
Doris Lessing

A person of interest

John Callaghan

Abstract

This article examines an important phase of Doris Lessing's life – the years of her commitment to socialism, which began in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and which she continued in London as a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the New Left which emerged from it. World war and her experience of colonialism played a large part in initiating this commitment but so too did her belief that the Soviet Union represented a giant step forward as the first socialist state. She never ceased to discuss these years, but with a growing discomfort derived from her earlier support for Soviet socialism, probably compounded by the fact that she continued to express optimism about the USSR well after her resignation from the CPGB. The result was that she tended to downplay her Communist years and the work she did for the party. The article gives a fuller and clearer account of her political commitments than her own recollections provide of those socialist decades, and establishes continuities between her socialist years and the reforming zeal which suffused many of her later works of fiction.

Key words: Doris Lessing, Communism, New Left

Introduction

Doris Lessing (1919-2013) achieved international acclaim as a prolific writer of fiction and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. The Nobel citation referred to that 'scepticism, fire and visionary power' with which she 'subjected a divided civilisation to scrutiny'. Lessing's critical engagement with the social order began in the racist settler colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1939, where she was raised from the age of five. But

it was when she moved to London in 1949 and especially after she joined the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1952 that she became known as a writer and political activist. She resigned from the CPGB in 1956 and was often inclined in later decades to play down the depth of her earlier Communist political convictions and commitments. But she was no apostate.¹ Her aspirations for a better world survived her disenchantment with Communism and she remained a critic of the social order, anticipating the multiple crises of the world she has left behind.

In this article I will present an account of her socialist years which differs from her own in significant ways. In doing this, the article reveals more about her significance in the party and New Left and the esteem in which she was held by her comrades in both. Her tenacious opposition to colonialism and knowledge of the British African settler colonies had much to do with this. Anti-imperialism and anti-racism were among the attractive powers of Communism and though the commitment of the CPGB has been questioned on both counts,² Lessing was closely involved in its attempts to intervene against the colonial settlement in Central and Southern Africa. Like many other socialists and Communists she was subject to surveillance by the political police; in her case for at least twenty years. The scale of this purported 'defence of the realm' is only beginning to be understood, yet MI5 had already amassed 250,000 files on the Communist Party 'and its fellow travellers' by 1950.³ Since the release of some of these files it has become apparent that academics, scientists, poets and writers were among those whose privacy was violated by phone taps, mail and baggage intercepts and various forms of monitoring. This article draws on Lessing's files and shows the international scope of the intelligence operation.

Salisbury

Two world wars played a major role in arousing overseas support for the Communist movement and during the second conflict Doris Lessing was drawn in to left-wing politics. In Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, she met 'a group of people ... who read everything, and did not think it remarkable to read, and among whom thoughts about the Native Problem I had scarcely dared to say aloud turned out to be mere commonplaces. I became a Communist because of the spirit of the times, because of the *Zeitgeist*'.⁴ Lessing sometimes referred to this phase in her life as 'short-lived', like the *Zeitgeist* she refers to.⁵ But bearing in mind the rapid turnover of members in Communist Parties, her commitment to Marxist politics is

more accurately described as long-lived, spanning around twenty years from when she was about twenty-three until she was approaching her mid-forties. This goes some way towards explaining why she constantly talked about this phase in her life and struggled to explain it. Though she never claimed to be a political theorist, politics in the broadest sense informed her fiction and non-fiction alike, sometimes with great knowledge and insight.⁶ Her Marxist years of political activism began with the Salisbury group and included the South African Communist Party, for which she worked for some months in 1946, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the New Left which emerged from among its former members. She was no ordinary rank-and-file member in any of these transitions. In Salisbury she married the most dedicated Communist in the group; in South Africa, she worked for the communist newspaper *Guardian* in its subscriptions department, selling the journal in the industrial areas of Cape Town, at a time when its circulation was still close to its wartime peak and the post-war repression of the South African Communist Party was increasing; in London she lived for a time, from 1950, with Joan Rodker, her best friend and a remarkable activist for the CPGB who had actually lived in the Soviet Union and shared Lessing's literary interests and single parenthood. Joan, 'knew everyone in the Party ... and ... most people in the arts'.⁷ Within weeks of formally joining the CPGB Doris – now a publishing success with a deserved reputation as a talented critic of colonialism and racism – was on first name terms with some of its leaders and taking on party responsibilities. The writers' trip to the Soviet Union of 1952, which she remembers in her autobiography, was the first time she had visited the country since her family travelled back to Britain from Persia overland in 1924 and witnessed the chaos, squalor, disease and hunger of the early Bolshevik state. It was undertaken before she formally joined the party, a sign of the confidence its Communist organisers placed in her.

But there is no doubt that the circumstances of 1942-3 played a big role in drawing her in to left-wing activism. An important element of this situation, perhaps the most important, was supplied by the victories of the Red Army 'and nothing the newspapers had said for years could explain how they did it'.⁸ People were left to draw their own conclusions and many of them seem to have thought that Soviet socialism must be worth fighting for.⁹ Meetings in Salisbury were organised around Medical Aid for Russia, by Friends of the Soviet Union and a Left Club mostly composed of non-Communists who were well-disposed to the small group which established a would-be Communist Party. The goodwill had peaked

before the end of the war, however, and so had the 'party'; by VE Day, as the airmen returned home, it was finished. From the start public meetings of the 'Race Relations' group, as it was known, were attended by the CID, even though the revolutionaries had no contact with organised black groups, which did not exist in the Salisbury area. Charles Mzingele, 'who dreamed of a trade union of mine workers', was the only black African with whom the group was in regular contact.¹⁰ But the hyper-active fraternity to which Lessing belonged managed to establish a branch of the Southern Rhodesian Labour Party for black members, with Mzingele as its intended leader.

In 1943 she married Gottfried Lessing, a lawyer and leading figure among the Salisbury Communists, who had fled Nazi Germany in 1938 and reached Southern Rhodesia via Britain (where 70,000 alien refugees resided when the war began). Gottfried's commitment to the party was lifelong. He settled in East Berlin in 1950, joined the Socialist Unity Party in 1951 and worked in various prominent official capacities for the DDR until his death in 1979. Doris, by contrast, doubts that she was 'really interested in politics' even at this stage in her development, judged by what she could remember about it when writing her autobiography.¹¹ Memory is notoriously unreliable, as she admits, sometimes 'utterly unreliable'.¹² John Saville, an associate of her party years, did not recognise the doubt-ridden Doris Lessing of her autobiography.¹³ Carole Klein, an unauthorised Lessing biographer, quotes an observer from her Salisbury days who also remembered it differently: 'Doris was, and to my mind still is, an ideologue'. Other acquaintances and former friends of later years took a similar view, one of them recalling Lessing after she resigned from the party in the 1950s as a person of 'radical views ... lacking in ambiguity or irony ... strangely literal-minded in her leftism'.¹⁴

British Communist Party

In 1949 she moved to London with her son and the manuscript of her first publishing success, *The Grass is Singing* (1950). She mixed with Communists for some years before she joined the CPGB 'for reasons which I still don't fully understand, but did not go to meetings and was already a "dissident", though the word had not been invented'.¹⁵ The suggestion of critical detachment, however, was not visible in her behaviour and even in her autobiography it is thrown into doubt by the notion that party membership was akin to a religious belief and that its devotees shared the mentality and capacities of the 'young activists, dedicated members of

the [Soviet] Communist Party' who carried out Stalin's directives, 'those murderers with a clear conscience'.¹⁶ This presupposes, at the least, a powerful ideological conviction and commitment to the Communist version of socialism shared by Lessing's associates and her supposedly semi-detached self. But if it is difficult to believe that Lessing's mentality was anything like that of those 'murderers with a clear conscience', she provides evidence to reinforce our doubts. One of her abiding memories of the war years, she recounts, was the shock the Salisbury group felt when the Russians publicly hung German war criminals.¹⁷ They had imagined the war in terms of named battles and had little idea of the mass murders and systematic cruelties that went on in the heart of it. Was the same true of their imaginings of 'building socialism'? Far from carrying out Stalin's orders, were Lessing and her friends able even to guess what they might be? Some answers to these questions emerged in 1956.

Lessing recalls that optimism about the future was strong in post-war London. Socialism was the key to the prevailing optimism in her own milieu. She found, however, that 'anywhere outside communist circles' people denied or simply did not want to know what she had to say about Southern Rhodesia and the Republic of South Africa. The communists were set apart – they were interested in the politics of other countries as well as their own. She was accepted as one of their number even before she joined the party. 'The world was their responsibility' and they shared her immersion in literature.¹⁸ Lessing's autobiography veers between memories of what attracted her to party circles, what had always troubled her about being a communist and what she finally found repellent. She claims that she was already 'Unhappy with communism ... unhappiest with its language' in the year she joined the party. It 'was probably the most neurotic act of my life ... at a time when my "doubts" had become something like a steady private torment'. She was 'far from a true believer' and yet one who secretly believed that the Soviet leadership had become corrupt and would be replaced by 'the good communists ... and then communism would resume its march to a just society' Doris, it seems, 'hated joining anything', and especially loathed meetings. She was upset by what she saw in Moscow in 1952, the dreary streets, the empty shops, bad clothes, even the atmosphere of Stalin's Moscow. Upon her return to Britain she was already regretting joining the party.¹⁹ Yet she spoke with the other participants at meetings organised by the CPGB, and the *Daily Worker* (18 July 1952) published a report on the trip extolling the USSR as a country of book lovers. She also asked party officials to provide contact details for members of the Communist Party of France (PCF), to see what

the PCF was like, and attended receptions at the Czech, Bulgarian and Soviet embassies in London; she spoke to members of the IRA and even sold copies of the *Daily Worker*.²⁰ In 1954 or 1955 she would arrange to meet Samuel Marshak – a prominent Soviet writer she had met in Moscow – whenever he came to London. Surprisingly, these nocturnal trysts at a London hotel seem to have been missed by MI5, an organisation inclined to regard anyone attached to the Soviet Embassy as a spy, let alone the holder of the Stalin Prize for Literature like Marshak.²¹

Lessing had been under observation for some time and emerges from the files as a committed activist with strong connections to world Communism. The first record of surveillance is an intercepted letter of 1943 shortly after she met fellow radicals in Salisbury.²² This connection followed her to London. As early as April 1949 MI5 was informed of her left-wing affiliations and of the likelihood that she would make contact with the CPGB upon arrival in Britain.²³ In December 1951 London was again informed by the Salisbury police of her membership of the Southern Rhodesian Labour Party and of its propaganda committee. The Security Liaison Officer in Salisbury reported in September 1952 of her continuing correspondence with Charles Mzingeli, Elias Mtepeka, of the Nyasaland African Congress, and other opponents of the Central African Federation (CAF) such as Lawrence Vambe of *African Weekly*. Soon after Lessing joined the CPGB in 1952 she behaved like a veteran rather than a new recruit. She had been a member of the CPGB only a matter of months when she is recorded as having spoken to Party officials (Idris Cox, Sam Aaronovitch and Desmond Buckle) about the possibility of providing leadership training for African activists.²⁴ Charles Mzingeli is named as one of those she wants to bring to Britain. In April 1953 another telephone tap found her speaking to the long-standing party intellectual and full-time official Emile Burns in connection with a problem she had writing a novel (*Retreat To Innocence*) in which the party and its ideology featured.²⁵ When her baggage was searched at London airport in June 1954 her passport was found to contain ‘several 1952 visas for Iron Curtain countries’; (apart from the writers’ trip to Moscow and Czechoslovakia, these would have included journeys to East Germany to speak to Gottfried). That month Lessing is reported to have offered her services to the CPGB’s National Cultural Committee – Aaronovitch was its national coordinator – and is described in the files as a ‘leader’ of the Party’s Writers’ Group. Lessing is said to have been writing articles for the Moscow-based *Literary Gazette* and the World Peace Appeal journal *Preview*, connected with its Film Panel. She was also a member of the management committee of the Russia

Today Book Club. An intercepted letter to Desmond Buckle in 1953 mentions her as a speaker at the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR on the topic of her recent visit to the Soviet Union.²⁶ At the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1954, according to the British Embassy in Moscow, she was praised as representative of 'modern progressive literature'. Her activities also included peace agitation as a speaker under the auspices of the Authors' World Peace Appeal. The Communist leadership in Britain was known to be keen on making more use of her, for example within the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) and perhaps as London correspondent of an overseas journal.²⁷ MI5 and the South African police were aware of her planned visit to Southern Rhodesia and South Africa by the end of 1955 and of her connections with South African Communists. She was visited at her London address by South African Communists such as Moses Kotane (secretary general of the South African Communist Party) and Charles Feinstein (party member and Cambridge economic historian) in November and December 1955.²⁸ Phone taps record conversations with Charles Mzingeli advising him to make use of the MCF in London. In January 1956 an anti-Communist Czech immigrant and neighbour of Lessing's reported that she was 'frequently visited by persons of various nationality'. For this reason, laughably, the local constabulary supposed that her flat was 'being used for immoral purposes'.²⁹ After her return from southern Africa Lessing hosted members of the Northern Rhodesian National Congress two or three times a week for several months, together with exiles from Zanzibar and Nyasaland. This was prompted, she says in her autobiography, by criticism from the CPGB that she was not pulling her weight.³⁰ But the reality is that she continued to advise and befriend African political activists well after her party days were over.

Lessing was aware that she was under surveillance both in Britain and in Southern Rhodesia and wrote about it in the *New Statesman*.³¹ With Paul Hogarth,³² she left for Lusaka at the end of March 1956 and was thought to be making contacts 'for future Party use' but also gathering material for writing.³³ They returned on 19 May. The visit was monitored by local police who complained that Hogarth and Lessing 'have been careful and wary over their plans and movements', taking evasive action and occasionally giving them the slip. They nevertheless reported trips to Salisbury, Bulawayo, Ndola, Kitwe, Kabulouga, Umtali, and Gwelo and noted the people³⁴ they stayed with, all of whom possessed 'advanced views on inter-racialism', when they were not actually 'Communists' (the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Garfield Todd, with whom she had a three-hour interview at his request, was said to be 'distressed to note the

number of Communist sympathisers who appear to have found refuge in the Native Education Department').³⁵ The local CID was also distressed that it did not have 'a properly equipped' Special Branch. Lessing told black activists that the purpose of her visit was to ascertain opinion on the question of the CAF but the police believed she was establishing contacts for future CP use and asserted that she made no secret of her Communist commitments.³⁶ The copper belt of Northern Rhodesia was of special concern, with its African Mineworkers Union, 43,000-strong, and African National Congress membership of 80,000. Lessing was there between 7 and 13 May. In Bulawayo she also met members of the Nyasaland African Congress. Lessing also flew to South Africa from Salisbury but was refused entry. She immediately contacted Desmond Buckle telling him to get Reuters alerted to her ban from the country; and articles explaining why she had been refused entry were later published in the *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman*. It was observed by officials in Salisbury that in future, with advanced notice of any planned visit, she could be prevented from entering the CAF as 'a prohibited immigrant' before she had even left London.³⁷ It would save a lot of trouble, though on this occasion, as she observes in her autobiography, Todd had actually intervened to allow Lessing to enter the country when Special Branch alerted the authorities that her name was on the passenger list. The Prime Minister, perhaps overestimating his powers of persuasion, was convinced that she would find nothing but good to say about the CAF and promised 'every facility' during her visit.³⁸

In *Walking in the Shade* Lessing explains that she was 'being urged to go back to Southern Rhodesia by friends there ... the comrades generally ...' at a time when all the newspapers in Britain, except *Tribune* and the *Daily Worker*, supported the CAF. Yet unrest was 'already breaking out everywhere in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia'.³⁹ She made unsuccessful efforts to get *Picture Post* to fund the trip and finally spoke to the cultural attaché at the Soviet Embassy in London. A week before the trip she received a cheque from the Narodny Bank, nominally as royalties for her publications in the Soviet Union. The articles she prepared for British newspapers were also sent to the embassy and ended up in Soviet publications after 'creative' translation to 'make the situation in Central Africa worse than it was'.⁴⁰

Though MI5 decided not to tamper with Lessing's and Hogarth's notebooks upon their return to London – officials were bearing in mind the *New Statesman* article in which Lessing had reported its surveillance activity – monitoring continued. This surveillance should have allayed all

the worries expressed in the files about the multiple Communist contacts which the trip to the Rhodesias had allegedly involved; likewise, it should have soothed the fears of the 'over-stretched' CID in Salisbury. But it also supplied evidence confirming their assumptions about the purpose of the tour. Lessing's public reports on her trip focused on the CAF, which she accurately described as an object of universal opposition among the indigenous people. She even suggested that they preferred South African apartheid, if only because South Africa provided greater economic opportunities than the CAF.⁴¹ Africans were subject to very similar segregation within the CAF and most of the whites would have gone further if they had been able to and adopted full apartheid, which, according to Lessing, they found perfectly acceptable. But their leaders favoured co-optation of a minority of Africans to give the appearance of a 'partnership', utterly bogus, but the better strategy for holding on to power. In London the motivation of the British government was strategic, in Lessing's view; the CAF would become a suitable object for dominion status which would ensure continued British influence and access to resources such as copper.

Lessing published an account of her visit in *Going Home* (1957) in which she elaborated on this analysis. She noted the links between British intelligence and the political police in South Africa and the CAF and wondered why they bothered with her visit; 'I could hardly be called a politically active person ... writing does not leave much time for politics; and in any case it was of my firmest principles that a writer should not become involved in day-to-day politics ... it has a disastrous effect on writing'.⁴² But she conceded that she did not stick to that principle because of her 'puritan sense of duty' and her fascination with political behaviour which made her 'an agitator manquée' who mixed socially with political activists. Not many pages later, however, Lessing admitted that she was considered undesirable in southern Africa because 'I am a Communist' and added that she believed 'that in a decade the Communist countries of the world will be freer, more democratic (in the political, as well as the economic sense of these words) than the Western World, which is rapidly becoming less free, less democratic. If I did not think this I would not remain a Communist'.⁴³ Supposing that these words were written immediately when she returned to Britain in the summer of 1956 they are still surprising in view of the tumult which had already engulfed the Communist world and all the more so in view of Lessing's acknowledgement, in conversation with a critic she encountered in Lusaka, that she 'hated as much as he did the massacres and atrocities that have occurred under Communism'.⁴⁴ They seem to show that the scale of the violence

Khrushchev revealed in 1956 was not the major factor in denting her faith in the Communist project.

By September 1956 MI5 also had information on Lessing's report of the trip to officials of the CPGB, as well as the public meetings she addressed, neither of which are mentioned in her autobiography. She was said to be 'disparaging' of Charles Mzingeli, in private party gatherings, while stressing that he was 'the only leader who is of any calibre'.⁴⁵ At a meeting of the Africa Committee held at King Street on 25 July 1956 – attended by Idris Cox, Hugo Rathbone, Desmond Buckle and others – the main subject was the CAF and Lessing was invited to reveal what her trip had disclosed. In this report she lamented a general lack of know-how of Africans in the political struggle. In Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland the Congress movements are described as 'on the wrong lines', both violently nationalistic and imagining that they could obtain Colonial Office protection. Lessing thought highly of Kenneth Kaunda but was critical of his attitude to the Indian community in Northern Rhodesia. Communist influence was described as 'small' throughout the CAF, completely absent in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and involving only four or five people in Southern Rhodesia, but none in Salisbury itself. What could the CPGB do to improve the situation? She thought it essential to make contact with Africans when they came to London and reported that the Indian government was doing some useful work in the CAF by sending so-called Trade Representatives 'who were in actual fact agitators'. Lessing thought that it might also be possible to use Cairo Radio in which Simon Zukos (an executive committee member of the MCF) had a contact. Zukos and Lessing had already 'worked out a complete plan of cover addresses to receive information' but what remained to be done was the organisation of people who could send information from the CAF. Cox suggested the WFTU might be able to get Africans to London, and delegations of miners and fireman might be sent there. The MCF could also be used for this purpose. Lessing began attending its meetings in the House of Commons in 1956.⁴⁶ But she found that Southern Rhodesia was ignored by these meetings on the grounds that it was a self-governing colony and Britain had no say on what was going on – a point she unsuccessfully challenged (despite the fact that the protection of the native population had been reserved to the British state since 1924). Lessing said that she soon stopped going to the meetings but MI5 records show that the political police in Britain and Southern Rhodesia remained convinced of her involvement with the MCF well in to 1958 and noted her connection to Dixon Konkola of Bulawayo, president of the Railway African Workers' Union.⁴⁷

Stalin

At the time Lessing left for southern Africa in March 1956 questions were already being asked about Stalin within the CPGB as its membership digested Khrushchev's rehabilitation of Tito, whom Stalin had anathematized, and wondered why the party leaders at home had been so uncritical of the Soviet leader. On her return, the CPGB was plunged into turmoil when the full text of Khrushchev's speech to the twentieth congress of the CPSU was published in the *New York Times* (5 June 1956) and the *Observer* (10 June). Shorter versions had been in circulation in the English-speaking world since March but the full text, revealing Stalin as a mass murderer and ruthless tyrant, exposed Communist leaders everywhere to an interrogation that would not go away. Lessing was soon exchanging correspondence with John Saville and Edward Thompson who emerged as leading party dissidents when *The Reasoner* commenced publication in July 1956 with the intention of reforming the CPGB from within, a goal Lessing supported, believing that the leadership could be saved from itself and taken out of the orbit of the Soviet Union. In fact she counted herself among a minority of Communists who were not shocked by the revelations but who wondered why Khrushchev had not gone further and told the whole truth. She expected that true Communists must exist who would 'put Soviet communism back on the true path'.⁴⁸ The situation of world Communism deteriorated sharply, however. In late October the Hungarian uprising against Soviet domination began and on 4 November Soviet military intervention suppressed the rising. The CPGB supported the Soviet action and thus demonstrated the survival of slavish support for the USSR within the party leadership and the continued health of Stalinism both at home and in Moscow. Up to a third of the CPGB membership quit the party by the end of 1957 and Lessing was among them.

On 11 December 1956 she submitted her letter of resignation to the party leader John Gollan:

Dear Comrade Gollan,

Firstly, I should like to congratulate you on the way you handled television last night. I thought you were impressively dignified in a very difficult situation, which does not mean that I agree with the line you put forward – I disagree totally with your attitude towards Hungary ...

I think the leadership of the British Communist Party has handled the situation since the Twentieth Congress in a way which makes it

inevitable that the British Communist Party can't win mass support in the foreseeable future, and will remain a small pressure group.

... I do not hold the view that Britain does not need a communist party – on the contrary, it is a tragedy that ... there will not be a strong communist party. Also, I think that a pressure group will be better than nothing.

.... I don't think artists should spend time on day-to-day politics; I never have and that is why I haven't taken part in branch life.

The development of the world towards socialism is an interaction between all the different forces inside communism and the different forces inside capitalism.

I want to make it clear that I have no intention of drifting into a position of being anti-communist or anti-soviet. Nor shall I join the Labour Party; because while I am not sure any longer what is meant by the word Marxist, I am quite sure I am not, and could not be, a social democrat.

If it were not another of those damned Russian phrases, I should say that I propose to be a non-party Bolshevik ... I won't suffer continually from a bad conscience ... because I am breaking discipline by criticizing the party ... I assure you of my continued respect for you as people and fighters for socialism even though (at the moment) I could hardly disapprove more strongly than I do of your policies and ways of thinking.

I shan't be issuing a press statement, because I can't stand these howls of malicious joy which go up from our opponents every time one of us leaves.

Lessing ended 'with fraternal greetings'.⁴⁹

MI5 understandably took the view that 'despite her resignation we have no reason to believe that Mrs Lessing's fundamental Marxist convictions have in any way changed'. An unnamed source told them that Lessing thought the CPGB was 'hopeless and gutless over Hungary' but the source added that she remains a Marxist in search of a communist party she can support.⁵⁰ Why someone who purportedly had doubts about Communism when she joined the CPGB in 1952 should want to be regarded as a 'non-party Bolshevik' in the month that she resigned from it is not immediately obvious. One possible explanation, provided by her future lover Clancy Sigal, whom she lived with for four years from 1957, was that her break from the party was primarily motivated by its hostility to creative artists.⁵¹ Another possibility, suggested by Lessing herself,

was that, under the influence of Sigal, she was thinking like a Trotskyist; Bolshevism had simply gone wrong under Stalin and was not inherently flawed.⁵²

New Left

In the autumn of 1956 Lessing was caught, like many other members of the party, between her established loyalties and her doubts about these commitments. She contributed correspondence to *The Reasoner* (launched in July 1956) in October 1956 explaining that ‘the cult of the individual’ was no explanation of what had gone wrong; it was rather the suspension of independent critical thinking on the part of all communists. She also informed Sam Aaronovitch that Thompson and Saville, though ‘very honest’ people, were also ‘impulsive’ and had published her letter without permission. From Thompson she had heard rumours that a party faction was forming that refused to participate in the Commissions and was demanding a new General Secretary. She promised to get in touch with Sam Aaronovitch ‘next time I have my colonial friends around’.⁵³ An attempt by Idris Cox to get Lessing more involved in CP work was rebuffed in October in what he called ‘a most pathetic letter’ pleading ‘please no more committees’.⁵⁴ But the following month she gave a talk on Africa to the Norland branch of the CP; only fourteen people attended.⁵⁵ She also addressed a meeting of the Association for African and Asian Affairs in Hull and was among the writers who condemned the British invasion of Egypt in a message sent to the Union of Soviet Writers. She was also among the signatories to a letter addressed to the party leadership criticising both them and the regimes of Eastern Europe while claiming that they ‘still consider the Marxist method to be correct’.⁵⁶

Lessing was increasingly involved with the party’s leading critics, informing John Saville in October 1956 of the incomprehension of CP officials and of their blanket condemnation of ‘you intellectuals’. She argued in correspondence to Saville that *The Reasoner* should take its commitment to communism for granted and only open a debate to save the party; ‘above all we must accept our responsibility for having been part of the thing, our responsibility for the good and the bad ... We have all been part of the terrible, magnificent, bloody, contradictory process, the establishing of the first Communist regime in the world – which has made possible our present freedom to say what we think, and to think again creatively’.⁵⁷ An unnamed source is quoted in the MI5 files saying that Lessing’s resignation had very little to do with Hungary, much more

to do with her estimation of the 'feeble' state of the CPGB – the party she wanted to reform.⁵⁸ In October 1957, ten months since her resignation from the party, a letter from Idris Cox to Desmond Buckle refers to a meeting with Lessing at which they had shared a 'long conversation' – 'quite a friendly talk'. Lessing stressed, once again, her need for time in order to focus on her work. But this time Cox left the meeting convinced that she would ultimately rejoin the party.⁵⁹ Of course that never happened and is probably simply evidence of Lessing's acknowledged love of political intrigue – a disposition she invokes in her autobiography to explain why she was repeatedly drawn into political activity. Such activity continued to find expression in published writing and in 1957 that included a chapter in *Declaration*, a work promoting the journalistic notion of the Angry Young Men, with whom Lessing was associated.

There was no ideological or artistic unity in the group beyond the conviction that some kind of cultural decay was in evidence in Britain. Lessing and Lindsay Anderson stood out from the rest for their political commitment. Lessing identified with the realist tradition in literature which she said represented the shared ethical standards and values of humanism, 'a faith in man himself' now sorely lacking in contemporary writing. She believed the time was 'one of the great turning points of history', a time 'so dangerous, violent, explosive and precarious' but one also of 'agonized reappraisals' throughout the socialist world. She thought that 'there is a new man about to be born' but that younger intellectuals 'who totally reject everything communism stands for ... cut themselves off from a third of mankind, and impoverish themselves by doing so'.⁶⁰ This parochialism knows nothing of 'the most epic movement of change ever known in history ... the greatest event of our time ...' convulsing the Soviet Union and China. Lessing admitted that when she first became a communist she knew little about the Soviet Union but after fifteen years of 'adjusting to reality' she still found herself 'in the possession of an optimism about the future ... Perhaps it is that the result of having been a communist is to be a humanist'.⁶¹ She certainly subscribed to the notion that profound progressive forces were at work in the Communist states well after her departure from the CPGB.

This was not the stance of the New Left gathered around Thompson and Saville, though building a broad socialist humanist front was. In London it could be found among those, like Lessing, who frequented John Berger's Geneva Club – including Lindsay Anderson, Paul Hogarth, Isaac Deutscher, and those realist painters and sculptors championed by Berger.⁶² She was still meeting colonial radicals and those interested in the

colonial world such as Cheddi Jagan, Joshua Nkomo, Ruth Glass, Basil Davidson and Abu Mayanja general secretary of the Uganda National Congress.⁶³ Her friends within the milieu of ex-Communists, and among socialists who had never been Communists, included CND supporters and radicals of the theatre, cinema and the arts. MI5 described her in 1962 as a speaker or a sponsor of 'communist-penetrated organisations such as the National Assembly of Women, the British-Polish Friendship Society, the Committee for the Defence of French Democracy, the Connelly Association, the London Schools Left Club, the National Film Theatre Forum, the National Association of Labour Student Organisations and the British Cuba Committee.'⁶⁴ Her charge sheet included membership of the *New Reasoner* editorial board, CND activism – including speaking at CND meetings and lobbying parliament against an Anglo-American deal for missile bases inside the UK, and sponsorship of the Direct Action committee of the Committee of 100. Stuart Hall remembered her speaking at events organised by the journal *Universities and Left Review*, which merged with the *New Reasoner* in 1960 to form *New Left Review* (NLR). Peter Worsley remembered talks they gave together on their shared knowledge of British colonialism in Africa.⁶⁵ Lessing also joined the editorial board of NLR. She 'last came to notice', a note in the files records, in January 1962 as a member of the management committee of Centre 42, set up by Arnold Wesker and a group of writers, to which Lessing belonged from its inception in December 1961, to promote educational plays and encourage the arts in the provinces.⁶⁶

But Lessing also supplied public evidence of her impatience with socialists and much of socialist ideology which of course MI5 ignored. She complained in 1961 about the abuse she suffered for expressing such criticisms.⁶⁷ Instead of thinking creatively about socialism, she said, energies were fragmented and wasted, while a 'false solidarity' blunted critical faculties on issues such as Cuba and Nkrumah's Ghana. Labour's left-wing remained utterly 'arid', no one made connections with the public, big issues such as the murder of sixty Africans in a Paris demonstration passed without causing a ripple, and socialists continued to pose 'no threat to that senile public school bully who owns and disposes of the country'. In fact Lessing's critical distance from the Left had been taking shape for some time and emerges in her relationship to the *New Reasoner* project despite her support for Thompson's 'socialist humanist and anti-Stalinist common intellectual front'.⁶⁸ Failures to contact Lessing and failures to communicate when they did meet are already recorded in February 1957.⁶⁹ She told Edward Thompson that month 'We are living in a time,

I am convinced, when there aren't likely to be any philosophies one can pay allegiance to'. But in the same letter she declared 'I know I am a socialist, and I believe in the necessity for revolution when the moment is opportune'.⁷⁰ However, the moral fervour that she believed necessary to underpin communist commitment had gone in the light of 'the blood baths and cynicism of the last thirty years' which made indignation about the depredations of capitalism impossible. Lessing's problem with the proposed *New Reasoner* also involved more mundane issues and began in the planning stage. It seems to have involved its perceived indifference to cultural issues at time when she believed her main contribution to the common cause could come through fiction.⁷¹ In fact she told the other editors that she was working on a novel that would address the issues they all felt strongly about. In May 1957 she contributed 'The Day That Stalin Died' to the second issue which Thompson believed was 'bang on. I don't think we will have any disagreement about publishing it this time', he told Saville – a comment that seems to allude to an earlier piece 'Excuse Me' which had to be revised.⁷² Thompson was actually very keen that Lessing and Randall Swingler should normally have final say on any publications involving fiction, poetry and reportage.⁷³ In preparation for the second number of *New Reasoner* he wrote to them both asking for 'the application of ideas and imagination', reporting that he had approached Beatrix Lehmann to write something on current theatre and suggesting that Swingler should approach Michael Warr, perhaps Sean O'Casey, and asking Doris to speak to John Osborne. Thompson thought that a recent article by Osborne for *Reynolds News* had 'expressed some strong and intelligent revolutionary socialist positions' and wanted Lessing to invite 'him to develop his views more seriously'.⁷⁴ Lessing hosted meetings related to the *New Reasoner* in London but the old aversion to such gatherings and the time they subtracted from her work was always present at a time when she was also living with Clancy Sigal, an individual with whom Thompson and Saville clashed on occasions.⁷⁵ She also felt 'more than aggrieved that when I write a novel all about left politics (*Retreat To Innocence*), and which surely ought to be of interest to the left, that neither the *New Reasoner* nor the *Universities and Left Review* can be bothered to review it'.⁷⁶ In fact neither journal attracted outstanding literary contributions for all their genuine concern to address cultural matters. Lessing nevertheless continued to speak at meetings organised by the New Left, one of the very few women to do so, and was valued for her ability to write persuasively and get into influential journals of opinion like the *Observer*.⁷⁷

Ongoing political commitment

One of the most prominent concerns of Left intellectuals in Britain in the years 1956–1962 was the state of working class politics. Lessing never contributed directly to this debate which raised questions about the decline or transformation of the working class as consumerist individualism grew, promoted by affluence and marketing, while other values, such as community and solidarity, were corroded under the pressure of social and economic change. Labour's third consecutive general election defeat in 1959 underlined the salience of these discussions that had been underway in response to publications by JK Galbraith, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and others. The question 'Must Labour Lose?' seemed to many an invitation to answer in the affirmative. Lessing had already complained of the deradicalising influence of affluence on former comrades when she wrote about her visit to Southern Rhodesia.⁷⁸ She and Clancy Sigal had separately arranged to live in mining communities in England – Doris five years before Clancy. She later complained that any working class people she had knowledge of – such as the ones she lived with and wrote about in *In Pursuit of the English* (1960) – were people who never lived up to the Marxist ideal, and were always dismissed as unrepresentative of the working class by people who defended that ideal. Sigal turned his experience into a novel – *Weekend in Dinlock* (1960) – which generated some controversy within the New Left.⁷⁹ While the New Left's turn to cultural analysis was powerfully informed by this 'state of politics, state of the working class' debate, and Lessing would have been well aware of it, her own retreat from Left activism after 1962, probably has multiple causes – first and foremost her commitment to writing. But whatever the causes of this stepping back from activism, her published work remained political and some of the old concerns continued to surface in her writing.

The sequence of near-autobiographical novels in the *Children of Violence* series, begun in 1952, grapples with Martha Quest's political commitments and beliefs, especially in the third and fourth volumes – *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958) and *Landlocked* (1965). But politics is far from absent in the final volume, the dystopian *The Four-Gated City* (1969). In fact Lessing promoted the last volume as 'a prophetic novel' because she believed that 'the future is going to be cataclysmic' and this sensibility would remain a recurring element in her thinking as her focus shifted from a critique of capitalism to a critique of contemporary civilisation. Nuclear weapons worried her and dangerously hysterical politics such as the anti-Communism that had gripped the USA since 1947. But

so did global inequality and the fact that a third of humanity was inadequately fed and housed.⁸⁰ At Stony Brook university in New York she acknowledged in an interview in 1969 that she was 'intensely aware of, and want[ed] to write about, politics' and felt 'obligated to dramatize the political conflicts of ... [the] ... time in ... fiction'. She made clear her sympathies with the student rebellions that had broken out in France, Britain and the USA and claimed that she had tried 'to reach the youth' in *The Four-Gated City*, in which the prospect depicted is apocalyptic war.⁸¹ She thought that 'the important sections of young people are revolutionary' but expressed concern that they had only known relatively liberal times and needed to prepare for a more authoritarian era by 'creating organisations that will survive in a totalitarian state'.⁸² She claimed that 'young people had penetrated below the surface and have seen the horrors of our civilization ... Humanity has gotten worse, puts up with more and more, gets more and more bourgeois. The youth have realized this'.⁸³ Similar claims were made when she spoke to Studs Terkel later in the same promotional tour, suggesting that these were not off-the-cuff remarks.⁸⁴

By this time she was most well-known for *The Golden Notebook* (1962), widely read as a feminist work, to Lessing's repeatedly expressed irritation. In the 1971 preface to the novel she made the point that though she supported Women's Liberation she believed its aims would soon look 'small and quaint' because 'it is already clear that the whole world is being shaken into a new pattern by the cataclysms we are living through'.⁸⁵ Nor was this a long-term prospect. 'I am so sure everything we now take for granted is going to be utterly swept away in the next decade'.⁸⁶ Marxism would play no distinct role in this transformation because while it 'looked at things as a whole and in relation to each other' – an approach which she claimed had enabled current and former Marxists to understand what she was trying to do in *The Golden Notebook* – it had been absorbed into ordinary thinking to become 'the commonplaces of conventional social thought', so thoroughly absorbed as to be finished as a force.⁸⁷ It was a point she had made before; the left-wing had lost its distinctiveness, 'because it always has to do with the individual, the rights of. Rights. Fair play. Justice'.⁸⁸

Her focus was on the collectivity and her approach was informed by the conviction, expressed in 1968, that 'the true novel wrestles on the edge of understanding'. Human beings were 'small things in the grip of gigantic forces'.⁸⁹ Influenced by R.D. Laing she now believed that mental illnesses like schizophrenia were not illnesses at all. Linked with this was the idea that 'we're breeding new kinds of imagination and ways of

thinking and experiencing', like extra-sensory perception and the ability to pass into different dimensions, something she explored in *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974). Experiences and beliefs conventionally dismissed as fantastic and superstitious were nothing of the sort.⁹⁰ Her gloom about the future had embraced environmental issues in *The Four-Gated City* and she told Studs Terkel when discussing the book that 'we could destroy all organic life' by everyday atmospheric pollution.⁹¹ *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) signalled her turn to what she called inner space fiction – 'fables, spun out of what is happening today' – in which madness and the degeneration of human society on Earth are explored in a dreamlike stream of consciousness.⁹² But having begun her writing career believing in 'the idea of transforming society' she now had to force herself to write when confronted by a sense of the futility of the effort arising from 'the ecological disaster we are facing [and] the self-annihilating madness of our society which brands its critics as "mad"'.⁹³ The many interviews she gave show that her sense of impending catastrophe, as expressed in her writings, was not confined to fiction. In 1972 she invoked the pages of *New Scientist* in support of her belief that war and ecological disaster were increasing dangers, but doubted that humanity could address such global problems or avoid a 'disabling despair'. The sense of civilisation falling apart which informed *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 was visibly happening, she felt, ten years later.⁹⁴ A representation of that disintegration dominates *Memoirs of a Survivor* in which she observes a city, like London, subject to lawless breakdown and a return to improvised self-help by bands of roving rootless young people. In *Shikasta* (1979) the grip of 'gigantic forces', now extraterrestrial, is depicted as beyond human control. Humanity is corrupted and rendered impotent by the influence of one of these cosmic powers representing evil; the decay would be terminal were it not for the countervailing power of benign aliens from Canopus, a kind of vanguard of enlightened guardians. Despair at the incapacity of humans to address global problems pervades the novel but so too does Lessing's rage and moralising. When questioned about her determinism in *Shikasta* she admitted it was what she believed and added that she had always sat in judgement of civilisation.⁹⁵

Jenny Diski, who knew Lessing for fifty years and lived with her from the early 1960s when the influence of Laing was waning and Lessing's interest in Sufism, as taught by Idries Shah, was about to begin, recalled that Doris, while still demonstrating with the left on international politics, was somehow 'adrift' and lacking the 'totalising commitment' she had known. Sufism supplied that for the rest of her life. Some things remained

the same, however. Shah's 'table talk', as reported by Doris, was 'firmly apocalyptic' involving the end of civilisation.⁹⁶ In conversation 'there was no hope of being right as Doris was right' and she continued to have 'firm opinions about everything from politics and literature to sociology and psychology'.⁹⁷ Eve Berelson noticed a recurring tendency in the fiction to identify 'a group of people with higher faculties ... who will survive and recreate society from its ashes', a sort of cognoscenti. But Lessing claimed that she believed that evolution was producing a more intelligent and more intuitive person.⁹⁸ The novelist, however, she increasingly believed, performed the function of delivering information about the world to different segments of society.⁹⁹ In the Massey lectures, delivered in 1985 under the auspices of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Lessing examined the sources of human self-destruction and announced how they could be controlled. Her catastrophism is relatively muted in these radio talks but the belief that remedies are to hand and Lessing knows what they are is expressed with a naïve certainty, something she was prone to throughout her long ever-changing ideological career. This time the 'quiet revolution' in psychology, sociology, social psychology and social anthropology of the previous thirty years is invoked to argue that 'looked at collectively' they amount to a completely new attitude towards ourselves and our institutions and represent 'the most valuable thing we have in the fight against our own savagery'. This 'hard information about ourselves' and the 'social laws that govern groups and govern us' was, however, not being applied.¹⁰⁰ Lessing's conviction that groups manipulate and 'pervert' individuals when applied to political parties went a long way, she argued, to explaining why 'you can sell yourself out under pressure from other people'. She was thinking about her own experience in the CPGB but the idea was also pursued in works such as *The Good Terrorist* (1985).¹⁰¹ Ideologies were of no interest to her now, she claimed, and yet the author's job, she believed, was 'to place their fingers on the wounds of our time' and 'be something of a prophet', sensing the way ahead while keeping a distance from the political issues of the day.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Doris Lessing's autobiography has been found both honest and evasive.¹⁰³ An act of 'self-defence', it was acknowledged to depend on unreliable memory.¹⁰⁴ It is also a failure to explain her political commitments. The very obscurity of her explanation, J.M. Coetzee concluded, relying as it did on 'some kind of social psychosis or mass self-hypnosis',

argues she was unable to explain what she did.¹⁰⁵ But it will be clear that she also omitted a great deal of *what* she did and what she thought when she was doing it. We have been able to provide a fuller account of her involvement in radical politics by virtue of the record of surveillance compiled by MI5 and with the help of the John Saville archive. From these records she emerges as a prominent activist with some sort of Marxist understanding of the world for at least twenty years. Her views during and after 1956 show that even among those who resigned from the Communist Party there was no standard reason for leaving. Lessing continued to believe in the reality of progressive change in the Soviet Union and China for many years after she resigned from the CPGB. Eleven years later she was persuaded that all of the Communist countries had become 'much more democratic, so much so as to make obsolete all the patterns of thinking of ten years ago'. Khrushchev's speech had not been a revelation 'in certain Communist circles, who had for some time been fighting to get the leadership of the Communist party to tell the truth and divorce itself from Russia'.¹⁰⁶ Even when she ceased to think of herself as a Marxist she remained passionately interested in politics, a disposition that went back to 1939, and expressed this disposition in both her fiction and non-fiction. Twenty-six years after she resigned from the CPGB she admitted that 'I tend to minimize both what I believed then and for how long I believed it'.¹⁰⁷ Both phases – Communist and post-Communist – are informed by a recurring catastrophism and a conviction that forces deeper than conscious human agency are driving the world towards crisis. Lessing maintained that her own parents' lives had been ruined by one such catastrophe – the Great War – and that her father's rage took her over when she was very young and never left her.¹⁰⁸ This may have made her receptive to Communist politics when the Second World War began and helped to keep her involved during the Cold War, when a nuclear catastrophe seemed likely to many people. It may also help to explain why she remained a militant in many ways for the rest of her life.

Notes

1. E.P. Thompson, *The Romantics*, London, 1997, pp37-38. Thompson distinguishes between apostasy and disenchantment in a discussion of Wordsworth and Coleridge contending that creative art can survive disenchantment as long as 'a boundless aspiration' exists in tension with unregenerate reality. This is a good description of Lessing's work at her best.

2. J. Callaghan, 'Colonialism, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern 1920-1939', *Science and Society*, Vol 6, No 4 (Winter 1997-98).
3. Quoted in Peter Hennessey, *The Secret State: Preparing For the Worst, 1945-2010*, London, 2010, pp81, 86, 89.
4. Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949*, London, 1995, p259.
5. D. Lessing, *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, London, 1994, p30; E.G. Ingersoll (ed.), *Putting the Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing 1964-94*, London, 1996, p96.
6. 'The Tragedy of Zimbabwe' is an example from 2003, contained in D. Lessing, *Time Bites: Views and Reviews*, London, 2004, pp231-247.
7. D. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade: Volume 2 of My Autobiography, 1949-62*, London, 1998, p19.
8. Lessing, *Under My Skin*, p271
9. This was also true in Britain. See P.M.S. Bell, *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union*, London, 1990.
10. Lessing, *Under My Skin*, pp304-305.
11. *Ibid.*, p271.
12. 'Writing Autobiography', in Lessing, *Time Bites*, p96.
13. In conversation with John Callaghan.
14. C. Klein, *Doris Lessing: A Biography*, New York, 2000, pp78, 162, 171.
15. Lessing, *Under My Skin* p275.
16. *Ibid.*, p277.
17. *Ibid.*, p348.
18. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, p22.
19. *Ibid.*, pp36, 52, 53-5, 67, 80.
20. *Ibid.*, pp84, 103, 106; The National Archive, KV2/4054, 44, 42a.
21. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, pp146-149.
22. KV2/4054, 23 March 1943.
23. KV2/4054, 7a dated 21 April 1949.
24. KV2/4054, 31a dated 18 December 1951, 46a dated 24 September 1952; KV2/4055 piece 47a, 4 October 1952.
25. piece 66, KV2/4055.
26. piece 58a 17 January 1953, *ibid.*
27. 138z Idris Cox communication to Lessing 4 October 1956 in KV2/ 4057; piece 141c 23 October 1956 reports talk of a new progressive journal based overseas in which Lessing could be London correspondent and receive a 'small financial return'.
28. 108a and 103a in *ibid.*
29. KV2/4055, 110a 28 January 1956.
30. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, pp183-184.
31. D. Lessing 'Being Prohibited', *New Statesman*, 21 April 1956, pp410, 412.
32. Paul Hogarth OBE joined the CPGB in 1936 while a student at the

Manchester School of Art. He was a talented illustrator and made a living working with many eminent authors including Doris Lessing. Desmond Buckle was told to approach the 'Commercial Branch' of the CPGB to obtain funding for Hogarth's trip, KV2/4055, 115a.

33. 115a in KV2/4057.
34. These included Jacob Geras, Colin Leys, Carol and Nathan Zelter, Marjorie Chisnall, Francis Williams, Harry Chinowitz, Frederick Barap, George and Phyllis Loveridge. Lessing also received letters of introduction from Commander Thomas Fox-Pitt addressed to Chief Comani and Mwase Kazungo in Nyasaland and Loya Masouga in Fort Jameson.
35. 131a in KV2/4057.
36. 121b, 123a, 128a, 131a in *ibid.*
37. KV2/4055, 128a .
38. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, pp177-178.
39. *Ibid.*, p172.
40. *Ibid.*, p174.
41. D. Lessing 'Central African Federation', *World News and Views*, number 27, 1956. See also 'The Settlers Have a Bad Conscience', *Daily Worker*, 16 October 1956.
42. D. Lessing, *Going Home*, London, 1996, pp49-50.
43. *Ibid.*, p82.
44. *Ibid.*, p91.
45. 136a 2 September 1956, KV2/4057/
46. 25b 25 July 1956 and 136a 2 September 1956 in *ibid.*
47. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, pp188-189; KV2/4057, 176b, 179a, 180b, 167a, 168a
48. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, p175.
49. John Saville Papers (JSP), Hull History Centre, U DJS/1/68, Doris Lessing to John Gollan, 11 December 1956.
50. KV2/4057, 150a 18 January 1957 and 9 January 1957.
51. C. Sigal, *The London Lover*, London, 2019, pp34-35.
52. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, pp154-155.
53. KV2/4057, 141b, 26 October 1956.
54. KV2/4057, 141a, 13 October 1956.
55. KV2/4057, 156a.
56. KV2/4057, 145z and 144d.
57. KV2/4057, 141a 13 October 1956 and 140a 24 October 1956.
58. KV2/4058, 189b 2 May 1958
59. KV2/4057, 173a 10 November 1957.
60. D. Lessing 'The Small Personal Voice' first published in *Declaration* (1957) in P. Schlueter (ed.), *Doris Lessing: A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, London, 1994, pp7-25, 17
61. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

62. J. Sperling, *A Writer of Our Time: The Life and Work of John Berger*, London, 2018, p32.
63. KV2/4057 193a 8 July 1958, 205a and 206a; KV2/4058 205a, 206a, 196a.
64. *Ibid.*, piece 216, 15 February 1962.
65. Klein, *Doris Lessing*, pp168-169, 141.
66. J. Harding, *Sweetly Sings Delaney*, London, 2014, pp109-112.
67. D. Lessing, 'Smart Set Socialism', *New Statesman* 1 December 1961, p822; KV2/4058, piece 215, an intercepted letter to Brian Simon of the CPGB.
68. JSP, Thompson to Saville, 10 January 1957, U DJS/1/61
69. Saville to Thompson, 23/2/57 in *ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*, p195.
71. *Ibid.*, Thompson to Saville 8/1/57 in U DJS/2/1/26.
72. *Ibid.*, Thomson to Saville 15/5/57 and 19/2/57 in U DJS/1/62; 'The Day Stalin Died', *New Reasoner*, number 2, autumn 1957.
73. *Ibid.*, Thompson to Saville 18/5/57 in U DJS/1/62.
74. *Ibid.*, Thompson to Lessing and Swingler, 20/5/57 in U DJS/1/62.
75. Sigal, *The London Lover*, pp59-60.
76. JSP, Lessing to Saville, 21/4/59 in U DJS/1/73.
77. *Ibid.*, Thompson to Janet Hase, nd, in U DJS/1/74; on the lack of female activists see also recollections of the New Left in Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left 30 Years On*, London, 1989, pp105-116.
78. Klein, *Doris Lessing* p163.
79. Tamara Rust suggested arranging for Lessing to stay with miners' families in north east England in 1953, KV2/4055, piece 70. Lessing confirms that she stayed in a mining community in *Walking in the Shade*, p234; *Weekend at Dinlock* was reviewed by Ron Frankenburg in *New Left Review*, 1, 2, March-April 1960 and was made the subject of a group discussion published in the same journal, 1, 3, May-June 1960. Sigal discusses aspects of his visit in *The London Lover*, pp95-104.
80. 'Talking As A Person', interview with Roy Newquist, in Ingersoll (ed.), *Putting the Questions Differently*, pp9-10.
81. Schlueter, *Small Personal Voice*, pp74, 69; Ingersoll, *ibid.*, p42.
82. *Ibid.*, p77.
83. *Ibid.*, p80.
84. Ingersoll (ed.), *Putting the Questions Differently*, pp21-23.
85. D. Lessing, 'Preface to *The Golden Notebook* in Schlueter, *Small Personal Voice*, p29.
86. *Ibid.*, p30.
87. *Ibid.*, pp33, 37.
88. D. Lessing in interview with Florence Howe, 1966, in *ibid.*, p86.
89. Afterword to *The Story of an African Farm*, by Olive Schreiner, in *ibid.*, pp163, 168.

90. Ingersoll (ed.), *Putting the Questions Differently*, interview with Studs Terkel, pp20, 25-26, 29.
91. Ibid., pp29-30.
92. Interview with Margarete von Schwarzkopf, 1981, in *ibid.*, p107.
93. Interview with Joyce Carol Oates, 1972, in *ibid.*, pp38-39.
94. Interview with Josephine Hendin, 1972, in *ibid.*, pp42-43, 52. The actuality of catastrophe was asserted again in 1980, p67.
95. Interview with Christopher Bigsby, 1981; interview with Michael Dean, 1980, in *ibid.*, pp74, 87.
96. J. Diski, *In Gratitude*, London, 2016, pp84-85, 232.
97. Ibid., pp194, 57.
98. Interview with Eve Bertelsen, 1984, in Ingersoll (ed.), *Putting the Questions Differently* p145.
99. Interview with Francoise-Olivier Rousseau, 1985, in *ibid.*, pp149-150.
100. Lessing, *Prisons We Choose*, pp23-24, 56.
101. Ingersoll (ed.), *Putting the Questions Differently*, interview with Michael Thorpe, 1980, p95.
102. Ibid., interview with Margarete von Schwarzkopf, 1981, pp104-105.
103. Klein, *Doris Lessing*, p251.
104. Lessing, *Under My Skin*, p11.
105. J.M. Coetzee, *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-99*, London, 2001, p300.
106. D. Lessing, 'Eleven Years Later', afterword to *Going Home*, pp248-249.
107. 'Twenty-Six Years Later', in *ibid.*, p253.
108. D. Lessing, *Alfred and Emily*, London, 2009, pp vii, 172, 257-8.