

A Quest of One's Own: Doris Lessing's "The Summer Before the Dark"

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Save yourself; others you cannot save.

— ADRIENNE RICH

KATE BROWN, of Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*, has been viewed often as the hero of a quest narrative — and appropriately so. Her journey in search of enlightenment, proceeding according to the ancient pattern of departure-and-return with a midpoint descent into an underworld, closely replicates traditional quest form.¹ The phases of the quest journey are marked structurally. The scheme of the novel falls neatly into a two-chapter setting-forth, located in London, followed by a long single-chapter descent into a hell of disorder and madness, located in far-flung *terrae incognitae* (Turkey and Spain), and concluding with a two-chapter recovery and reintegration, located again in London. Indeed, the quest structure provides a clear pattern for the novel's seeming vagaries and a particularly rewarding interpretive approach, as the concerns and experiences of a fairly ordinary woman are shown to comport quite well indeed with a deeply traditional, hence typically masculine, narrative pattern.²

Nevertheless, reading Lessing's novel according to its fulfilment of this traditional, and surely resonant, narrative pattern raises interpretive problems. The mythic reading does not encompass the fullness of the novel. As structural readings often will, it blurs the full particularity of Kate's story and obscures the importance of elements that do not readily fit the quest pattern. One such element is the distinctly female quality of Kate's experience and understanding. Her journey expresses an awareness and a set of possibilities very different from those of most traditional questing heroes.

Further, a reading of the novel according to traditional quest myth may not adequately recognize the great indeterminacy of Kate's quest. What is groping and uncertain — and significantly so — becomes unduly clarified and sure; the openness of the narrative is foreclosed.

Critics taking a structural approach to the novel typically emphasize either the "real" quest journey or the dream journey. But since the pattern of the one is circular and that of the other is linear, the two seem at variance and the dream journey is seen as a divergence from the real journey. Elaine Campbell, for example, views Kate as undergoing "the sequence of the mythic initiation journey" and completing a cyclical quest journey "successfully" (412). Barbara Lefcowitz, in her article "Dream and Action in Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*," emphasizes the intersection of the circular real-life journey by a linear dream journey. Both readings sever the journey occurring in a dimension of realism, a life journey incorporating familiar features of a distinctly feminine quality of life, from the mythic journey which enters the novel in the dream dimension and as a structuring of its overall shape.

The reading offered here provides what I believe is a needed corrective to views which have presented the dream journey as a divergence. To be sure, Kate's journey is circular; all completed quests are circular in that they include a return.³ Kate's dream of the seal which she is compelled to return to its native element follows a linear progress from the place where the seal is found to the water into which it is released. Both journeys, however, end with homecomings — the seal is at home in the salt-water where the carrier leaves it; she is herself nearing her marital home at the end of the novel. If the dream journey is more linear, and thereby seems more purposeful, than the real journey, it is perhaps because the dream, for all its puzzling symbolism, is a clarification of Kate's important needs and purposes which are obscured by the contraries and distractions of daytime life. It is, in fact, the more important of the two journeys; it is "her business for this time in her life" (128) — precisely because it does assist her in understanding her life journey. The two journeys are congruent.

Considering the novel according to three structural phases, I will develop not only a clearer view of the uncertainties and the distinctly female nature of the quest, but an understanding of the ways in which Kate's dream journey to the sea parallels and interprets her realistic journey of search.

Kate's journey begins and ends in uncertainty. At the opening of the book, she finds herself feeling increasingly uncertain not only of that all-encompassing matter, who she is, but of what she thinks, whether the phrases that move through her mind are really her own thoughts or merely ready-made substitutes. She is uncertain even of what she feels: "Was she depressed? Probably. She was something, she was feeling something pretty strongly" (5). Her departure on her quest is not so much a setting-forth as it is a drifting-forth, a submission to circumstances. With no clear destination, plan, or purpose, she goes only because events push her to go. Indeed, at its outset, her journey more nearly resembles the involuntary journeys of her family years than that of a questing hero. She remembers her "movements" of only a year ago as "always fitting in with those of the children, as of course they had to do" (9). That is, they were determined not by her own preferences, but by her conventionally feminine roles of wife and mother. Just as the work she takes up for Global Food is, as several critics have noted, very similar to her caretaking, organizing, and cheerleading role in her family, so her departure on the journey of enlightenment is an extension of her earlier travels. Though she does indeed take the important step of accepting a job, and an interesting one at that — thus moving away from the house, where she has been a "base for members of the family" (9) — she does so at the instigation of others.

When she moves on into the real journey that becomes her descent into hell, she again does so only in response to external pressures and accidents. The pattern of Kate's physical movements in this early part of the narrative is, indeed, not linear but erratic. She does not so much decide to go to Istanbul as go along with the choice of others (who, after all, are higher up in the organization — another aspect of the typically feminine circumstance of the narrative). Their choosing is itself almost haphazard. In an effort to deal with an emergency involving hotel accommodations for a

conference, "one European city after another was thought of and discussed and dismissed: Rome, Barcelona, Zurich" (32). The list is extended to include Beirut, Nairobi, Rome, North Africa, Stockholm, and Istanbul — it does not much matter where she goes. Even after the destination is picked, Kate's progress towards it is uncertainly zigzag, her course from one city to another determined not by her own plan of how to reach her destination but by such outside forces as strikes, timetables, "traffic jams, muddles, all kinds of delay" (48). Her actual arrival at her destination gets as lost in the verbal shuffle as it does in the traffic. Noting merely that "her surroundings were as she had expected," she gets to work mothering these new delegates just as she had those in London. Even the day trip which serves as the prelude to her Spanish 'holiday' with a younger man, Jeffrey, is an abortive journey: the hired car breaks down; it might or might not be best to go on by bus; a jolting taxi picks them up; they never get where they were going.

The uncertainties of this initial phase of Kate's journey are paralleled by uncertainties in her dream journey with the seal. Three seal dreams occur in this opening section. The first of these, the first "instalment," as she thinks of it, occurs at the point when Kate has withdrawn from her family to accept the Global Food job and is feeling misgivings about her role there. The dream expresses her doubts and fears. She sees the seal "lying stranded and helpless" in an unfamiliar landscape and takes it up, hoping to get it to water (30). If we can postulate that both the seal and the carrier, the "I," represent Kate herself,⁴ we see translated into the dream Kate's dissatisfaction, her sense of abandonment by her family, her caretaking behaviour, and her start on a journey towards revitalization, imaged as water. The second seal dream occurs as the first conference is ending. At this point, Kate feels both a dissatisfaction with the mothering nature of her work and an uncertainty as to whether she will go on to the next conference. In her dream, she is equally uncertain, both as to whether the seal-self will survive its all-too-evident injuries and as to whether she is "going in the right direction" (47) — a doubt that will plague her repeatedly during the sequence of dreams. The seal itself has been unable to progress effectively alone, and as carrier she can only "struggle" uncertainly on (47). She feels a need to take the seal

north, into colder and colder weather, just as in her real-life situation she feels a need to face "the cold wind" of aging and other harsh truths (46).

The third dream of this first narrative phase occurs as the Istanbul conference is ending and Kate is hesitating about going to Spain with Jeffrey. She knows she ought not to go, because the trip is likely to interfere with the serious, solitary thinking she needs to do.⁵ Accordingly, in this dream, the seal is missing, lost. She knows the animal is her "responsibility," but instead of carrying it she sits in a movie theatre watching a film of confused sea turtles who will certainly die. She "could do nothing for the turtle"; she ought to be doing what she could for the seal (68). Here we can see the turtle as representing Jeffrey — confused, self-defeating, spiritually blasted.⁶ The note being struck in this dream is reminiscent of Adrienne Rich's warning in "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," quoted in the epigraph to this paper: "Save yourself; others you cannot save."

In the middle section of the novel, the long chapter ironically titled "The Holiday," Kate's real-world journey takes her to Spain, and significantly to a back-country area far off the beaten tourist path. By its unfamiliarity, its remoteness, the site of the real journey readily accommodates the quality of a nightmare journey into the unknown.⁷ The excursion so lightly undertaken becomes in many ways an ordeal, so much so that the reader can readily accept it as an approximation of the mythic descent into hell. Disorder rules. Roles become confused, as her young "lover" Jeffrey vacillates between masculine pride and boyish confusion and dependence. Similarly, Kate vacillates between the role of free woman enjoying her sexual ripeness and that of disappointed matron envying the young their pleasures. Past griefs and frustrations return to overwhelm them both. The environment takes on a nightmarish luridness as the beach at Malaga becomes a dance floor beside a forbidden "tainted" sea (77) reached along paths "scented with oleander, sun oil, and urine" (79).

The Spanish people Kate and Jeffrey encounter in hotels and restaurants go through the motions of courteous service but express a tacit disapproval of their evident unmarried state. Jeffrey falls

ill but denies he is sick. Lapsing into alternating delirium and unconsciousness, he wakes occasionally to offer comments virtually without reference to reality as the two of them wander by bus up the coast and then inland, without map and without destination. The Spaniards' disapproval of their "sinfulness and irregularity" culminates in Kate's running a kind of gauntlet as, knowing herself to be notorious among the townspeople but determined to go check on Jeffrey, she traverses a desperately poverty-stricken narrow lane, stared at from all sides. Looking back, she sees the lane "packed, crammed, solid with black-dressed women and bare-footed Murillo children staring after her" (121). It is like a dream of public nakedness.

The disorder of the excursion in Spain projects an inner state tinged with madness. The threat that Kate may catch Jeffrey's mysterious illness, which she has from the first perceived as a "spiritual crisis" (119), only reinforces the insanity that she feels welling up from her entire life, which now seems to her one long "betrayal of what she really was" (126). Rather than confronting the dead as she descends into hell, she must confront herself and her past family experiences. At this point, madness and sanity become intertwined.⁸ Kate feels "as if she were just coming around from a spell of madness that had lasted all the years since that point in early adolescence when her nature had demanded she must get herself a man" (126). And indeed her aloneness, while Jeffrey is lost in his fever, comes in a sense as a recovery from insanity, in that it is the first time in years that she has been able really to think.

Even though she sometimes feels she is *recovering* from madness, however, because she now sees her past life for what it has been, Kate's present feelings are extreme to the point of irrationality, and the ordeal of seeing and judging is itself a period of madness. Reliving the past, thinking in detachment about her husband and her children, she can only wonder why she has lived for years "inside the timetable of other people's needs" (86) and why, even now, she has let herself fall into the stereotype of the woman on her last fling, instead of withdrawing alone to go through the period of self-scrutiny she craves. What is it but a fresh bout of insanity that

would prompt a woman craving to be “really alone — that is, a person operating from her own choices” (90) to submit herself instead to the whims of a man? What would prompt a woman beyond the “drug” of sexual urgency to act out the stale farce of a sexual adventure? The answers are in themselves a hellish encounter with maddening visions: she views her own life as wife and mother as having brought her “not virtues but a form of dementia” (92). She sees, too, that she is not alone in this, that “the faces and movements of most middle-aged women are those of prisoners and slaves” (93). Small wonder that, confronting such realizations, she lapses, like Jeffrey, into a sickness both physical and spiritual. The two of them come to a similar kind of ordeal, but by very different paths, hers being distinctively female even as the quality of her journey through the hell of Spain, following her man’s whims and taking all her cues from him, is a traditionally feminine way to go.

Five seal dreams occurring during this descent phase of Kate’s journey project her ordeal. The first dream is characterized by domesticity, as the carrier and the seal take refuge in a little cabin where she is distracted from her sense of purpose by a felt need to enact housewifely roles and by the presence of a lover. The second comes as an “inner tutor” speaking to her of her ongoing need to pursue the journey of introspection, but she is “too obtuse to understand” and goes on busying herself with her ailing young man (119). The third, not actually a seal dream at all, is a respite from the engagement with significant issues that is going forward in the dream series, and reflects an actual respite from her efforts to care for Jeffrey, who has been removed to a convent for care, so that she can do nothing but wait. She sleeps lightly in a “shallow lake of dreams where shadows of ideas moved as cool and light as fishes, a very far place from the dark northern country where she and the seal were making their painful journey” (123). The fourth dream, or the fourth which is told, comes as Kate has been thinking how her sexuality had betrayed her into a life-situation utterly inimical to her sense of self, a situation compounded of husband, children, friends, and duties. In the dream, accordingly, the carrier and the seal are beset by wild animals “leaping up and snapping and snarling at her feet” (129). In the fifth, which occurs as she is falling

ill, she has reached a very cold, snowy land and feels that both she and the seal will die if they do not soon reach the sea. In this dream Kate and the seal are, for the first time, clearly identified; what happens to one happens to the other; and the compulsion to keep going is absolute.

The return phase of Kate's quest, the concluding two-chapter section, maintains or even intensifies the note of uncertainty that characterizes the whole. Structurally, this section is less clearly defined than on superficial view — London, abroad, then London again — it would seem. The descent phase of her journey is prolonged into the recovery and reintegration phase, back in London, as she struggles to reach an understanding of the harsh truths she has confronted. If the escapade with Jeffrey was her hell of fatigue, public censure, and madness, she now dwells in a borderland between hell and the upper world, between madness and sanity. It is clear even to Kate herself that she cannot reach a resolution of her ordeal by rationality alone, but must work through the unconscious symbolism of her dream. Even though she has enacted, through her illness, a kind of death and rebirth, she must complete the dream journey before she can complete the real-world journey and initiate a new phase of her life.

It is appropriate, then, that while she remains in this mental hinterland between ordeal and restoration, her journey brings her to places at once familiar and strange. She is indeed in London, her home city, but it is an alien London, not the familiar environs of her home. She spends her recovery period first in a strange hotel where she is only a transient paying customer, then in a neighbourhood very unlike her own, where she is a temporary lodger — that is, someone in a condition between transience and at-homeness. She returns home by degrees, remaining a traveller up to the very last page, where we see her going to catch a bus for home, not actually arriving.

Here, as before, Lessing stresses the female nature of Kate's quest. Her departure had been cluttered with family concerns, her venture into unknown lands burdened by a series of stereotyped roles — first a sort of nanny to adults, then a bolsterer of masculine pride, an older woman on a fling, a nurse, a scarlet woman. Now a series of elements of her recovery period tinge with traditional

femininity the journey of discovery: her easy confidences with the hotel maid, her problem with her unkempt hair, her kitchen concerns when she moves into Maureen's apartment, the nature of her role there as confidante charged with advising Maureen whether to marry. In particular, this last section provides the culmination to a motif of clothes and concern with appearance which has played through the novel from the beginning. This Carlylean motif is particularly appropriate to the narrative of a woman's experience in that women have so often been judged and valued by their appearances, and specifically by their clothes. We now need to retrace this motif.

As the novel opens, Kate has come to sense that she has let herself be defined by roles assumed much as one puts on a ready-made dress off the rack. Further, as a distillation of her sense of entrapment, frustration, and subjection to the will of others, she senses that her dress itself is not determined by her own wishes but by others' expectations of her role:

A woman in a white dress, a pink scarf around her neck . . . hair . . . done in large soft waves. . . . Her own choice would have been to go barefooted, to discard her stockings, and to wear something like a muu-muu or a sari or a sarong — something of that sort — with her hair straight to her shoulders. (7)

Accordingly, the novel is punctuated by references to clothes tried on, changed, discarded, fitting well or poorly, expressing or concealing her changing sense of self. Changes of role require changes of wardrobe. The dress motif becomes entwined with the journey as each change of place, conveying a shift in self-awareness and a trying on of a new self, involves a change of clothes and hair style or, at the end, lack of a hair style. During her time as lodger in Maureen's apartment, Kate engages in repeated (even repetitious) experiments with dressing this way and that, presenting herself 'made up' or not, and observing the drastically varying reactions of men on the streets. Through this process she is not so much groping for an identity as reinforcing her sense that she does not have one, not if she depends on others' perceptions, since those are so easily manipulated.

Similarly, Kate's physical movements during this period, the last stage of her journey, are marked by erratic, aimless motion. She leaves the apartment and comes back, leaves and walks back and forth and comes back — the very shape of her "travels" around London projecting the groping for resolution in which she is engaged.

The seal dreams which punctuate this stage of the narrative as Kate nears the very tentative and uncertain completion of her quest are marked by a strong sense of the nearness of the goal and by breakthroughs of understanding. Some measure, at least, of the resolution she cannot achieve through her conscious efforts comes to her through her unconscious in the continuation of the dream sequence.

As Kate lies in the hotel recovering from her illness, she has a dream which projects, in very clear terms, the troubling view of sexual relationships she had begun to develop while in Spain. It is a sort of fable of woman as love object, chosen more than choosing, desired and celebrated while young, then cast aside. In her dream, a young and beautiful Kate dances with the princely lover who had appeared in an earlier dream, but she is cast aside as he chooses to dance with a sequence of younger and more beautiful women. When she complains that his treatment is unfair, he defends the male's right to accord his favours as he pleases, and the townspeople pursue her in fury at her having dared to challenge the accepted system. Significantly, as long as the dreamer is trapped in this fable, imprisoned by the established view of woman as object rather than subject, she cannot reach the seal and cannot pursue her journey.

In the next dream, though she has resumed her carrying of the seal "north, north, always north" (146), she fears that it is dying. The dark and frozen landscape seems to offer no means of satisfying its needs. But she discovers that, after all, the seemingly hostile land holds within it — "in a hollow between this rock and another" — a minimal bit of saving moisture. Once she finds this water and spreads it over the seal, it greets her and is "saved," and she is able to go on (146). It is a curious and curiously vivid dream. But if we accept the language of the novel itself, we can see the dream as a parable of aging, which, as we have noted, Kate has

thought of in terms of chill, a "cold wind" (46). As a dream about aging, it offers reassurance that old age, though seemingly a time of dreariness and decay, may after all provide, out of its very nature, the means to restore her real self. Kate does not consciously assign this interpretation; she is still searching; but the dream provides her the emotional state of hope and expectation that will inform her return.

After this dream, Kate enters a period when her dreams of the seal are lost to her; she cannot remember them the next morning. She knows only that the dream journey goes on, that it remains tortuous, and that the carrier remains fearful she is going the wrong way. But this very quality of uncertainty reflects Kate's present condition. Her time of withdrawal for self-scrutiny is running out, and she can neither resolve her own doubts of what she is to make of her life nor help Maureen decide what to make of hers. As Maureen says, she "must finish the dream" before going back to her family, she "mustn't go back before it is finished" (210). Together, they wait. And while they wait Kate tells Maureen stories of her early married years and her children. It becomes clear to her that even if men are exploiters, a distraction, her family life has given her some very good memories. It is not, then, an all-or-nothing situation, as she was seeing it in Spain: family or happiness, family or self. Kate's attitude, though still wry, becomes less resentful, more acceptant.

The next dream confirms the hopeful intuitions of the dream before it. The seal itself directs the carrier's attention to a cherry tree in full bloom in the snow — again, reassurance and redemption within the wintry landscape. Breaking off a twig, she proceeds on her way carrying this emblem of rebirth. When she tells Maureen this dream, Maureen comments, "Well, I suppose it won't be long now" (229). And indeed it is not. After a peculiar incident in which Kate watches Maureen watching a boy and girl at the zoo (an incident which Lessing seems to offer as being particularly illuminating but which strikes the reader as both extraneous and excessively emblematic) Kate dreams again. In emotional tenor this dream is utterly different from those before. In fulfilment of the promise offered by the cherry tree talisman, both she and the seal are "full of life, and . . . of hope" (241). Though the land-

scape has remained a "thick cold dark" (240), a warm breeze now springs up and grass and flowers grow. She reaches the sea and puts the seal in the water, the place where it belongs; it gives her one long look; and "her journey was over" (241).

At once Kate decides that she will go home the next day. During an impromptu party given by Maureen, she simply picks up her suitcase, packed with the assortment of clothes (projections of self) which she has collected over the past months, and goes to catch a bus "and so home" (247). Returning, she feels far from certain that her family will be pleased with her appearance, particularly with her unstyled hair showing a wide band of grey at the roots. But she is determined that, whatever else happens, she is not going to give in and let her hair be dyed again. It is a matter, for her, of facing facts.

It is very hard to say precisely what Kate has brought back from her quest. Indeed there is no reason we, or she, should be able to say. The seal journey has made it clear that the deepest meanings may be symbolic, not directly expressible in words. We can say that she has gained some measure of self-understanding and self-acceptance, a clearer vision of the forces constricting women's choices, and an acceptance of aging. We can say, from the way she slips quietly out of Maureen's party, that she no longer needs to attract attention or to demand that others cater to her. She is sufficient unto herself. And it is very clear that she means to maintain some margin for self-determination after she returns to her family. Her grey at the roots is an appropriate culmination of the motif of clothes and concern with appearance that has played significantly through the novel. It is Kate's "statement of intent" (244).

Considered in terms of these achievements — self-confidence, self-determination, acceptance of self and aging — the resolution seems not merely adequate but emphatic. In fact, however, the novel does not on the whole operate on the level of grand abstractions, and readers are left to infer the outcome from rather scanty evidence. Certainly Kate has not found all the answers; she still has many of the uncertainties she had when she set out. She returns a more independent, self-possessed person than when she left, but she has not resolved her uncertainties about marriage and family, and the reader is not at all sure how well she will hold her own in

the future. Neither is Kate sure. The ending expresses the hope for arrival, for the completion of the quest, not completion itself.

Many readers find themselves unable to accept the grey streak as an adequate emblem. In part, such a reaction may express simply intolerance of narrative indeterminacy. More specifically, though, there are three observations to make about the grey streak and our reactions to it. First, Lessing's reliance on this small manifestation of a changed outlook shows her to be a realist more than a fabulist. We could scarcely expect a Kate, capable and honest as she is, to achieve radical transformations after a lifetime of conditioning. The modest changes and discoveries she does achieve form a humanly possible ending to her quest. Second, the streak of grey also shows Lessing to be a humourist. She knows quite well that the result seems disproportionately small, compared to the effort that preceded it, and accordingly has Kate herself comment, in bemused tones, "my area of choice — . . . well, it's narrowed down to how I do my hair. Isn't that extraordinary?" (245).

Last, if Kate Brown's determination to let her grey show seems to us novelistically inadequate or even frivolous, it may be that we, as readers, have not sufficiently accepted the female quality of her quest. It is the kind of response that once blinded readers to the excellence of Jane Austen. We are accustomed to reading *men's* quests, with *masculine* kinds of achievements — battles, encounters with dragons, stealing of great treasure hoards, achievement of power. We are, perhaps, not ready even yet to admit that concerns which have traditionally belonged to women are equally as important as those conspicuously large-scale endeavours. Or worse, we may be assuming — all unconsciously of course — that if concerns do belong to women they must be unimportant. We can see *The Summer Before the Dark* as a resistance to Lady Clairrol, and trivialize it,⁹ or we can see it as a search for the means to face loneliness, old age, and death. And those dragons are not trivial at all.

NOTES

¹ It is important to note that the traditional quest form has often become truncated and ridden with uncertainty in the literature of the twentieth century, in the writing of both men and women. Our quest heroes have seldom found the golden talisman. Even so, I would argue that the journey

- motifs of women writers and women characters remain more typically characterized by uncertainty and incompleteness, or by states of liminality, than those of men.
- 2 Not only have heroic quests in myth and literature traditionally been performed chiefly by men, but summaries of the quest structure and associated theories of psychological inner journey typically perpetuate a masculinist tone by their use of masculine pronouns. See, for example, Marchino and O'Fallon on the importance of the "ritual quest of myth" (O'Fallon 180) and the psychological theories of R. D. Laing and Gabriel Maciel in Lessing's earlier novels.
 - 3 As Sydney Janet Kaplan points out, citing M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism*, the spiritual quest can well be conceived of as an "'ascending circle, or spiral'" (7).
 - 4 Lefcowitz observes that the seal has "a peculiar appropriateness as a symbolic form for the energizing inner self" (110) and is a possible pun on seal/soul *via* the German word *seele*. This latter I find unconvincing. Poznar implies the identification but does not state it (59).
 - 5 It is interesting and I think entirely indicative of Lessing's reconstitution of women's ethical valuation that Kate's reasons for feeling she ought not enter into this erotic adventure have nothing to do with a traditional morality of chastity but with her sense of the need to examine her life independently, for her own understanding.
 - 6 Lefcowitz, whose reading of the two journeys generally insists upon disparity in patterns, does note the parallel between Jeffrey and the turtle in the missing-seal dream by pointing out that this dream, with its sense of futility, occurs when Kate has become involved in "a false and hopeless situation" (112).
 - 7 Kaplan identifies Istanbul and Spain as "centres of ancient Sufi wisdom" and uses that identification as part of her basis for arguing that *The Summer Before the Dark* is a novel concerned with the "collapse of present systems and the evolution of consciousness." I have no intention of challenging that interpretation, but do object to the accompanying derogation of "stor[ies] about a middle-aged woman's attempts at self-discovery" (4).
 - 8 Insanity is sometimes viewed as a "reasonable" means of resisting the unreasonable plight of women in society. For a convenient summary of Elaine Showalter's argument to this effect in her recent study *The Female Malady*, see Clark 48. Rigney also develops such a view.
 - 9 So perceptive a writer as Alison Lurie has complained that the "only apparent result of all Kate has gone through is a resolve not to dye her hair any more." Kaplan rightly counters that it is "nonetheless... a highly significant symbolic action" (11).

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