over again, as they are born on the planet repeatedly until they master the skills required of a good life.

And what all this has to do with objectivity, argues Eagleton, is the fact that flourishing cannot be a subjective matter. “Ethics is all about human beings – but it is about what they are like, not what they like” (Eagleton 2003, 126-127). Happiness and flourishing is not simply about feeling good; therefore one cannot tell if one is happy simply by introspection. It is about how one is doing in life, and for Aristotle this is a practice or activity rather than a state of mind (Eagleton 2003, 127). Another reason for why one cannot judge whether one is flourishing or not, is that flourishing is a complex idea, involving a whole range of factors, among other things certain social and material conditions (Eagleton 2003, 128). So instead of seeing how one is feeling, one needs to look at a wider context, and this context Aristotle calls politics (Eagleton 2003, 127).

Therefore, whether one can live a moral life, that is to say a fulfilling life appropriate for human beings, depends in the end on politics (Eagleton 2003, 128). Ethics for Aristotle is a kind of sub-branch of politics; if one wants to be good, one needs a good society (ibid.). In Aristotle’s view ethics is the science of human desire, since desire is the motive for all human action (Eagleton 2003, 129). “If there is not something in it for us, it is not true morality. And since all our desires are social, they have to be set in a wider context, which is politics. Radical politics is the re-education of our desires” (ibid.). Eagleton notes that Aristotle was of course not a radical, but held

that playing an active part in politics was in itself a virtuous thing to do. “Being politically active helps us to create the social conditions for virtue, but it is also a virtue in itself. It is both means and an end” (ibid.). As already mentioned, one can be mistaken whether one is flourishing or not, and someone else might be more perceptive on the matter. This is another important sense in which morality is objective, Eagleton says (ibid.). There are certain public criteria to determine whether one is flourishing or not, and this involves looking at the human body and the behaviour (Eagleton 2003, 130). Citing Ludwig Wittgenstein, Eagleton notes that “the best image of the soul is the body” (ibid.).

Lessing presents very similar ideas in *Shikasta*. The moral decline of the Shikastans can also be discerned in their external features, as “every face was deformed, inwardly or outwardly” (*Shikasta*, 138). However, an individual is not to be straightforwardly blamed for these unfortunate circumstances. “*Most people now are not brought up to be decent, but the opposite and it is not their fault,*” as George Sherban declares to Rachel (*Shikasta*, 334). Lessing repeatedly brings forward the idea of the generation gap, as the young regard their parents with “disappointment or worse. One reason is that the parent is identified with the horrible condition of Shikasta: the previous generation represents the chaos and terror everywhere visible” (*Shikasta*, 218-219). The young blame the previous generations of ruining their planet, but they do not fare any better themselves in this respect. It is somewhat paradoxical, every generation forcing the blame on the previous generations, but not to be blamed themselves. Lessing’s idea here is quite similar to Eagleton’s and Aristotle’s in that in order to actually live well and be good, one needs a good society. The situation is not as dire as it would seem though, as hope always lives on. In *Shikasta* the individual is the key to change at all times: “And this is the point, you see, this is always the point which they must remember: that every child has the capacity to be everything” (*Shikasta*, 212).

The idea proposed by Lessing that an individual is not responsible, to a degree, for his or her actions if the circumstances created by the society do not enable better behaviour, goes all the way back to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Indeed Lessing's ideal society in *Shikasta* is Utopian Socialist. It is philosophical in nature, and provides a worldview that is in reality utterly unattainable. Having said this, however, simply exclaiming that things have gone wrong is not enough, as each individual ought to take responsibility for their own part. Lessing echoes Eagleton and Aristotle in that being politically active is a good thing in itself. One should not simply expect others to mend their situation, but to take actively part in mending their own situations. Lessing brings up the individual's responsibility of their choices and contemporary people's inability to commit themselves to a purpose.

[...] the politicians of the globe of whom nothing much was expected – certainly not by the people they were supposed to represent. These might work, fight, even commit crimes to get 'their' representatives into power, but after that they did not consider they had any responsibility for their choices. For a feature, perhaps predominant feature of the inhabitants of this planet, was that their broken minds allowed them to hold, and act on – even forcibly and violently – opinions and sets of mind that a short time later – years, a month, even a few minutes – they might utterly repudiate. (*Shikasta*, 103-104)

Sometimes taking this responsibility means, Lessing seems to suggest, taking dire actions.

Following a similar line of thought, Eagleton (2003, 126) suggests that for this previously discussed overarching fulfilment to be possible, it would require nothing less than radical politics. "Morality is about fulfilling the self, not abnegating it. It is just that for some people, abnegating it may be historically necessary for bringing that desirable form of life about" (ibid.). The idea of resistance can also be linked to the ideologies of Romanticism, ecocriticism and, as already suggested, Lessing's politics in *Shikasta*. Of *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*, Jayne Glover (2006, 127-128) notes that passive peace is not enough for Lessing, one must strive for something more. Activity, even at the risk of penalty, is a positive thing. There is the need to strive for something outside an effortlessness of the everyday life.

In *Shikasta* the Canopeans repeatedly practice radical politics. In practice the Canopean Empire allows its enemy, Shammat, essentially to run through its course and sits by as it destroys itself in its greed. Humankind, walking hand in hand with Shammat, destroys itself in the process as well. This happens not by accident, nor unseen by the Canopeans. The Third World War is the revolution, which ends the temporary reign of Shammat and the Degenerative Disease, and allows humankind to return to the paradisiacal state of harmonious fellow feeling. The survival of the most potential individuals to carry on their species is achieved through courses of action resembling those of a resistance movement. When the population diminishes – and as the astral positions change into better ones –, the flow of SOWF is again sufficient for everyone.

This kind of practice on the part of the Canopeans is a recurring phenomenon, as indicated by Johor’s musing on what should be done to the Shikastan situation: “What is to be done with them? What can be done? Only what has had to be done so often before, with the children of Shammat” (*Shikasta*, 139). Taufiq reports of a previous occasion on Shikasta, when some unexpected conditions presented a similar kind of situation: a massive inundation was threatening the earth, and without the help of the Canopeans, all would have perished. It was not, however, insignificant who were to be rescued: “This new emergency is in fact providing an unforeseen but useful means of separating the superior from the inferior” (*Shikasta*, 130). Equality is not an objectively universal matter, not even in the Canopean terms, as shall be discussed later. Later Johor reports of yet another incident, after the Canopean Empire had decided all the people in the cities were “fallen victim to the enemies of the Lord”: “Having made sure of the safety of those who could be saved, we signalled to the space-fleet, and the cities were blasted into oblivion, all at the same time” (*Shikasta*, 140). In addition to the radical bombings of the cities, the Canopean breeding plans for the Shikastans are quite extreme in nature. The idea presented in *Shikasta* is, that by limiting reproduction to a predesigned level, and only reproducing with the best of genes, the quality of the race can be maintained, and developed. The idea that forming a family and having

children should not be an individual choice, but a privilege of the few chosen objectively by the community, is quite controversial, to say the least.

However, there seems to be controversy in Lessing's ideas of radical politics and revolution, which she does not directly give voice to. Historically violent revolutions have practically never resulted in harmonious peace. More violence has always followed, as is more than clear if one looks, for instance, at the Russian Revolution or the Cultural Revolution in China. Even the ideals of the French Revolution were quite quickly corrupted and resulted in the Reign of Terror. In *Shikasta* the Chinese take over the world, and it is suggested this 'benevolent' occupation results in all kinds of violence until it eventually results in the Third World War. Perhaps the interest Lessing shows in this violence is a recognition of the fact that the same process repeats itself throughout history. This cyclical nature of history is also phrased in *Shikasta* as Johor voices the concern that the extermination of the enemy must be repeated *yet again* (*Shikasta*, 139). The revolution the Canopean Empire aids provides hope for the surviving people, as does every revolution in history, but the notion of failure and terrors to follow are already implicit in it. I shall return to the topic of recurring cycles in chapter four. It is interesting, nevertheless, that it seems that the Canopean rule over Shikasta is not subjected to criticism practically at all in *Shikasta*. This can hardly be an accident on Lessing's part.

"Objectivity can mean a selfless openness to the needs of others, one which lies very close to love. It is the opposite not of personal interests and convictions, but of egoism" (Eagleton 2003, 131). Genuinely caring for someone is not what gets in the way of seeing his or her situation for what it is, but it is what makes it possible in the first place. Since love involves radical acceptance it allows us to see others for what they are (*ibid.*). Trying to be objective can be a very tiring matter, and it can only be achieved by those who are virtuous. The corruptive nature of power is also a recurrent theme throughout *Shikasta*. "[T]he mass of populations, the average individual, were, was, infinitely better than, more sane, than those who ruled them: most would have been

appalled at what was being done by ‘their’ representatives” (*Shikasta*, 116). Lessing seems to share Eagleton’s view on this, as Eagleton argues that objectiveness is especially difficult for those who exert power. “Only those with patience, honesty, courage and persistence can delve through the dense layers of self-deception which prevent us from seeing the situation as it really is. This is especially difficult for those who wield power – for power tends to breed fantasy, reducing the self to a state of querulous narcissism” (Eagleton 2003, 132).

There seems to be somewhat of a paradox of power in Lessing’s view. She suggests that almost anyone would make better judgements than those in power, but by the time one would be in a position to make these judgements, one would already be corrupted. Judgements made on a level where they have no influence whatsoever, are hardly beneficial for all. The Canopeans are presented as being above corruption, but their representatives in the shikasta form struggle with it. Taufiq has been assailed by it and therefore nearly fails to carry out his mission on Shikasta, and even Johor, as George Sherban, struggles with being in a position of power. Politics is not something he wishes to attend to, but being the political animal that he is, he cannot avoid it. Besides, how one can have influence in the world and make a difference, and not be political?

Eagleton states that Karl Marx was much indebted to Aristotle in his moral thinking as well as in his economic thought (Eagleton 2003, 143). Marx was a classical moralist in the sense that he believed that the questions of good and bad had falsely been abstracted from their social contexts and had to be restored to them again. But unfortunately, as Eagleton argues (*ibid.*), Marx did not realize that he was a classical moralist, and like many radicals of his time, thought morality was just an ideology. Marx made what Eagleton calls “the characteristically bourgeois mistake of confusing morality with moralism” (*ibid.*). “Moralism believes that there is a set of questions known as moral questions which are quite distinct from social or political ones,” Eagleton explains (*ibid.*), and continues by saying that moralism does not see that moral questions cannot be explored as richly and possibly as they should be, if human beings are removed from their social

surroundings. Marx, however, made the mistake of confusing morality and moralism, and therefore naturally rejected it. Eagleton (2003, 144) points out that the paradigm of morality in contemporary times has been feminism, which in its own way insists on the interwovenness of the moral and political, and of power and the personal. And so does, of course, ecocriticism also.

Following the thoughts of Alasdair MacIntyre and Friedrich Nietzsche, Eagleton argues that morality is essentially a biological affair, which is to say that it is in the end rooted in the body, just like everything else about humans (Eagleton 2003, 155).⁹ “In this sense, ethics resembles aesthetics, which started life in the mid-eighteenth century not as a language about art, but as a way of investigating bodily experience” (ibid.). Eagleton claims that it is ultimately because of the body that we can talk of morality as universal (ibid.) The material body is essentially what humans share as a species, despite our differences as cultural beings. Shared bodies are such that they are in principle capable of feeling compassion for any others of their kind, and it is this capacity for fellow-feeling that moral values are founded on. And this, in turn, is based on material dependency on each other (Eagleton 2003, 156). Eagleton notes that drawing parallels between humans and animals used to be distasteful to humanists and continues to be so for culturalists, as they rather maintain “a sharp distinction between language and culture on one hand and dumb, brute nature on the other” (Eagleton 2003, 156-157). But Eagleton claims that the link between the natural and the human is, in fact, morality (Eagleton 2003, 157).

Nature, Eagleton (2003, 171) notes, “is a slippery term, gliding between fact (how it is with something) and value (how it should be). It shares this ambiguity with the word ‘culture’, which some see as the opposite of Nature.” The same applies to human nature, as it is suspended somewhere between fact and value. It is a fact that humans are naturally political animals, and could not survive unless they co-operated with each other, but as Eagleton says, there is no virtue in

⁹ In *Shikasta* the innate piece of humanity, which enables the growth of true humanity, is a result from the breeding programmes of the Canopean Empire. It therefore seems that Lessing’s morality could be interpreted as also being rooted in the genetic structure and the human body.

human co-operation in itself, as it can be used just as well to foul ends. The virtue depends on who is co-operating with whom and for what purpose (Eagleton 2003, 172). Co-operation usually has some kind of practical goal, but Eagleton suggests that perhaps the whole matter should be looked at differently. “What if the sharing of life becomes its own purpose, rather as in the activity we know as art?” Eagleton asks (ibid.). Lessing touches upon the idea of co-operation repeatedly in *Shikasta*, especially in the form of collective responsibility. In relation to war, she writes, “[a] single nation could not be solely responsible for what it did, since groups of nations were whole, interacting as a whole” (*Shikasta*, 170). I shall return to the theme of responsibility on chapter four.

Eagleton (2003, 162) points out that since humanism went out of fashion culturalism has had to take the defending of human supremacy as its mission. This kind of zoological view of humans does not fit in that picture. When everything is seen in cultural terms, the whole world seems to depend on human interpretation for its existence, and thus humans give themselves a very central position (ibid.). The world is, however, flawlessly democratic, as it has no regard for any of us. It does not depend for its survival on our favourable opinions of it, Eagleton argues (2003, 138)¹⁰:

One way in which we recognize that the world is objective is by recognizing the presence of others whose behaviour manifests the fact that, at very basic level, reality is pretty much the same for them as it is for ourselves. Or, if it seems not to be, then at least there is someone out there with whom we can argue the toss. Indeed, it is others who are the paradigm of objectivity.

Nature always gets the last word, the final victory over culture, since death, despite its cultural significance, claims all of us in the end (Eagleton 2003, 163). Lessing however seems to dispute this nature’s final word in *Shikasta*, as for the Shikastans death is not the end. Their bodies die, but their souls return to the cycle of reincarnation, that is until they are freed from it, and their souls move on to other spiritual states.

¹⁰ Ecocritics, however, might, to some degree, disagree on this matter; see for instance ecodespairing Scott Slovic (2002, vii-xi).

This discussion of Eagleton's ethics aims to illustrate the distinctively socialistic ethics presented in *Shikasta*, but also to indicate the shift from red to green within this thesis. To draw up a short summary of the moral dimensions of *Shikasta* as presented in this chapter, it is well-being that is the foundation of everything. Well-being is something that every human should strive for, something that humans as individuals and as a collective need to pursue. Well-being can be achieved by fulfilling one's nature, which means being as good a human being as they possibly can. And as being a human is more than the bodily existence, and it is not a given state of affairs, it requires from humans a lot of work. Working hard means developing themselves and their mental and moral capacities. Morality is a question of individual duty, and it should be valuable in itself. As humans are naturally political animals, morality is inherently a political matter. Therefore in order to succeed in being a good human, one needs a good society. The most appropriate form of society is socialism, as it is, in its ideal form, based on the love of strangers. Love, in the Judeo-Christian sense of agape, is the solid foundation of this society. Co-operation for the common good is an essential requirement of this society, and therefore being politically active is a virtue in itself. The common good is the result of common efforts, and it requires individual commitment. As Marsha Rowe (1982, 193) notes, "[t]here is a delicate balancing of social responsibility and self-interest" in *Shikasta*.

3. Isn't It Romantic – Romanticism in *Shikasta*

There are various characteristically Romantic features present in *Shikasta*. Such as the idea of the natural goodness of people, which is disturbed by the urban civilization. Children, until spoiled by civilization, are naturally closer to nature. Intuition, instincts and emotions are more important than reason, and humans gain knowledge of the world specifically through intuition. The importance, or love, of nature is significant, and nature's ability to help the urban individual find their identity is a focal theme in both *Shikasta* and Romanticism. A certain kind of interest in the mystical is also intrinsic to both. Romanticism was attracted to rebellion and revolution, and was especially interested in human rights and the freedom from oppression. Elements of tragedy, suffering, melancholy and sadness are also often characteristic to Romanticism. Although *Shikasta* seemingly lacks sublime descriptions of nature, nature and human relation to it are nevertheless central themes in the novel. Only by maintaining a close relation with the earth can Shikastans preserve the precious Lock between Canopus and Shikasta. Shikastans gain valuable knowledge only by "tuning in" with nature, as it were; but the surrounding civilization corrupts their minds and prevents them from understanding the world. Rebellion and revolution have also their bearings in Lessing's politics in *Shikasta*. The air of tragedy is present throughout the novel, as Johor reports on the steady destruction of Shikasta and the shikastans. I shall return to some of these themes later.

Lessing was primarily known as a realist writer before her turn to the elements of science fiction at first in *The Four-Gated City* (1969). The supernatural, or rather transcendental, elements brought her approach to the realm of Romanticism. As already noted in the introduction, not everyone appreciated this inversion of style. One such critic was Michal L. Magie, who in his article "Doris Lessing and Romanticism" (1977), downright attacks against Lessing's Romanticism. His article is in effect a speech for the defense of reason, and he seems especially annoyed by Lessing's inclination to mysticism and the weight she gives to things outside the scope of reason.

Rather vehemently against Romanticism in his criticism, he regards these traits as Lessing's errors. However, he considers Lessing as worth being disagreed with (Magie 1977, 531). Despite Magie's Antiromanticism, his discussion of Lessing's Romanticism is rather interesting in itself. What makes it even more interesting is that it was also the only reading of Lessing that I was able to find that unambiguously identified her as Romantic.

Magie (1977, 531) notes that Lessing has claimed "we have no self, [...] only such a one as is developed in the habits, inclinations, roles, and choices of ordinary intercourse with others." Magie points out that despite this argument, Lessing has insistently continued the search for this inner entity, as if it existed, and as if it was achievable through art (Magie 1977, 531). "Just this combination of affirmative quest with skeptical and moral self-criticism characterizes the English Romantics, particularly Wordsworth. [...] And it is the same conception of the mind and self which they proposed and doubted that is at work in her fiction" Magie writes (1977, 532). The strict behaviorism of Lessing's perception of the self noted by Magie seems to have somewhat changed by the time of writing *Shikasta*, perhaps by way of influence of Sufism.¹¹

Magie argues (1977, 532) that in the Romantic notion of human mind two different concepts intertwine. The first notion is that the human mind constructs reality, not simply passively takes in the external reality. This view has gained universal acceptance and brought together scientists and literary scholars. It is a familiar concept in as varied fields as in Kantian philosophy, study of literature, Gestalt psychology and structuralist anthropology, for example. It also has its opponents in radical humanists and in some of the Marxists, Magie notes (ibid.). The second notion is more questionable, Magie argues, as "[i]t says that the mind, often in this context called the self, is a substantive entity which exists "inside" each individual" (Magie 1977, 532-533). This is an old

¹¹ The influence of Sufism – and especially of one of its most prominent popularizers in the West, Idries Shah – on Lessing has been frequently pointed out. Nevertheless, her writing is not religious as such. Lessing herself has noted that she is both mystical and political: "I had an inclination towards mysticism (not religion) even when being political. It is not an uncommon combination" (Müge 2007, 23).

concept relating to the Christian tradition and the notion of the soul (Magie 1977, 533).

In *Shikasta* the Shikastans indeed have an inborn entity, a kind of an innate piece of humanity in them. They have this ‘seed of humanity’ in their core, which enables their growth into proper human beings, if exercised properly. In *Shikasta* this seed, grain or whatever one wants to call it, traces itself from the breeding programs the Canopeans had inflicted on the Shikastans in the distant past.¹² This ‘seed,’ which must be the origin of the self, is quite easy to read as representing the soul. However, external forces are at work and most often prevent this growth human’s strive for. Humans have to work hard in order to make it possible for them, as was already discussed in chapter two in relation to Eagleton’s ethics.

“The attribution of substance to the mind occurs in many forms, some of them still wearing the mask of science,” Magie argues and offers as examples many psychological theories (ibid.). “Since there is no evidence of this entity, it is quite as mysterious and spiritual an item when scientific psychologists discuss the self in these terms as when theologians ponder the soul” (ibid.). He illuminates this distinction by discussing the title of M.H. Abram’s book, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. “If the mind is a mirror, it may be nothing in itself except the reflection of external realities. But if it is a lamp, then not only does it see the light, nor does it only shine the light by which things are seen, but it *is* the light. The mind, then, is, or is like, a god” (Magie 1977, 534). However, according to this view, although every human being has a natural self, the transcendence is not achievable to everyone. With proper exercising of imagination a transcended self can be achieved, but theorists claim, as Wordsworth does, that only some few people can achieve this, and these are the artists (ibid.). “The transcendent self, theorists assert, is not fundamentally an individual entity. It is simply an aspect or element of a great cosmic entity, a universal spirit, which is said to

¹² There is also an element of Sufism discernable. Within Sufism the human soul is simply a ‘Breath of God’, “so every human being essentially carries in herself/himself the divine entity” (Saladdin 2008, 235).

comprise all men's souls, or, sometimes, all things whatever” Magie rather dryly notes (ibid.).¹³

Another possible path to transcendence is madness. Romanticism values insanity as salvation. Through madness an individual can have an access to a transcended reality, a sort of transcended collective self (Magie 1977, 544). “[I]f reason, sanity, and the social self obstruct our avenue to true being, they must be destroyed or escaped. [...] [The] transcendent self, and perhaps God, will appear to us, will be us, if we break out of our customary persons by becoming insane” (Magie 1977, 543). Lessing has been interested in questions of sanity and insanity in several of her novels previous to *Shikasta*, including such works as *The Grass Is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook*, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, and it is also one of the major themes in the Children of Violence series, and she continues exploring the theme in *Shikasta*. In contrast to the previous novels, in *Shikasta* the insanity as salvation has a very concrete significance, as I will discuss shortly.

Lessing’s humans seem fairly pitiful little creatures, quite unaware of the world around them, except of what their feeble senses inform them. And even some of that information is quite lost on them. As Lynda Coldridge explains in the novel, “[w]e have senses adjusted to a very small range of sight or hearing. All the time sounds are coming from everywhere, like a waterfall. But we are machines set to accept only 5 per cent. If the machine goes wrong then we hear more than we need. We see more than we need. [...] The reason they are horrors and not nice is that your machine is distorting what is there, which is really nice” (*Shikasta*, 232). Lynda continues by explaining:

[N]early everyone has been brought up to believe that the 5 per cent is all there is. Five percent is the whole universe. And if they think anything else, they are peculiar. And if the machine goes wrong and in comes let us say 10 per cent then as well as being frightened about voices coming out of someone’s elbow or the door handle, and what these voices say which is nearly always silly, then they will know they are *bad*. *Wicked*. Because you can’t change people’s ideas. Not just like that. Not suddenly. (*Shikasta*, 233)

¹³ Lessing writes in her foreword to *Shikasta* (n.p.) that “Yes, I do believe that it is possible, and not only for novelists, to ‘plug in’ to an overmind, or Ur-mind, or unconscious, or what you will, and this accounts for a great many improbabilities and ‘coincidences.’”

However, Lessing's humans have every potential, when they are children. As children most people are open to the world that surrounds the planet.¹⁴ It is the already corrupt surrounding civilization that tries to convince the children that the things they see and hear are not really there, therefore often ruining the Canopean efforts of reaching them. If the children continue to insist that the things they see are real, they are eventually considered as mentally ill. "When they were children, it is more than likely they saw and heard all kinds of things more than the 5 per cent, like having friends they could see and others couldn't, and their parents when they told them said they were lying and wicked," Lynda Coldridge explains (*Shikasta*, 233). The discrepancy between what they feel is true and 'the truth' they are told by their parents creates a conflict. There are basically two choices for them; either they learn to suppress their own feelings and senses, and conform to the expectations of the society, eventually truly forgetting they ever thought otherwise and thus be 'cured', or they fail – or even refuse – to do this and most often eventually develop mental health issues as a result of the curing processes inflicted on them by the society

In *Shikasta* insanity is the consequence of denying the truth of what they know of the world, and the consequence of society's ill effect. It is, however, a possible path to the salvation; if they, despite the problems caused by the mental health issues, can still hold on to the truth and navigate their way through life in a proper manner, they are freed from the shackles of *Shikasta* and need not be born there again. Jocelyn Harris notes in "Doris Lessing's Beautiful Impossible Blueprints" (1991, 34) that "[w]hat the world calls madness is actually a route to sanity. Madness, says Laing, is not just breakdown, but breakthrough. So Lessing will argue in *The Golden Notebook* and beyond." In *Shikasta* the insane also play an integral part in saving the humankind from total destruction, as a mental hospital patient Lynda Coldridge plays an integral part in getting people

¹⁴ This is a very Romantic notion indeed, and it actually seems like a rewriting of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," stanza 5.

into safety before the World War Three. A large part of those chosen to be saved and to continue their race are in fact people from mental institutions, considered to be insane by their society. “In each [hospital we worked in] we found people who had various Capacities in embryo or in potential and because of a misunderstanding of the phenomena they experienced had been classed as ill and incarcerated temporarily or permanently, but due to good fortune or stronger than usual constitution their treatment had not damaged them” (*Shikasta*, 433). The people society has deemed faulty and defective and considered best shut away from the rest of society, are in fact the people the Canopean Empire considers as precious. As Rachel muses, “I wonder if some of the people he rescues would be pleased if they knew they have genetic value. Genetically useful, said George once when I asked about someone” (*Shikasta*, 357). Often those with the worst mental problems are in fact those with better potentiality than the rest. On the subject of insanity Lessing’s connections to the rather controversial psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who wrote extensively on mental illnesses, has been noted on many occasions. Marion Vlastos (1976, 246), for instance, notes that Lessing “shows striking similarity to the views of R.D. Laing, unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician.”¹⁵

As already indicated, many Romantic features are present in *Shikasta*. Lessing seems to employ the Romantic idea of an unspoiled child, whose relationship to nature is naturally closer, until the civilization corrupts it. The child, and later the adult who has enough potential, gains valuable information of the world through their intuition and emotions rather than through sensory perception. The mental problems are not always necessarily produced by the surrounding civilization – since the incoherence is the result of a malfunction of the body – but they are invariably made worse by the treatments inflicted on the ‘patients.’ The indigenous peoples are already in a better position to preserve their mental health since their relationship to the earth is closer, but also because their “wise men and women knew how to cure the sicknesses of the mind”

¹⁵ Vlastos (1976, 246) also remarks that it might be helpful, or possibly even necessary, to read Laing along with Lessing, which is exactly what David Waterman did in his reading of Lessing in “Who Am I When the Other Disappears?: Identity and Progress in Doris Lessing’s *The Sirian Experiments*” (2008).

(*Shikasta*, 199). Modern psychology, Lessing argues, only makes things worse. In a manner similar to the Romantics critical of the cold rational approach of the Enlightenment, Lessing is highly critical of modern sciences, and especially of psychology.

I will return to the themes of Romanticism in the form of Romantic ecology, as it brings together the fields of ecocriticism and Romanticism. In the next section I will move on to introducing the notion of ecocriticism, its relevant characteristics and the concept of Romantic ecology. Concurrently I will discuss their application to *Shikasta* as I see relevant.

4. And All the World is Green – Green Reading of *Shikasta*

Since ecocriticism is still quite young and very much a developing discipline, I will introduce some of its relevant features. William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" originally published in 1978 introduced the term 'ecocriticism' and aimed at bringing ecology – which studies the reciprocal relations of living creatures with physical environments – and literature together. He bases his ecocriticism on the 'first law of ecology' by biologist and ecosocialist Barry Commoner: "everything is connected to everything else" (Rueckert 1996, 112).

The terms 'ecocriticism' and 'green studies' can be used interchangeably, as they basically refer to the same critical approach. They do, however, have slightly differing emphasis. Ecocriticism is often associated with the American movement, with the leading figure of Cheryll Glotfelty and her *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, co-edited with Harold Fromm in 1996. The American ecocriticism takes its literary bearings from the transcendentalist movement, usually identified with Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) (Barry 2002, 249). The work of these writers, essayists and philosophers celebrates nature, the life force and the wilderness (Barry 2002, 251). Green studies, by contrast, usually refers to the British version of ecocriticism. It takes its bearings from the 1790s British Romanticism, and the founding figure is Jonathan Bate and his *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). The British variant has a tendency to seek "to warn us of environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial, and neocolonial forces" (Barry 2002, 251).

From the very beginning ecocriticism has been theoretically and methodologically very diverse, combining different approaches. It has been criticized for the lack of its own theory, but as Lahtinen and Lehtimäki (2008, 22) point out, we could just as well talk about the abundance of it. Scott Slovic has noted that the uniting factor among the ecocritical studies is their practicality,

which is often confused with having no theory at all. “Perhaps the overriding feature of ecocritical theory, though, is it is nearly always attached to an accessible, helpful application, sometimes making it almost unrecognizable as theory. [...] If you’re looking for ecocritical theory, look for it in our practice,” Slovic states (2000, 162).¹⁶ Ecocriticism therefore could be defined in many different ways. One of the best-known definitions belongs to Cheryl Glotfelty (1996, xviii): “Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” Scott Slovic (2000, 160), on the other hand, would define it as “the study of explicit environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world.” Ecocriticism wishes not only to talk about nature, but also to speak on its behalf. With ecocriticism what is at stake is the future of the planet itself, and though class, race and gender are important dimensions of both literary and cultural studies, without a surviving biosphere they are not issues worth addressing (Coupe 2000, 5).

This thesis uses the terms green and ecocriticism together interchangeably throughout the text for reasons of convenience. This thesis is, nevertheless, centred on the British variant of ecocriticism, but texts from both variants will be referred to.

4.1. Ecocritical characteristics

At the turn of the millennium literary research concerning the relations between literature and nature began to increase significantly. Ecocriticism has rapidly emerged from the margins to become one of the current trends of literary research. Ecocriticism brings with it a new emphasis to

¹⁶ Buell (1999, 700) notes that ecocriticism “has begun to generate a sizeable secondary literature and with it, perhaps, the beginning of something like an ecocritical canon, which current work often builds,” but he also notes that within the movement there is no consensus on how the varying topics should be approached. Some, such as Glen A. Love, “proceed from a conviction that informed knowledge of the natural world and/or natural science(s) ought to matter for the practitioner of environmentally-valenced literary studies” (Buell 1999, 703).

literary research by concentrating on the diverse encounters of human and non-human instead of – or along with – more traditional topics such as representations of the human mind or societies (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 8). In ecocriticism a central question is what significance we give to nature and how this influences the way we treat it.

Nature is generally separated from humanity and culture in our thinking. However, it is a concept through which we ask questions about our behaviour, cultural phenomena and the impact of culture and nature on an individual (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 9). As Raymond Williams famously noted in his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983, 219), “nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language.” In the last decades nature has become a very political question, though its political roots go back to the awaking awareness of environmental issues in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the earliest influential works that awoke and roused people to issues such as global pollution was Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), which readdressed the questions of natural sciences into politics, legislation, the media and popular culture. The environmental awareness that rose in the 1970s caused the greening of many disciplines, such as history, philosophy and sociology, but only in the 1980s did literary scholars begin to share green projects, and by the beginning of the 1990s ecocriticism had established itself in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 11).

Though ecocriticism is concerned with political questions, it cannot be considered as a politically or philosophically united approach. It comprises parallel and contending approaches, such as, for example, environmentalism, deep ecology, social ecology, ecomarxism and Heideggerian ecophilosophy. Ecocriticism has many similarities with feminism and postcolonialism. In a manner similar to feminism, ecocriticism aims at challenging the dominant ideology, based on otherness and separateness. Feminism and ecocriticism in fact unite in the form ecofeminism, which tends to see a direct link between humanity’s domination of the earth and man’s domination of woman. Also in a similar manner to postcolonialism’s view of the colonial

discourse in relation to the colonized, ecocriticism sees humanity as the subjugator, and the earth as the subjugated Other.

Ecocriticism approaches literary works from the focal point of nature. An ecocritic asks questions such as how nature is represented in a text. The spectrum of questions phrased by ecological literary studies is broad, but what they all share is the perception that human culture has a solid connection to the surrounding material world (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 14). Although nature requires humans in order to achieve self-realisation and therefore separateness seems redundant, the process nevertheless implies that there is something waiting to be realised (Coupe 2002, 2). Since the middle of the 1970s different theories have regarded nature as a cultural discourse, not really existing in itself or without meaning per se. “To declare that there is ‘no such thing as nature’ has become almost obligatory within literary and cultural studies” (ibid.). The linguistic turn and the following understanding of the meaning of language in human comprehension of the world, has resulted in scepticism of ‘truth’ and downright denial of the non-textual world. In its attempt to avoid naivety, it has succumbed to a ‘semiotic fallacy’ (Coupe 2000, 2). “It has assumed that because mountains and waters are human at the point of delivery, they exist only as signified within human culture. Thus they have no intrinsic merit, no value and no rights. One function of green studies must be to resist this disastrous error” (ibid.).

Ecocriticism therefore stands against postmodernism, especially its most extreme forms. Ecocriticism does not challenge the idea that humans make sense of the world through language, but it challenges the notion that nature is merely a linguistic construction. As often quoted Kate Soper dramatically states, “[i]t is not language which has a hole in its ozone layer; and the ‘real’ thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier” (Soper 2000, 124). Ecocriticism naturally does acknowledge that humans interpret and construct their environment, which comes across to us culturally and textually as somewhere between the world and us, but at the same time ecocriticism strives to detach itself from

postmodern egocentrism, aiming towards ecocentrism (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 20). Therefore, nature is an abstraction, but as postmodernism has disregarded its physical and autonomic presence as well as humans' bodily connection to the world's material foundation (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 20), ecocriticism aims to bring the material nature back into the discussion. It also discusses what this 'real thing' actually means in all its complexity, and what our relationship to it is.

As already indicated, the important question is not what nature physically is, but what it conceptually means or can be made to mean (Kern 2003, 258). Robert Kern (2003, 260) defines the objective of ecocriticism as

to read in such a way as to amplify the reality of the environment in or of a text, even if in doing so we resist the tendency of the text itself (or of our own conditioning as readers) to relegate the environment to the status of setting, so that it becomes a place chiefly interesting because of the human events that unfold in it, or to see its significance as primary symbolic, so that it becomes something essentially other than itself.

As the quotation implies, texts read from an ecocritical perspective need not be nature-oriented in their content at all. Kern (2003, 259), as well as Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (2003, xix) suggest that all texts can be read from a green point of view. The field is currently thriving, and ecocritical readings include various "subjects ranging from science fiction treatments of population issues to urban ecocritical theory, from nineteenth-century American literature to experimental films about cities" (Slovic 2002, viii). Ecocriticism reassesses the value of certain genres, especially the pastoral but also science fiction. One such critic is Glen A. Love (1996, 231), who discusses the "need to redefine pastoral in terms of the new and more complex understanding of nature."

In a similar vein Leo Marx (2000, 105) writes that "[m]ost literary works called pastorals – at least those substantial enough to retain our interest – do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery." Marx continues that in the pastoral design, which he talks about, for there are many others, "embraces some token of a larger, more complicated, order of experience. [...] [T]his feature of

design brings a world which is more ‘real’ into juxtaposition with an idyll vision. It may be called the *counterforce*.” He also notes that in the archetypal American pastoral design it is the imagery of the machine technology, which provides this counterforce. An interrupted idyll is a recurrent trope.

(ibid.). Marx (2000, 106-107) continues:

[T]he striking fact is that again and again our writers have introduced the same overtones, depicting the machine as invading the peace of an enclosed space, a world set apart, or an area somehow made to evoke a feeling of encircled felicity. [...] [W]hatever the specific details, certain general features of the pattern occur too often to be fortuitous. Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached with the landscape.¹⁷

In the rather early stages of ecocritical movement in 1996, Love (1996, 229) reproves literary criticism of dragging behind in the widespread disciplinary revaluation, and questions why literary criticism has not been as affected by the environmental awareness as other disciplines – such as architecture and urban planning, for instance – have been. He urges the need of literary criticism to address these vital questions in the hope of recovering its lost social role (ibid.). In 1996 Love (1996, 235) appealed and demanded that

a reasonable observer must conclude that either through some ecological catastrophe of massive proportions or through genuinely enlightened new sense of environmental awareness, our profession must soon direct its attention to that literature which recognizes and dramatizes the integration of human with natural cycles of life.

It is indeed interesting, that despite the quite apparent ecocritical questions *Shikasta* poses and despite it being published in a period of time when environmental movements were growing rapidly and the concerns over global pollution were great, as were the anxieties over the threat of nuclear war and its possible effects on the world, it nevertheless has never been examined from the perspective of nature.

¹⁷ It is quite interesting to reflect *Shikasta* against Marx’s pastoral design, as it amongst other things also juxtaposes two worlds, that of the idyllic and organic Rohanda and the industrial Shikasta. Lessing’s setting is perhaps somewhat atypical to the pastoral tradition, since she takes it to the galactic or planetary level, but it nevertheless remains an enclosed space of felicity, until the idyll is unexpectedly interrupted by the invading Shammat and its technology, and the nurturing Canopeans are overtaken by their aggressive progress.

Ecocriticism aims at affecting the way people consider their surroundings and their approach to nature. Literary studies are traditionally, directly or indirectly, thought to function as society's conscience, and as Scott Slovic (2002, xi) notes on the subject of ecocritical literary studies – in a manner more hopeful and positive than Love's –, “our society's actions today, however harmful and shortsighted, will not pass without resistance, critique, and remembrance.” Although it is realistically noted that the current audience of ecocritical criticism is still rather narrow (Slovic 2002, ix), it is also granted that the ecological awareness is on the increase.

4.2. Romantic ecology and the shift from red to green

If one historicizes the idea of ecological viewpoint – a respect for the earth and a scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society – one finds oneself squarely in the Romantic tradition; and it has strong contemporary force in that it brings Romanticism to bear on what are likely to become the most pressing political issues of the coming decade: the greenhouse effect and depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of the tropical rainforest, acid rain, the pollution of the sea. (Bate 1991, 9)

The Romantic movement of the eighteenth century began as a reaction against the Enlightenment's rational thinking and aspiration to master the natural world. Romanticism, as opposed to the Enlightenment, emphasised feelings, imagination and freedom. The twentieth and twenty-first century critique of modernity has corresponding characteristics with the Romantic movement of the eighteenth century, as modernity is often critiqued by the means of memories – or imagination – of a more unified relationship with the earth (Bate 2000a, xvii). Palmer (2002, 165) notes that “[t]he nineteenth century nature writing, characterized by romantic, mystical concepts of pure, wild, originary nature and the “organic” nature of the human subject, became environmental writing in the middle of the twentieth century by way of infusion of ideas from the realm of natural science.” Lawrence Buell (1999, 709) says

ecocritics have every right to believe that if they do their jobs right – not, of course to be taken for granted – they will not only be able to reveal to fellow literature department colleagues some hidden things about even the most familiar and classic works but also

have a basis to consider themselves participants in a pandisciplinary inquiry of the first order of historical significance.

The pivotal question of the relationship of nature and culture has been the central intellectual question of the twenty-first century, with people from very different disciplines taking part in the conversation, such as philosophers, poets, anthropologists and postmodern theorists (Bate 2000a, xvii). This thesis aims to take part in this discussion, on its part bringing together differing theoretical approaches such as Bate's Romantic ecology and Eagleton's cultural and literary discussion of ethics.

Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) discusses William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) poetry and argues that instead of being a radical political writer, as he is most often considered in previous criticism, he was essentially politically green. He suggests that the 'Left-Right' model of politics is no longer useful, and links Wordsworth to this political change from red to green. Bate reassesses Wordsworth's poetry in the context of the abiding pastoral tradition of British literature, and posits him as the first truly ecological poet of British literary history. "[*Romantic Ecology*] is dedicated to the proposition that the way in which William Wordsworth sought to enable his readers better to enjoy or endure life was by teaching them to look at and dwell in the natural world" (Bate 1991, 4). I suggest that Lessing's aim with *Shikasta* is very similar to that of Wordsworth's.

The French Revolution is often considered as the creative force behind the poetic revolution we now call Romanticism (Bate 1991, 6). But "if the French Revolution was one great root of Romanticism, then what used to be called 'return to nature,' associated above all with the Rousseau of the second *Discourse* and the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, was surely the other," Bate notes (1991, 7). To put recent criticism of Romanticism in a nutshell, the 1960s gave us an idealist interpretation of Romanticism that was implicitly bourgeois in that it elevated individualistic imagination above all else, taking for granted that the human mind is superior to nature. The 1980s gave us post-Althusserian Marxist critique of Romanticism, in which the economy of society is

more important than the economy of nature. These are the dominating assumptions that green politics is now questioning (Bate 1991, 9).

In order to politicize Romanticism in a way that speaks to “our present discontents,” Bate suggests that “we make the move which many ex-Marxists have made, predominantly in Germany but increasingly in Britain: the move from red to green” (Bate 1991, 8-9). “An ‘ideology’ based on a harmonious relationship with nature goes beyond, in many ways goes deeper than, the political model we have become used to thinking with. By recuperating the Wordsworthian pastoral, we may begin to reconfigure the model” (Bate 1991, 19-20). Bate (1991, 33) also notes that “poems do not send people out on to barricades, but they do have the capacity to alter mentalities. Wordsworth can help us to rethink the nature of politics.” Romanticism was rather political in its nature, and it strongly influenced the emerging European nationalisms of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Romantic poets were in general revolutionary in their politics, and therefore Wordsworth’s shift from red to green is quite exceptional.

My ecocritical reading of *Shikasta* is founded on this notion of moving from red to green. Lessing has previously been a famously communist writer¹⁸, and the socialist ideas are also clearly present in *Shikasta* – as I have discussed in chapter two – but I argue and intend to demonstrate that Lessing’s disappointment with Party politics is also evident in *Shikasta*, and a move from red to green can be discerned. Lessing, previously an active member of the Communist Party, had by the time she wrote *Shikasta* lost her faith in party politics. This is rather obvious in the wordings of *Shikasta*. “Not long ago it was possible for members of a political sect to believe that it was pristine and noble and best – but there have been so many betrayals and disappointments, lies,

¹⁸ However, classifying Lessing in this way is not without problems. She was at one time undeniably a communist writer, until she became disillusioned with the Party. Some call her a Marxist writer, but for instance Frederick C. Stern (1988, 54) suggests that “the world view of Lessing’s important left-wing characters is *not* in any full sense Marxist, although it is certainly radical.” Stern (1988, 57) suggests that “Lessing’s commitment from the beginning of her work, it seems, was not to Marxist thought and its revolutionary components, but rather to radical humanist thought.”

turnings-about, so much murdering and torturing and insanity, that even the most fanatic supporters know times of disbelief” (*Shikasta*, 248). Already previous to *Shikasta*, Harris (1991, 36) notes how “Lessing works from division to wholeness in *The Golden Notebook*. Political and social blueprints fail, and she discards them. She reveals for instance the failure of Marxism – which she had once welcomed as the first attempt outside the formal religions at a world-mind, a world ethic.”

However, despite her disappointment in the actual forms of political practice, her writing continues to be philosophically political. In *Shikasta* the wholeness Lessing strives for finds its ultimate philosophical form in the equality and moral altruism of the Canopean Empire. In *Shikasta* Lessing calls politics “one of the strongest of false ideas of this epoch” (*Shikasta*, 100). Politics allures not only those after crude power, but also those who imagine themselves better than the others in the sense that their intentions are good, not mere self-interest at the expense of others. Political thinking, when it comes to party politics, Lessing comments sourly, despite the good intentions, always ends up in corruption, and the common good is forgotten.

Nearly all political people were incapable of thinking in terms of interaction, of cross-influence, of the various sects and ‘parties’ forming *together* a whole, wholes – let alone groups of nations making up a whole. No, entering the state of mind where ‘politics’ was ruler, it was always to enter a crippling partiality, a condition of being blinded by the ‘correctness’ of a certain viewpoint. (*Shikasta*, 101)

Lessing discusses this dilemma especially in the form of Johor, as already discussed in chapter two. Johor, who is no doubt morally quite mature, still struggles with his own political nature as a Shikastan, and with the influence of the surrounding society. Politics is, in the end, something unavoidable.

Bate, however, suggests that the desired results might be better achieved by means other than politics. Bate (1991, 40) says that Romantic ecology “proclaims that there is ‘one life’ within us and abroad, that the earth is one vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our own peril.” Romantic ecology has nothing to do with the escapism connected with ‘Romantic Ideology’, as it is in fact an attempt to “enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into

harmony with the environment” (Bate 1991, 40). And this can be better achieved by means of ‘ecopoetics’, rather than ‘ecopolitics’, Bate suggests. He further develops these ideas in his *Song of the Earth* (2000), but unfortunately it is not possible to go deeper into this theme within the scope of this thesis. However, I somewhat cautiously suggest that one could read Lessing’s turning from political activity but her strongly retaining the philosophically political aspect in her writing as something of an assent to this view.

Ecology as an academic discipline began, and has in many respects remained, as one of the non-human sciences (Bate 1991, 36). Ellen Swallow, a 19th century campaigner for clean air and water and better urban living conditions, seems to have been the first to apply the term ecology as “the worthiest of the applied sciences which teaches the principles on which to found healthy... and happy life” (ibid.) Since then, the term has been applied to both a biological science and an environmental attitude (Bate 1991, 37). Bate (1991, 36-37) notes that ecology, or originally ‘Oekologie,’ was coined in 1866 by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, and it was originally built on the Darwinian concept of evolution by natural selection according to adaptability to environment. However, Bate (1991, 37) points out that although “Haeckel’s chief inspiration was the argument in *The Origin of Species* concerning the ‘web of complex relations’ by which all animals and plants are bound to each other, remote as they may be from one another in the scale of nature,” there are other roots to the term besides Darwin. These are clear, says Bate, from Haeckel’s definition of the term ‘the economy of nature’ (ibid.) “This venerable phrase,” Bate points out, “takes us back into a long tradition of natural religion.” Bate writes as follows (ibid.):

The economy of nature is to be found throughout Enlightenment natural philosophy, whether in the biology of Linnaeus or the geology of Hutton. The latter’s ‘Theory of the Earth’ was ‘a view of that system of mineral oeconomy, in which may be perceived every mark of order and design, of provident wisdom and benevolence’: it sought to demonstrate that ‘there is a system in nature’ and that in the long perspective of geological time nature’s economy is benign – ‘with such wisdom has nature ordered things in the oeconomy of this world, that the destruction of one continent is not brought about without the renovation of the earth in the production of another.’

Bate (1991, 39) also notes that where Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Thoreau, differ from Darwin and Haeckel, is “in their emphasis of a symbiosis between economy of nature and the activities of the humankind.” Scientists made the effort to describe the complex economy of nature, and the Romantics endeavoured to teach human beings how to live as part of it. Strong echoes of both, Linnaeus’s economy of nature and the attitudes of the Romantics, can be seen in the spiritual worldview of *Shikasta*.

Since *Shikasta* is undoubtedly mystically inclined in its worldview¹⁹, this also extends to its view of nature. There is a certain amount of pantheism observable,²⁰ though any Deities as such are not mentioned in the novel. There seems to exist the idea, that although even the great changes in nature are unpredictable, they are somehow, if not predesigned, at least part of a ‘bigger plan,’ which means they are not simply coincidental. The same idea is manifest in the tradition of natural religion. Though there exists the concern about the humans spoiling the nature around them, and of their own destruction, there is still, always, continuance in nature.

Forced back and back upon herself, himself, bereft of comfort, security, knowing perhaps only hunger and cold; denuded of belief in ‘country’, ‘religion’, ‘progress’ – stripped of certainties, there is no Shikasta who will not let his eyes rest on a patch of earth, perhaps no more than a patch of littered and soured soil between buildings in a slum, and think: Yes, but that will come to life, there is enough power there to tear down this dreadfulness and heal all our ugliness – a couple of seasons, and it would all be alive again...and in war, a soldier watching a tank rear up over a ridge to bear down on him, will see as he dies grass, tree, a bird swerving past, and know immortality. (*Shikasta*, 250)

The continuance may not be of their own self, but it is of their kind, and of their world. Lessing describes how the human

feels nature as a roaring creative fire in whose crucible species are born and die and are reborn in every breath...every life...every culture...every world...the mind, wrenched away from its resting place in the close visible cycles of growth and renewal and decay,

¹⁹ Saana Saarinen (1984, 38) also notes that in *Shikasta* Lessing creates a kind of synthesis, as it were, between the main religions of the East and the West. In addition to Sufism, there are also features of both Hinduism and Christianity present in *Shikasta*.

²⁰ This is not in fact contrary to Sufism, as there exists within Sufi teaching, despite Monotheism, the belief that God is the only reality and therefore God is everywhere (Saladdin 2008, 235).

the simplicities of birth and death, is forced back, and back into itself, coming to rest – tentatively and without expectation – where there can be no rest, in the thought that always, at every time, there have been species, creatures, new shapes of being, making harmonious wholes of interacting parts, but these over and over again crash! are swept away! – crash go the empires, and civilizations, and the explosions that are to come will lay to waste seas and oceans and islands and cities, and make poisoned deserts where the teeming detailed life was, and where the heart and mind used to rest, (*Shikasta*, 255)

and continues by describing by how they still, despite all this, must continue and go forth, knowing that perhaps tomorrow, next week, or in a thousand years, the next ‘end of the world’ will yet again come. The ‘explosions that are to come’ of course refer to the atomic bombs of the Third World War, which Lessing felt was inevitable (Henstra 2007, 3). The ‘end of the world,’ however, might just be the end of the world as we know it, and not the end of the entire planet, as nature has an extraordinary tendency to repair itself. The planet might survive without humans, but this is not something Lessing seems to comfort herself in.

An individual may be told she, he, is to die, and will accept it. For the species will go on. Her or his children will die, and even absurdly or arbitrarily – but the species will go on. But that a whole species, or race, will cease, or drastically change – – no, that cannot be taken in, accepted, not without a total revolution of the deepest self. (*Shikasta*, 55)

It is essentially the survival of the human race that Lessing is concerned with. However, when the Third World War finally breaks out, the survival of each individual, or even a majority of them, is not to be expected. It is not to be hoped for either, as Lessing somewhat radically leads the reader to understand.

The Third World War can be considered, somewhat radically, I presume, as a green revolution. It is a revolution assisted by the Canopeans, with a new world order as its target. The harmonious organic life is achievable only through radical moves and great sacrifices of the humankind. On the other hand, the naturalness of an upheaval of this kind is also brought forward, as the concept of a cycle is repeatedly brought forward in *Shikasta*. As a part of his education, George goes to a farm to learn about the natural cycle of seasons in practice: “George was there for a whole year, December to December, to learn about the cycle of the seasons” (*Shikasta*, 267). The

idea of a cycle is often repeated in the story, and it is also featured in the narrative structure of the novel itself, as well as in its concept of time. Earl G. Ingersoll (1996, 45) notes that in the Canopus in Argos series, including *Shikasta*, time is not simply relative but it is non-linear, “indeed, recurrent, cyclical, multiple.” The story is also in itself cyclical: all events described as happening or having happened in the story, have also happened earlier in the history of Shikasta. The story of the Shikastan race pretty much ends in a similar situation it begins from: the shikastans are making a new beginning for themselves, after their harmonious and balanced lives have been violently disturbed. It is also suggested that all this will happen again in the future. “Over and over again, a shock or strain in the peculiarly precarious balance of this planet has called forth an accident, and Shikasta has been virtually denuded of life. Again and again it has been jostling-full with genera, and diseased because of it” (*Shikasta*, 15). It is only a fact of nature that it is in a process of continual evolution and change.

The planet is above all one of contrasts and contradictions, because of its in-built stresses. This is its strength. This is its weakness. Envoys [of Canopus] are requested to remember at all times that they cannot find on Shikasta what they will have become familiar with in other parts or our dominion and which therefore they will have become disposed to expect: very long periods of stasis, epoch of almost unchanging harmonious balance. (*Shikasta*, 15)

In the Wordsworthian pastoral love is of critical importance. The love of nature enables Wordsworth to be able to love and see love even in the urban environment of the city, which previously had been a place of alienation to him. Love of nature leads him to love of mankind. In his pastoral Wordsworth replaces illusions of romantic love with the philanthropy explicit in the phrase ‘love of mankind’ (Bate 1991, 31).²¹ In *The Prelude*, Bate argues, “the three-

²¹ The absence of romance is also noticeable in *Shikasta*. Relationships of a sexual nature are referred to on many occasions, but not in any romantic context. Yet philanthropy plays an integral part in Lessing’s ethics in *Shikasta*, as it is essential on the root level of people’s relationships to other people. This takes shape for instance in George Sherban’s repeated remarks to Rachel on the importance of ‘kindness’ to others. “Suzannah is kind, he said. This was not a criticism of me, but a statement about Suzannah” (*Shikasta*, 342). Its vitality is also spelt out in the case of the Individual Six: “All this was good, was a step towards freedom from the miasmas of Shikasta. But it was useless to him, for he had no kindness” (*Shikasta*, 172).

book sequence should be read as a progression from alienation in the city through love of nature to the recognition of individual human love and tenderness in the city to the general love of humanity in the revolutionary spirit of book nine” (Bate 1991, 32). Bate (1991, 33) discusses the three links in the Wordsworthian chain of love; nature, local community, and mankind:

Wordsworth goes straight from nature and Grasmere to mankind, and in particular to the aspirations for mankind that were given voice in the ideals of the French Revolution. The inclusion of nature and exclusion of a Burkean sense of nation, of an established order under threat in England, are equally significant. The progression suggests that the ‘socialism’ of Wordsworth’s republican pastoral is of a highly distinctive kind. Its vision of ‘fullness and completeness of life’, to use William Morris’s fine phrase, is dependent on integration with, not subjugation of, nature. The politics of Grasmere Vale are ultimately based on a relationship to the environment, a marriage of humankind to the natural world [...]. To go back to nature is not to retreat from politics but to take politics into a new domain, the relationship between Love of Nature and Love of Mankind and, conversely, between the Rights of Man and the Rights of Nature. The language of *The Prelude* is fleetingly red but ever green.

The principle of the ‘love of mankind’ to which ‘love of nature’ leads is of a piece with the rhetoric of the revolutionary declaration of the universal rights of man. It is no coincidence that for the Romantics Rousseau was a prophet both of nature and of the French Revolution” (Bate 1991, 32).

The discussion of Wordsworth’s chain of love can also be applied to Lessing’s *Shikasta*. Love in relation to socialistic ethical ideals was already discussed on chapter two, but love is also a key term in another sense in *Shikasta*, a sense that has to do with nature. In *Shikasta* the love that enables the human capacity for fellow-feeling quite literally wells from deep inside the earth. The springs, that the new town are built around, are literally sources of life, as they provide unpolluted fresh water even after the Third World War, but they are also sources of love. The emotive human bond to nature is concretized here. The flow of water is the flow of life, and also the flow of love. Fountains are built on these sources, and towns built around them; the springs are, quite literally, the centres of life. It is quite easy to see the parallels between the Wordsworthian love of nature leading to the love of mankind, and the *Shikastan* love flowing from the earth and uniting all of mankind. Loving nature enables the Shikastans to again love each other, and the alienation of the old cities is but a bad memory for them.

Romantics emphasised that as we physically cannot live without the green environment, we cannot do so psychologically either. John Ruskin (1819-1900), a follower of Wordsworth's in many respects concerning his thoughts on nature, also puts God back into nature (Bate 1991, 78). In *Unto This Last* (1862, quoted in Bate 1991, 81) Ruskin writes,

[n]o air is sweet that is silent; it is only sweet when full of low currents of under sound – triplets of birds, and murmur and chirp of insects . . . As the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary; – the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle; because man doth not live by bread only.

It is exactly this same idea that Lessing is also entertaining in *Shikasta*. Living by bread only, that is by considering only the worldly affairs, humans are reduced to the level of other animals. Being a human being requires a different level of awareness; awareness of themselves, their surroundings and of being a part of these surroundings. God, or any other divine entity for that matter, is not mentioned in *Shikasta*, but there is still a certain sense of pantheism detectable in the Shikastan nature, as already suggested. “There is something else, stronger than anything: the well-being, the always renewing, regenerative, healing force of nature; feeling one with the other creatures of Shikasta and its soil, and its plants” (*Shikasta*, 250). Nourishment for the body is not sufficient for human beings, nourishment for the mind – or the soul, if you prefer – is also required.

Bate (1991, 82) writes that for Ruskin real happiness is “in the keeping of the little mosses of the wayside” and the clouds in the sky, but

the world tramples the mosses and forgets the clouds; the march of progress will destroy the natural world. Science has packed the clouds into iron cylinders and made the steam engine that enables man to travel at a cloud pace; it has got weavable fibres out of the mosses. The modern age imagines that such advances will bring mankind closer to paradise; soon, however, says Ruskin, it will become apparent that going fast is no more paradisaical than going slow and that all the prints and cotton in Manchester cannot make us comfortable in the mind.

For Ruskin all this is precious because they are the creation of God. “When we see this, we may see too ‘that God paints the clouds and shapes the moss-fibres’ [...], that these things are therefore sacred, and that only by living in harmony with them rather than exploiting and destroying them

may we be reparaed (Bate 1991, 82). If one disregards the divine presence in Ruskin view, this is again exactly the picture Lessing is painting in *Shikasta*. The world really is ‘reparaed’ in the end, when the Shikastans are able to leave their old world and its corruptive influences behind them and begin building their future. It is done by hand, in the wild nature, and out of the reach of modern developments. A life of fruitful asceticism seems to follow. Bate (1991, 83) writes that Ruskin refused to separate economics and scientific fact from ethics because he saw the human indifference to nature as monstrous *hubris*. The disregard for nature was a

blasphemy against nature, a symptom of mankind’s degeneracy. Ruskin said that he did not know whether the plague-cloud could be dispersed and the clear sky brought back, but that what his audience assuredly could do was to purify themselves. To translate his point into the language of our own time: ecology has to be an attitude of mind before it can be an effective set of environmental policies. (Bate 1991, 83)

The idea that Wordsworth and other Romantics were trying to advocate, that a closer relationship to nature provides humans with a better mental health, is at work in *Shikasta*. Lessing focuses her criticism to what she calls the white races of the Northwest fringes; in other words she mainly criticizes the Western culture, its alienation from nature and its exaggerated consumption. Indigenous peoples, who still live outside modern civilization, are in a better condition than the rest, for their relation to nature and earth is much closer. Lessing clearly idealizes this closer contact, as it means that people are in a better balance with their environment. Of the original inhabitants of Southern Continent I – or Africa – Lessing writes: “They lived in a balance with their surroundings, taking no more than they were able to put back. Their ‘religion’ was an expression of this oneness with the land they lived on, medicine was an extension and an expression of their religion, and their wise men and women knew how to cure the sicknesses of the mind” (*Shikasta*, 199). The indigenous peoples are also the real saviours of *Shikasta*, as they have through times ensured the continuous flow of SOWF by preserving the precious Lock between Canopus and *Shikasta*. “Many times in the history of *Shikasta* our bond has been maintained by a culture or subculture considered contemptible by the ruling power” (*Shikasta*, 145).

Wordsworth and Ruskin both strive for a condition, in which labour is harmonized with nature, since this is beneficial for everyone (Bate 1991, 51). Wordsworth's shepherds are free and they work for themselves, representing, in the lines of Marxist thought, the spirit of unalienated labour. "Despite the absence of alienation and appropriation, Wordsworth's image is not that of prelapsarian Eden. This is *working* paradise" (Bate 1991, 22). In *Shikasta* the idea of labour is also important. It provides humans with the possibility to develop themselves, and to provide for the common good: to feel needed and to be an integral and valuable part of the community. Any work at all does not suffice, however. It is not insignificant what this work consists of. Just as the virtue depends on who is co-operating with whom and for what purpose (Eagleton 2003, 172), the value of work depends on its purpose. The meaninglessness of the modern labour projects itself on the wellbeing of the individual:

When he is at his work – if he has any, for he may be one who is merely kept alive, not being used, or stretched, or developed through his labour – he, at his work, again and again, because the need is so old, renews himself in the thought that this work of his benefits others, that it links him with others, he is in a creative mesh and pulse with all the labourers of the earth... but he is checked, is stopped, the thought cannot live on in him, there is bitterness and anger, and then a weariness, disbelief: he does not know why, she does not know why, but it is as if they are pouring away the best of themselves into nothingness. (*Shikasta*, 252)

F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson (2000, 74) discuss this same theme and argue that we all suffer from the loss of the organic community: "[t]he modern citizen no more knows how the necessities of life come to him (he is quite out of touch, we say, with 'primary production') than he can see his own work as a significant part in the human scheme (he is merely earning wages or making profits)..." And this results in uneasiness, not only for the working classes, but also for all of the society. They state that this present period in human history is strictly abnormal in its alienation from the land on which they live on (*ibid.*). In a manner differing from Lessing's, they point out that there is no going back into the state of the organic community. However, they state that "[i]t is important to insist on what has been lost lest it be forgotten; for the memory of the old

order must be the chief incitement towards a new, if ever we are to have one” (Leavis and Thompson 2000, 76).²²

Harmonious existence within nature, and labour integrated to the surroundings, are fundamental necessities, and indeed regulated by the Canopean Law in *Shikasta*.

Canopus forbade them to use each other or the other creatures of the planet as servants, unless these servants were treated as well as they would treat themselves, as equals at all times. [...] Canopus forbade them to kill animals unless it was for food, and then only with care and without cruelty. They must plant crops, [...] and must harvest fruit and nuts. [...] [t]hey might not waste the fruits of the earth, and each might take only what was needed, no more. (*Shikasta*, 83)

Occupying the earth is a matter of necessity and as such it is appropriate, but subjugating the earth is not acceptable. A similar idea seems to lie behind Bate’s (1991, 40) citation of Wordsworth, in the idea that “man ought to be ‘earth’s thoughtful lord’ but he has abnegated his responsibilities in the name of material gain.” Similarities between Wordsworth and Lessing’s ideas in *Shikasta* are notable. Lessing strongly makes the point that humans should not take more from the earth than they can return, and not take more than they need. Capitalism and consumerism are therefore the targets of Lessing’s bitter critique in *Shikasta*. In its fervour and tone, as in its contents, Lessing’s criticism closely resembles that of Terry Eagleton’s discussed previously on chapter two.

The system of economic production depended on consumption of every conceivable kind of goods by everyone – consumption of entirely unnecessary objects, food, drink, clothes, gadgets, devices. Every person in the Northwest fringes – as in the Isolated Northern Continent – was subjected, every moment of every day, through propaganda methods more powerful than any ever known before, to the need to buy, consume, waste, destroy, throw away – and this at a time when the globe as a whole was already short of goods of every kind and the majority of *Shikasta*’s people starved and went without. (*Shikasta*, 156)

Eagleton (2003, 119) notes that for Aristotle the idea of economic profit was unnatural, and the economic profit had to be embedded within the moral. This, as has been discussed, leads to the

²² There is quite a significant similarity in the thoughts of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2000), the “two leading twentieth-century Marxists [...], who now appear as indispensable figures in the tradition of socialist ecology” (Coupe 2000, 63), as they insist that culture grows from nature, and they base their criticism of modernity, alienated from nature, on the idea of repressed memory of nature.

ideology of socialism. But looking at this question from the point of view of ecocriticism and nature, it also leads to the questions of sustainable development and conservation.

It is somewhat surprising, that Lessing's nature is not depicted, for instance, as the subjugated Other. A more sensitive approach to nature could have been expected from a feminist-orientated anti-colonial female writer, but instead what she seems to offer is a view of nature that reminds one of the model of the garden suggested by both Michael Pollan in his *Second Nature* (1991) and Frederick Turner in "Cultivating the American Garden" (1996). In this model all of nature is treated pragmatically as a garden, not as wilderness. Lessing actually refers to Shikasta and its nature as a garden, which the Canopeans maintain. "Shikasta [...] was like a rich garden [...]. But this garden could not be maintained as it had been" (*Shikasta*, 62). In this aspect Lessing seems to adopt the position of a heterosexual dominant male towards nature, which is rather surprising in the light of her other works and her other themes. Pollan (1991, 50) states "[w]e are, like it or not, lords of creation." This is very anthropocentric, but as such tries not to make any other claims about it. So is Lessing, and she makes no other claims about it either.

Bate is critical of the fact that questions of landownership have overridden what he considers to be more relevant questions in ecocritical discussion. Arguing against Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) and McGann's "fellow anti-romantic romanticists," Bate (1993, 65-66) suggests that "[i]f, then, romanticism is a critique of materialism, of capitalism in its high industrial phase, is it not perverse to undertake a materialist critique of romanticism?" Bate (1991, 18-19) notes that the claim that "there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular form of government" is interesting in the sense that almost everywhere on earth land is owned or claimed by someone, and in a small country like Britain the pressure of landownership has always been heightened. "What, then, are the politics of our relationship to nature? For a poet, the pastoral is the traditional mode in which that relationship is explored. Pastoral has not done well in recent neo-Marxist criticism, but if there is to be an

ecological criticism the ‘language that is ever green’ must be reclaimed” Bate (1991, 19) argues. “If we are to use romanticism to politicize our students, might not it be more interesting to use it to show them that trees matter in relation to things which are more far-reaching than landownership?” (Bate 1993, 66)

The theme of occupying the land brings one also to the theme of colonialism. Colonialism is a theme Lessing has frequently discussed in her writings, and it is also an integral theme in *Shikasta*. Lessing is highly critical of colonialism and the power and lack of responsibility colonialists exert over the colonized. Therefore it is somewhat puzzling that the great colonizers of Shikasta, the Canopean Empire, are not presented in a critical light at all. This seems quite problematic, especially from the point of view of the colonized, as the Canopeans, among other things, do exercise their breeding programmes on the Shikastans, and repeatedly commit mass murders. All the other colonizing powers are very critically approached in *Shikasta*, the latest of them being the ‘Benevolent tutelage’ of the communist China, whose actions, it is suggested, are the reason and ignition for the Third World War. It is rather interesting that Lessing chose the communist China as the initiator for the war – though it is stated in elsewhere in *Shikasta* (p. 121), that the war began in error as a result of a malfunction of a mechanism – rather than, for instance, the capitalist United States of America.

In a manner traditional to Romanticism, Wordsworth’s poetry “sustains the critique of industrialization and urbanization” (Bate 1991, 21). “The Wanderer does not omit to speak of the favourable effects of industry, but his main concern is to produce graphic images of the deprivation of and dehumanization that are the price of ‘progress’. In this, he is voicing the concerns that Ellen Swallow later brought together under the banner of ecology” (Bate 1991, 41). Lessing is also very critical of modern technological and scientific advancements, and in *Shikasta* she clearly prefers a life of asceticism to utilizing modern advancements. Marsha Rowe (1982, 192) notes that “[t]hrough [*Shikasta*] Doris Lessing questions any residual clinging to the belief that we have

attained the pinnacle of progress.” Technology diverts humans from more important things in life. “Technology was the key to all good, and that good was always material increase, gain, comfort, pleasure. The real purposes of life – so long ago perverted, kept alive with such difficulty by [the Canopeans], maintained at such a cost – had been forgotten, were ridiculed by those who had ever heard of them, for distorted inklings of the truth remained in the religions” (*Shikasta*, 118). In a manner similar to Wordsworth’s Wanderer, Lessing aims to produce images of the deprivation of humans as the consequence of the focus on progress. The subsequent moral decline shows itself, as previously discussed, literally on the Shikastans, as “every face was deformed, inwardly or outwardly” (*Shikasta*, 138). Ruskin (2000, 31) wrote critically on the subject of industrialization and railways that “the really precious things are thought and sight, not pace. It does a bullet no good to go fast; and a man, if he be truly a man, no harm to go slow; for his glory is not at all in going, but in being.”

Wordsworth’s shepherds and Lessing’s Canopeans seem to serve a very similar purpose and function. Bate (1991, 29-30) writes of Wordsworth and his shepherds that

the purpose of book eight of *The Prelude* is not so much to show shepherds as they are but rather to bring forward an image of human greatness, to express faith in the perfectibility of mankind once institutions and hierarchies are removed and we are free, enfranchised, and in an unmediated, unalienated relationship with nature. [...] [T]he working Lakeland farmer, free from institutional constraint, is a true shepherd of the people. By virtue of his relationship with his environment he represents human potential wrought to its uttermost.

In *Shikasta* this human potential wrought to its utmost is presented in the form of the Canopeans. Canopeans represent something that humans should strive for, and could, in philosophical terms, achieve by loving nature and each other. They form a socialist society of equality in its utmost form, and they utilize nature in a sustainable way. But whether their dominion of nature really is that ideal as that of Wordsworth’s shepherds, or as Lessing seems to suggest, is rather questionable after all. Whether their rather unconstrained manipulation of nature – portrayed in their breeding programmes in *Shikasta* and in other colonies – really displays the kind of moral consideration for

nature as proposed necessary by Wordsworth and many others after him, remains a problematic question, open to discussion.

However, as the Third World War functions as the revolution that overturns the current world order, the Canopeans work as a resistance movement arranging a favourable change for the future, shepherding their flocks to safety. The new beginning for humankind is again harmonious with nature, and the new world order is based on love and the fellow feeling. This we-feeling is universal love; high standards of morality are of course integral to it. The world seems to reach a state where morality can again extend as far as nature. The survival of humankind depends on the fact that nature continues to grow and spread over the ruins of the old civilizations; in other words, rather ironically, the survival of the humanity depends on nature's dominion over all that humans have brought to the planet. Everyone does not share this optimism for survival though. Harris (1991, 43) finds that "[i]t is hard to share her optimism that blades of grass will grow, that new people will be born, after the world as we know it ends." But this has, of course, been the case over and over again in the course of evolution, when the planet has met with different kinds of catastrophes. Catastrophes are a part of the natural circulation of the planet, part of its cycles. However, it is true that the dominant species have gone extinct in the course of these upheavals in the past, so whether humans would survive the next upheaval is a great question indeed.

But Lessing seems optimistic. There is an interesting correspondence between Lessing's optimism and Wordsworth's faith in the continuance of life, as the following, rather lengthy but opportune quotation demonstrates.

In the final section of ['The Ruined Cottage'], nature's processes are seen as inexorable. The weeds go on growing, oblivious of human suffering, but for Wordsworth an indefinable 'spirit of humanity' insinuates its way into that growth. Paradoxically, nature's very indifference seems to guarantee humanity's survival. 'Survived' is the climactic word in Wordsworth's lines, and knowing what weight he attached to words we need to remember its Latin root – *super vivere* – to live beyond. Wordsworth's intensely immanent religion – we may perhaps allow ourselves to say his 'pantheism' – is at work here. There is no sense of Margaret 'living beyond' in heaven; not until very late in life did Wordsworth rewrite part of this ending in the language of orthodox Christianity. What we do sense is that since the vegetation lives beyond, lives on, her

spirit somehow survives too. [...] Humanity only survives *in nature*. Human survival and the survival of nature are therefore co-ordinate with one another. [...] Behind the whole passage there is the startling idea that where wilderness reasserts itself there the spirit of humanity survives. Orthodox thought defines man through his mastery over nature; 'The Ruined Cottage' proposes that the survival of humanity comes with nature's mastery over the edifices of civilization. Wordsworth reminds us that a claim can be made for the weeds (Bate 1991, 34).

Surviving and prospering are also Lessing's chief concerns in my view. But here the concern is turned towards the survival of the humankind. Although Lessing stresses the interconnectedness of everything in the world, her perspective is still very anthropocentric. Her concern towards the spoiling and poisoning of nature seems to be essentially for the sake of the human race; it is not like humans have anywhere to escape to. The consolation and harmony that Wordsworth finds in nature's survival, does not reach Lessing. Lessing seems very aware, however, of the fact how acutely we need nature in order to survive.

Wordsworth parallels the beauty of nature and its heartlessness; his poetry is also poetry of human suffering, human pain and mortality are present (Bate 1991, 71). Human suffering is a quintessential theme in Lessing's writing as well, regardless of which theoretical framework one examines it from. The turmoil of the life on Shikasta is not easy to bear with a clear focus. The image of a pumpkin flower retains the hope of human amendment in the chaos: "He has seen once a pumpkin vine sprawling its great leaves and yellow flowers and sumptuous golden globes over a vast rubbish heap, where flies sizzle and simmer – at the time he hardly noticed it, and now it is an image for his imagination to find rest in, and comfort" (*Shikasta*, 253). Lessing suggests, however, that when it comes to human beings, this comfort is nowadays misplaced, or misleading. Though the idea of a natural cycle – of something being born, living, dying, returning to earth only to be born again in some form – is a simple fact, simply relying on this, and taking comfort in this, is, Lessing suggests, to be misled. It is only the awareness of the 'the other truth,' of the higher understanding, that in reality provides the substance to life and deliverance from the chaos of life on

Shikasta. Here Lessing is rather mystical, tilted towards the Ruskinian view of the world, and transcendence is the key.

Lessing suggests that people turn to nature since their other reality blunters have lost their effect.

Each one these alliances of an individual with some greater whole, the identification of an individual with a mental structure larger than himself, was a drug, a prop, a pacifier for children. These were greater than alcohol and opium and the rest, but they are going, thinning, dissolving, and the insensate and furious, fanatic and desperate struggles that go on in the name of this or that creed or belief, the very fury, is a means of stilling self-doubt, numbing the terror of isolation. (*Shikasta*, 249)

Humans need something to fill in the void caused by the lack of substance in their lives. Some try this by dulling their reality with intoxicating substances, other hurl themselves into religions, nationalisms, politics or science. And others turn to nature for comfort. Lessing differs from Wordsworth in that in *Shikasta* some people are facing a state utter despondency: they are losing even the ever recuperating and encouraging impact of nature. The pollution and destruction of nature have proceeded so far, that even nature loses its ability to comfort those individuals who are beginning to have a grasp of what is happening to their environment.

They watch the a flight of birds, as they stand together at their windows, and it is as if they are sorrowfully saying goodbye, with a silent corrosive, tearing apology on behalf of the species they belong to: destruction is what they have brought to these creatures, destruction and poisoning is their gift, and the swerve and balancing of a bird does not delight and rest, but becomes another place from which they learn to avert their eyes, in pain. (*Shikasta*, 254)

Here Lessing is also voicing the concerns of the toxic discourse, outlined by Lawrence Buell in his article “Toxic Discourse” (1998). The toxic discourse is about expressing the anxieties caused by the realization of the chemically inflicted destruction and its threat on the environment, and Karoliina Lummaa (2008, 57) notes that Buell’s definition of the toxic discourse can be considered not only as a certain type of rhetoric, but also as an emotive world dominated by feelings of guilt, fear and terror.

Wordsworth's and Ruskin's visions differ somewhat, but Bate (1991, 70) argues their similarities are much more significant. "In his supposition that spiritual impoverishment is inherent in the process of urbanization, Ruskin stands squarely in the Wordsworthian tradition," Bate argues (1991, 77). Ruskin aims to show with his writings how the love of nature has been neglected, and denies the then modern notion that it belongs to slackers of some kind. He argues that from the love of nature inherently follows also a deeper faith in God (Bate 1991, 80). For Ruskin (2000, 29) love of nature is connected to the moral character of a person. "[Love of nature] is an invariable sign of goodness of heart and justness of moral *perception*, though by no means *practice*; [...] when it is originally absent from any mind, that mind is in many other respects hard, worldly, and degraded." Nature-worship provides the kind of sense of the Great Spirit, which cannot be achieved with reasoning. Nature becomes a channel for certain kinds of holy truths (Bate 1991, 80). Ruskin justifies his claim by saying that love of nature is an essential part of the book of Job and the Sermon on the Mount, which he considers to be the most elemental parts of the Bible, and from which he hears God's voice most clearly (ibid.)

Here Ruskin is an heir to eighteenth-century natural religion: the association between the love of nature and the four chapters of Job goes back to Edward Young's verse *Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job* of 1719, which consisted of precisely these chapters rendered in isolation from the rest of the book, and to the defence of the poetry of nature in James Thomson's 1726 preface to the second edition of his *Winter*. (Bate 1991, 80)

Belief for Ruskin, as for Wordsworth's Wanderer, "is a matter not of doctrinal nicety but of contemplating the lilies of the field. By now, the language has been transformed into that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the love of nature has become connected not with the faithlessness of the age but with 'the benevolence and liberty of the age'; it is not morbid but 'precisely the most healthy element which distinctively belongs to us'" (Bate 1991, 81).

It was Wordsworth who taught Ruskin to love and value nature and the Wordsworthian faith in the moral of landscape remained as the foundation on which Ruskin built "in a way that speaks vitally to us today, for by the end of his analysis he had come to something

new: a programme for education into ecological consciousness” (Bate 1991, 83-84). “The point of Wordsworth’s project was to teach the intellect of man to wed itself to ‘the green earth’ which is its ‘living home’ and the point of Ruskin’s was to expose the limitations of nineteenth-century political economy by moving from material to the spiritual” (Bate 1991, 85). Bate (1991, 58) also argues that it was Ruskinian texts, not Marx’s *Capital*, that “were the inspirational force behind the socialism of Morris and others; English socialism is at root more ‘green’ than it is ‘Marxist.’” Bate (1993, 67) sets forth an appeal to the Western sense and sensibility:

If the planet is to be saved, we in the superdeveloped West will have to change our ways; before we can change our ways we will have to change our minds. To change our minds, we need new ways of conceptualizing the world. The non-human must be seen as something other than what both Marxism and capitalism see it as, the raw material for production. It must be viewed as romanticism viewed it, with wonder and reverence, not rapaciousness.

It has been suggested here, that although Lessing undisputedly gives humans a central position in the world, their need of the connection to and dependence on nature is also emphasized. Lessing draws a continuum between humans and nature, between flora and fauna, and between the world as we know it and the whole universe.

There [the leaf] lies in a palm, [...] and the mind meditating there sees its supporting ribs, the myriads of its veins branching, and rebranching, its capillaries, the minuscule areas of its flesh which are not – as it seems to this brooding human eye – fragments of undifferentiated substance between the minute feeding arteries and veins, but, if one could see them, highly structured worlds, the resources of chemical and microscopic cell life, viruses, bacteria – a universe in each pin-point of leaf. It is already dragged to the soil as it lies there captive, a shape as perfect as ship’s sail in full wind or the shell of a snail. (*Shikasta*, 254)

Everything here is connected to everything else, and on the level of the atoms, we are all the same. Every cell of the ‘flesh’ of the leaf contains a universe of its own, just as our world is but a minuscule speck in the surrounding universe. The kind of ‘animation’ suggested in this quotation extends beyond the cells and arteries of the flora and fauna; it extends itself to everything in the world.

Lessing's connection to the soil has been previously pointed out. Nicole Ward Jouve (1982, 80) points out in her article "Of mud and other matter – *The Children of Violence*" that "[b]y the time of [*The Four-Gated City*], Africa's of course been left behind, there's no mud left anywhere. Anyhow. The disappearance of mud from the universe of the novels is bound up (runs parallel with) the disappearance of the home. The mud house. The childhood house. 'Roots.'" The transition from the close contact with the earth to the urban environment causes the loss of the sense of home (Jouve 1982, 81). Similarly in *Shikasta* Rachel is the happiest while she lives in the mud house in Morocco, in the bosom of the earth, and sleeps under the vast starry skies. "*This is my bedroom. It is more like a cabbyhole. But I like it. It is very cool. It is all mud. It has an earthy smell. A damp smell, because I sprinkle water in the morning before the sun gets hot. And I throw down water outside the door morning and evening, to keep the dust down, and the smell is gorgeous*" (*Shikasta*, 278). Later when they live in Tunis, Rachel remembers sadly, "*I felt perfectly at home in that mud rabbit warren. I loved living there. [...] In this block there is no sleeping on the roof. That was the best thing I ever knew*" (*Shikasta*, 312-313). The connection to the earth and the loss of it being the loss of home and the loss of roots is also, as can be seen, a theme in *Shikasta*.

However, in *Shikasta* the consequences of the loss of connection are taken even further. As previously suggested, the continuum extends from the humans to everything else in the world. Not only the humans, animals, vegetation or water suffer from it but also the bedrock of the planet itself is affected. The pollution originally resulting from the humankind's alienation from nature extends through all the different life forms all the way to the stones. In the times of Rohanda when the connection was still preserved, humans worked hard and kept the stones in towns aligned as they were instructed, all the while nurturing the precious Lock. The nurturing of the stones can be interpreted as a more sensitive and responsive relationship to their environment. When things fall apart in *Shikasta*, and the connection to the earth is lost and the stones no longer maintained, they begin to emanate bad vibrations instead of the good ones. Even the stones become corrupted. Johor

reports how he feels the “very strong vibrations of the city and [how] its environing Stones were causing real physical damage” (*Shikasta*, 72). The damage caused is physical and concrete, just as the toxic wastes in the actual world can cause very real physical consequences. There are long-term repercussions for this contamination, as the towns with their stones continue to be places of intoxication and negative effects long after the harmony is again restored. Again, just like the pollution in the nonfictional world can cause very long-term effects indeed in our closed ecosystem.

As I have suggested within this thesis, although she left communism behind her, Lessing has yet been a famously leftist writer. In *Shikasta* the socialist elements are also clearly discernible, but there is also a clear shift in her philosophy and politics, and this is towards ecological issues and green values. Lessing’s approach to nature is very anthropocentric, and even though it is for the sake of the human race, she nevertheless questions the human impact on the Earth. In the manner of Romantics and Wordsworth, Lessing emphasizes the symbiosis between the economy of nature and the activities of humankind.

5. Return to Innocence – Conclusion

The power nature wields over the Shikastans, the emotions it evokes, are often beyond their comprehension. Their reactions vary, and they cannot justify themselves, nor argue with or against them. Many see themselves simply as a part of nature and a part of the natural cycle; others revere and worship it, apologetic about the destruction their species have caused it. But some, Lessing writes, still a minority but in growing numbers, are able to see nature for what it is: a “fierce and furious war of eating and being eaten” (*Shikasta*, 256). Despite nature being the perpetual source of life force in *Shikasta*, Lessing does not romanticize nature, at least not quite in the traditional Romantic sense. Lessing’s nature is not about the gleam of the first rays of sunlight on a drop of water on a freshly bloomed orchid; it is more like a ruthless fight for survival. In this Lessing differs from Wordsworth, but what is more interesting in my view is the similarity of their message, and this message has to do with how to best live in these circumstances. Although Lessing’s approach is extremely anthropocentric, its central message is to have the reader to reconsider their position in the world and their effect on it. And in this it is green indeed.

In *Shikasta* Lessing aims to construct a picture of harmonious symbiosis between humans and nature, and opposes it to the depleting parasitism. Lessing’s nature is not a place of continuous harmony but a place of continuous war. It is not, however, a war between good and evil, as Lessing does not humanize nature in that sense. Lessing does not employ pathetic fallacy, as nature is not provided with human qualities, nature just exists; just as the bodies we humans have just ‘are,’ they are not good or bad in themselves. The potentiality for ‘goodness’ and ‘badness’ lies in our minds, and it is our duty as human beings to develop this ‘goodness,’ Lessing suggests, and hence to lift ourselves above the mere battle of existence. In a similar manner, as mindful colonizers of the earth, we as humankind also have the choice to either use the earth sustainably for our own good – which would also be in the benefit of all the other living creatures – or to deplete it,

eventually causing its and our own destruction. The Canopean Empire provides the moral model for human colonization of the earth; Shammat provides the mirror for us.

Despite the theme of returning to nature, Lessing's disposition is not towards American transcendentalism – that is, towards the sublime transcendental idea of an individual's return into nature, which can be seen, for instance, in Thoreau's subjective experiences of the greatness of nature. For Lessing it is, again, about the collective experience: the collective and communal return to nature and the natural forces and resources, also the mystical ones. This is possible, however, only after a great upheaval in the world. Lessing's approach in fact bears a close resemblance to the British variant of ecocriticism, which, as has been noted previously, aims at warning people of the “environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial, and neocolonial forces” (Barry 2002, 251). What is interesting, and also rather disturbing, is the fact that despite the Third World War being presented as a real and existing threat, an immensely destructive holocaust just waiting to engulf the world, its realisation is, in the end, presented in a rather positive light. It is the event that enables the human return to innocence and harmony.

Sarah Henstra (2007, 3) discusses Lessing's prophetic voice in *The Golden Notebook*, and presents a critical question; how should one act, if one believes for sure that the world is heading towards a nuclear holocaust? In the end, there are two choices: to be silent, or not to be. As already noted in the introduction, Lessing had approached the issue of apocalypse, the nuclear holocaust, in her writing previous to *Shikasta*, and had been disappointed that the theme had been overshadowed in criticism by other, less relevant, matters. In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing delivered her prophecy through the words of Anna Wolff, as Anna agonized over the question on how to write about the threat of the nuclear war, when the surrounding society seemed unable to comprehend the oncoming disaster (Henstra 2007, 9). In *Shikasta* Lessing brings this theme into a clearer focus. This time she not only suggests that something is going to happen, but she presents

the reader with the holocaust actually happening. Lessing's choice, obviously, was not to stay silent.

Henstra (2007, 12) also notes the moral controversies of speaking about a catastrophe. On one hand there is the grim task of breaking people's peace – their self-denial – and spreading the bad news, and on the other hand, there is the importunate attraction to the bad news in question, the awkwardness of being “too interested in crisis or destruction.” If Anna Wolff was “caught between the need to articulate her dread about the nuclear conflict and the fear of inciting further conflict with her work” (Henstra 2007, 13), in *Shikasta* Lessing seems to have overcome that dread. The disaster is bound to happen, and it is only a matter of time. Magie (1977, 550-551) writes on *The Memoirs of a Survivor* that

since her concern is collective rather than individual, it is all of humanity, the entire world experienced by humanity, that must die. Such is the logic of the transcended quest. [...] She wants the disaster she abhors, because only beyond that death is the imagined fulfilment attainable.”

It seems Magie has a point here. Perhaps this explains the lack of prophetic passion Magie faults her with;²³ the disaster is something Lessing feels the need to give voice to – as in to make people aware of the oncoming affair – but is also something she expects to happen. ‘Expects’, as in almost looks forward to. In *Shikasta* the nuclear holocaust presents a new beginning for humanity, something that has to take place in order there to be any hope for the humanity to evolve.

It could be argued that what is at work here in Lessing's writing is what Ralf Norrman (1998) calls ‘love of symmetry.’ Norrman (1998, 10) argues that “love of symmetry is an important shaping force in thought, language and literature,” and it is a universal phenomenon. He argues that what “symmetricism offers humans is a magic vision of restored wholeness,” and it is achieved through ‘inversion’ (Norrman 1998, 11).

²³ Magie (1977, 549) argues that Lessing lacks the prophet's passion and commitment. As this argument was set forth prior to the publication of *Shikasta*, it remains an open question whether Magie would still hold that position.

A bilaterally symmetric whole is made up of two halves, which are each other's mirror-images, each other's inversions, each other's enantiomorphs. Thus in bilateral symmetry there is repetition, in that two halves are the same (except inverted), and there is also inversion, in that the order of the elements in each half is the opposite of the order of the elements in the other half. *Wholeness* is achieved when you add, to an existing half, by means of repetition and inversion, another half; *the* other half; *its* other half. This is how the symmetry is achieved, and such is the magic power of inversion. (Norrman 1998, 11)

The reason the world is not very well aware of the powerful influence of symmetry on our existence, Norrman (1998, 12) argues, is that we fail to understand the connection between inversion and symmetry. The satisfaction wholeness causes in humans is of many kinds, one kind being an aesthetic pleasure, but it is not easy to distinguish between these different forms. Having said this,

it can, however, be argued that one variety of symmetric longing for which there is evidence in human culture is a "metaphysical" variety. Man and life are in such cases perceived as "not-whole", and a state before the beginning of time and after the end of time is seen as a state of perfection, which is in various ways linked to symmetry. The longing for paradise or heaven is imbued with symmetricist desire. (Norrman 1998, 14)

Love of symmetry involves a panhuman longing for perfection, where "mankind [is] made *perfect* again through a return to paradise, to an unfallen state, in which to the concepts of *hale* and *whole* we may now add *holy*. Through asymmetry paradise was lost; through the magic of symmetry wholeness might be restored, and paradise regained" (Norrman 1998, 11-12). He also notes that when 'progress' fails to satisfy, the wish for 'regression' is universal (Norrman 1998, 10). In the words of Barbara G. Myerhoff, Norrman (1998, 25) states that "[s]urely the vision of an original condition of unity, before the world and mankind began, is one of the most common themes in religions of every nature and place." Norrman also (1998, 26) quotes Meyerhof and her discussion of reversal and its varied uses:

The theme of reversal, in all its permutations and combinations – opposition (complementary and binary), inversion, and dualism – has always been of great interest to anthropologists, mythographers, psychologists, linguists, and artists. The subject seems inexhaustible. In anthropology alone, we continue to unravel additional layers of meaning, to discover more and more functions fulfilled by reversals in various contexts. Recent studies especially have shown how reversals can be used to make statements

about the social order – to affirm it, attack it, suspend it, redefine it, oppose it, buttress it, emphasize one part of it at the cost of another, and so forth.

The symmetric longing Norrman describes is clearly evident in *Shikasta*. *Shikasta* presents a state where a human is perceived as ‘not whole,’ whereas they used to be so and will again eventually become so. The human perfection and a paradisiacal state are achieved through symmetry and inversions, which were, in a way, previously discussed in the form of the cyclical nature of *Shikasta*. *Shikasta* begins with the harmonious state of Rohanda, but things fall apart and state of Shikasta chaos follows. But through another collapse the harmonious state is again reached, and such a cycle is suggested as being repetitious. As previously suggested, one of Lessing’s motivations for this type of longing is indeed the disappointment in the progress of the world, and motivation for writing *Shikasta* can be interpreted as the questioning and redefining of – utopian – the social order of the world.

There are strong – utopian – socialist values presented in *Shikasta*, as especially shown in chapter two, in my discussion of *Shikasta* in relation to Terry Eagleton’s ethics. But Lessing’s visions clearly stand within the Romantic tradition of environmental writing. In the footsteps of Romantics such as Wordsworth and Ruskin, Lessing presents her readers with a text that invites them to reconsider their surrounding environs and their own part in it. In this it is as much ecocritical as it is Romantic. One of the morals of *Shikasta* seems to be that we humans, as a collective and as individuals, should really come to recognize the fact that our planet is a closed ecosystem, which we pollute and destroy at our own peril. Although Lessing’s main concerns clearly lie with human beings, she strongly endeavours to make the point that we, as individuals and as a species, cannot concentrate solely on ourselves. In order to prosper and indeed survive, we need to think on a larger scale. We cannot survive without a surviving planet, and we cannot survive as a species without the others of our kind.

As a summation it could be argued that it is morality, the ability to reason for the benefit of all, that lifts humans above the rest of the nature in *Shikasta*. Our dominant position and

therefore our dominion of the earth is an unavoidable fact of life, from which it follows that we have a moral responsibility towards those under our power. Although intuition is emphasized throughout the story, when it comes to making moral decisions, it is rationality one needs to rely on. Emotionalism, in Canopean terms, is the result of precarious Shikasta influences (*Shikasta*, 196). Since reasoning is an ability given each individual of the species, each one should take the responsibility for their own part. Turning the other way and shifting the responsibility to others is not acceptable. As Marsha Rowe (1982, 193) notes, in *Shikasta* “Doris Lessing appears to stress engagement with the world as the choice which must be made.” In a manner similar to Eagleton’s (2003, 124), the moral of *Shikasta* seems to be that morality is a question of duty, on an individual and on a collective level.

Jayne Glover (2006, 130) suggested in her reading of *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* that Lessing seems to take an ecofeminist stance in that she rejects the domination and abuse of both women and nature, but she does not suggest that the opposite is without problems, rather that we need both reason and emotional empathy, order and freedom, human and animal, male and female, in order to strive towards a fulfilled and balanced world. “Perhaps what Lessing is saying is that the best pattern of behaviour is premised on the idea of ecology – that is, many different parts, working together, in an evolving, dynamic equilibrium” (ibid.). I believe Glover’s reading is quite an apt one and can partly – with the exception that in *Shikasta* her position is not an ecofeminist one – be applied to *Shikasta* as well. The ethics Lessing presents in *Shikasta* in the Canopean form repeatedly reminds me of Eagleton’s (2003, 172) suggestion, “[w]hat if the sharing of life becomes its own purpose, rather as in the activity we know as art?”

The idea of interconnectedness is a pervasive feature in *Shikasta*, as already indicated. The balance in life is only attainable if all of its components are in concordance. However, the interconnectedness is also manifested in a form other than the idea of ecology, that is in the form of

intertextuality. Harris (1991, 41) notes that “[t]hese archives [...] build on the Bible, recorded history, and a science fiction novel by Olaf Stapledon, *First and Last Men: A Story of the Near and Far Future* (1930).” She also notes that there are many features from *Gulliver’s Travels*, such as giants and pygmies, and geometric cities²⁴. As Roland Barthes suggests, a text is always ‘plugged in’ to other texts ‘intertextually.’ This critical idea translates to a collective sense of the world, the substance-of-we-feeling, on which *Shikasta* depends, Harris notes (1991, 41). Bate (1991, 60-61) on the other hand, notes that there are elements of Ruskin, which can seem disturbing to modern readers.

There are aspects of late Ruskin which we will want to reject – the moral opprobriousness; the obsessive, near-paranoid tone; the element of feudalism in the alternative vision proposed – but then all readings, all uses, of literary texts are selective. Though the ecologies of Wordsworth, of Ruskin and of Morris, of Ellen Swallow, are by no means identical to our own, are very much of the nineteenth century, the core of their thinking [...] is familiar and is modern. They are the fathers and mothers of our environmental tradition. (Bate 1991, 60-61)

Echoing Bate, I would suggest that despite some of the disconcerting radical political ideas Lessing seems to present in *Shikasta* – such as the ideas of selected breeding and radical political activity – there are ideas worth pondering on, as I have aspired to illustrate within this thesis. These ideas include the elements such as sustainable ways of living, the responsibility of an individual, and the appreciation of nature as our only home. The idea of interconnectedness of all things is at the very core of all these ideas.

I am only scratching the surface with my analysis, as the confines of the thesis constrict my going deeper into this topic. I am aware of this being in great part a result of my own choices in this work; should I begin writing my thesis now, knowing what I now do, I would limit my approach differently, allowing a narrower and deeper analysis. *Shikasta* still provides many

²⁴ Harris (1991, 40) connects Lessing’s geometric cities to Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture. “Various historical and philosophical antecedents have been suggested for her ideal cities, but her impulse to use them came from a sixties mood. Optimistic ideas about town planning took strong hold on people’s imagination after the austerity and skimping of the post-war years, because it was surely thought that the inhabitants of a perfectly planned city must surely enjoy health, sanity and democracy. One particularly powerful advocate of this view was Frank Lloyd Wright” (ibid.).

interesting points for further study. For instance, one such possibility would be to essentially continue the theme of this thesis, with a slight shift of focus, and to read *Shikasta* in relation to the pastoral tradition. I have of course already suggested this in relation to the Wordsworthian pastoral in this work but I am convinced that a more extensive analysis would provide interesting reading. One could also, for instance, critically examine the questions of landownership and ‘land ethics,’ which I have not discussed in this work. Another approach, slightly different from my own work, would be an aesthetical reading of *Shikasta*, especially in relation to the notion of the ‘sublime.’ While preparing for the Romantic part of my thesis, I repeatedly encountered interesting points that would, in my opinion, be worth of study. There are some previous works related to this topic written on Lessing, such as Penelope Anne Lefew’s unpublished doctoral dissertation *Schopenhauerian will and aesthetics in novels by George Eliot, Olive Schreiner, Virginia Woolf, and Doris Lessing* (1992), but there are clearly quite vast unexplored areas just waiting to be scrutinized.

As I already noted in the introduction, through the years critics have tried, in vain, to place Lessing into one tradition or another. This thesis, despite my effort at positioning her into the Romantic tradition of environmental writing, does not intend to categorize Lessing as such, but to indicate that there are these elements, among others, in *Shikasta*. When writing about literature one is always affected by the time and the environment, in other words, by one’s own historical circumstances. And as Bate (1991, 5) points out, “critics are not only exegetical but also polemical,” that is to say, texts are read selectively in order to make them serve the critic’s own purposes. “But in some readings [...] the critic’s purposes are also the writer’s” (ibid.). It is my conviction that this is, at least partly, the case with my ecocritical reading of *Shikasta*. One reason for the difficulty of classifying and indeed interpreting Lessing is the fact that she is often conflicting and contradictory, as is also the case with *Shikasta*. Being inconsistent may not be

valued in science, but art is of course another matter. In Lessing's (1971, 165) own words, "It isn't either or at all, it's and, and, and, and, and, and..."

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