

**POSTMODERN METAFICTIONAL DECONSTRUCTIONS AND
RECONSTRUCTIONS IN DORIS LESSING'S *THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK***

Anca GEORGESCU, Assistant Professor, PhD, "Valahia" University of Târgoviște

*Abstract: The prevailing critical reading of *The Golden Notebook* sees it as a novel in which Doris Lessing works through her changing attitudes towards fiction, and which challenges her previous reliance on realism as a favoured form, both aesthetically and politically.*

*This article will argue that Lessing critiques the postmodernist rejection of the politically committed text, by embodying the dilemma of representation at the heart of this rejection in the very structure of her novel. I suggest that she does so first, through the construction and subsequent fragmentation of a succession of modes of, or possibilities for representation; and second, through the structural performance of a rhetorical openness and repudiation of narrative and critical resolution. Thus, the text represents Lessing's critical and philosophical investigation into the nature of fiction itself and the relationship between literary form and politics. In this sense, drawing on Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon's theories of metafiction, I will demonstrate that *The Golden Notebook* is a metafictional text, a form of writing that is presented as fiction, and operates as fiction, but simultaneously pursues a critical exploration of the nature of fiction and the mechanism by which a novel communicates its meaning in a specific cultural environment.*

*The analysis will conclude that in *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing has deconstructed not only established narrative and aesthetic forms, but also language and writing itself, as well as the role of the author.*

The multiple versions of events and characters suggest that the only means of representation is through a plurality of interpretations, none of which being privileged over the others. The novel thus questions and disrupts the established status of fiction, of the author, and of conventional expressive representation.

Keywords: Metafiction, representation, authorship, politics, realism, parody.

The publication of *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 marked the change of direction which took place before Doris Lessing finished writing the *Children of Violence* sequence. The search for a different method to communicate the complex nature of consciousness itself led Lessing to change the form of her fiction in order to conceptualize that subject. Thus, from the dust jacket of the original British edition of *The Golden Notebook*, we learn about the author's intention to 'break a form; to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them'. In that statement Lessing refers to the tradition of the narrative form, which, she had admitted after writing five conventional novels, was inadequate to express her particular vision. She also states her view on the relationship of the mind to reality. Those shifts appear in the earlier fiction as well, in her examination of the relationship between perception and experience. With *The Golden Notebook*, the author continues to break through forms of consciousness, while expressing her discoveries in narrative structures.

The Golden Notebook is often considered one of Lessing's best works, because of the "...immensity of its conception, its formal intricacy, the inclusivity of its concerns, its historical accuracy, the intellectual capacity of its protagonist, and above all the fact that the

entire book asserts that the ‘filter which is a woman’s way of looking at the world has the same validity as the filter which is a man’s way’” (Pickering 3).

Although *The Golden Notebook* can, and has been, interpreted from various perspectives – feminist, socialist, psychoanalytic, among others – it is also a clear example of postmodernist writing, both thematically and in terms of the literary techniques it employs.

The prevailing critical reading of *The Golden Notebook* sees it as a novel in which Lessing works through her changing attitudes towards fiction, and which challenges her previous reliance on realism as a favoured form, both aesthetically and politically. The novel has been seen as both a turning point, and a break in Lessing’s experimentation with fictional forms, in which her views on the ideological implications of fiction first undergo a crisis, then a reformation into a new style of writing. These are the points of view expressed by Ruth Whittaker, Jeannette King and Betsy Draine, and I agree to it. Out of the three critics, Draine seems to be the most radical, since she proclaims Lessing to be a ‘novelist utterly hostile to modernist values and achievements’ (Draine 31). Here Draine implicitly rejects Lessing’s engagement with realism. For me, the text represents Lessing’s critical and philosophical investigation into the nature of fiction itself and the relationship between literary form and politics. In this sense, *The Golden Notebook* is a metafictional text, a form of writing that is presented as fiction, and operates as fiction, but simultaneously pursues a critical exploration of the nature of fiction and the mechanism by which a novel communicates its meaning in a specific cultural environment. With *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing not only questions realism, but also deconstructs it. Through the character of Anna Wulf, Lessing questions the appropriateness of realist forms to represent the fragmented nature of modern reality (which she had come to believe was unrepresentable), and the crisis of belief for intellectuals on the New Left.

In abandoning conventional narrative, *The Golden Notebook* also explores the relationship between language and ideology and the possibility of a new literary form. The novel suggests that, before she can create a new kind of novel, Anna, the artist with a writing block, must not only accept that ‘words are faulty and by their nature inaccurate’ (653), but also accept the challenge of finding another way to use language. Lessing is aware of the inherent instability of language, as well as of the necessity of using language if she is to communicate with her readers. Thus, *The Golden Notebook* necessarily uses language even if it simultaneously calls this language into question.

The situation in Lessing’s writing is now similar to that described by Jean Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. He characterizes post-modern art thus:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, put forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentation, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. (Lyotard, in Patricia Waugh, *Postmodernism* 124)

This extremely rich novel accommodates all of Lyotard's 'demands': there is no ideal form, although the protagonist, Anna Wulf, a writer, struggles with 'form' and coherence; there are no pre-established rules. 'Philosopher' Doris Lessing denies her readers all comfort.

Clearly, a work of the scope of *The Golden Notebook*, which tries to portray the 'intellectual and moral climate' (*Preface to The Golden Notebook* 472) of our time, provides ample material for critical studies.

My aim here is to analyze the metafictional techniques she has used and the formal experiments she has undertaken. If I must necessarily leave out a great deal that is important in the novel, I think, however, that my restricted approach is legitimate, because it focuses on precisely that aspect of the novel which was of the greatest importance to its author: the way in which it 'talks through its shape' (*Preface* xix).

In *The Golden Notebook* she takes the novel form apart in order to see how far, if at all, fiction is capable of telling the truth. One of the problems examined in the novel is the writer's block, the cessation of artistic creativity. Lessing considers not only the psychological features of this condition, but also the technical ones. Is it possible that the form of the conventional novel can hinder the writer who wishes to express the irrational and the unconventional? How can an art form, which is a set of conventions, capture the chaos of the contingent world? Should a novel attempt to mirror the world, or should it create its own universe? Is creation without recreation possible?

In *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing acknowledges this difficulty, and sets out to free Anna's creativity through her exploration of the novel form. Now Lessing writes a metafictional work, in which she explores what Patricia Waugh named 'a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction' by questioning thematically and formally the nature and function of the novel. Through her fictional character-narrator Anna Wulf, she openly questions how narrative assumption and conventions transform and filter reality, trying to prove that no ultimate truths or meanings exist. Thus, metafictional ploys such as framing narratives, parody, multiple discourses, seem to be the only tools Lessing can make use of to answer the intricate questions that have loomed large in her literary quest. The form of this novel is very complicated and even Lessing's comments in her *Preface* do not seem to help the reader much.

The structure of the novel itself challenges many of the conventions of the realistic novel. The frame is a novella, written primarily about a main protagonist, Anna Wulf, and her friend Molly. There are five installments of this novella, entitled *Free Women*. The novel is interspersed with a series of notebooks written by Anna. The Black Notebook is a record of various aspects of Anna's bestselling first novel, *Frontiers Of War* – the raw material, financial transactions and critical commentaries. The Red Notebook documents Anna's involvement with the British Communist party and her various political activities. The Yellow Notebook is a 'romantic novel' called *The Shadow of the Third*, written by Anna; the life of its protagonist, Ella, Anna's alter ego, mirrors aspects of Anna's own life. The Blue Notebook, a diary (Anna's attempt at a 'factual', 'objective', account of her life), explores her ideas regarding art and writing, and their relationship to concepts such as 'truth' and 'reality'. All of these notebooks represent different aspects of Anna's life; she separates them in an

attempt to understand herself and the apparent chaos of her life, and more practically, to overcome her writer's block.

Anna has written one novel, *Frontiers of War*, and is obsessed with what she calls its 'lying nostalgia' (70). She has decided never to write again, because she 'no longer believes in art' (232). She repeatedly comments on the limitations of the traditional novel, on the impossibility of conveying 'reality' through that form. Anna is aware that the only 'reality' the individual can be sure of is his or her own perception: for the modern writer, as Lessing herself puts it, there is 'no way of not being intensely subjective' (*Preface* xviii). The notebooks are intended to record Anna's 'subjectivity', that is why she writes part of her diary as factually as possible, in order to see if the plain facts are nearer to the truth than the carefully shaped material that goes into the novel.

The *Blue Notebook* represents an attempt to come closer to objective 'reality', but this raises doubts and questions about the 'reality' of the Notebooks themselves. They emphasize the division of Anna's personality; it is almost as if she were four different persons, adopting a persona to suit each one.

Metafiction pursues such questions through formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as a book. Patricia Waugh, in the article 'What is Metafiction and Why Are They Saying Such Awful Things About it?', comments that if our knowledge of this world now seems to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (relying entirely on language) becomes a useful way of investigating the construction of 'reality' itself. Language, she further explains, has the role of exploring the relationship between the world of fiction and the world outside fiction.

The metafictionist, mentions Waugh, 'is highly conscious of a basic dilemma: if he or she sets out to 'represent' the world, he or she realizes fairly soon that the world, as such, cannot be 'represented'. In literary fiction it is, in fact, possible only to 'represent' the discourses of that world'. (Waugh, *Metafiction* 3)

Lessing always uses language as a theme in her fiction; her narrators often view language from a Marxist perspective: one that unmasks language as the partner of oppressive and lying ideologies.

The Golden Notebook is central to Lessing's work for both thematic and formal reasons. Thematically, the novel documents – through the figure of Anna Wulf – Lessing's disillusion with, and ultimate rejection of the Marxist metanarrative. For Lessing, this loss of faith in politics, which led to an increasing awareness of social fragmentation and alienation, had a direct effect on the novel's form. In *The Golden Notebook*, convinced that the realist novel can neither evoke nor encompass the chaotic nature of contemporary society, she explores the formal consequences for the novel genre of the collapse of the ideology that, for her, had primarily underpinned it. This novel, which marks a shift in her fiction from a realist writer with strong socialist beliefs to an experimental writer with little faith in politics, not only documents the breakdown of the Marxist metanarrative thematically, but also structurally.

Her attempt to portray contemporary English society panoramically, 'in the way Tolstoy did it for Russia, Stendhal for France' (*Preface* xv), becomes an account of social and psychological breakdown. In the opening chapter, Anna Wulf observes that, 'the point is, that as far as I can see, everything's cracking up' (25), and the rest of the novel exhaustively

describes the various areas of social life in which this ‘crack up’ is evident: the alienation of people from themselves and from one another, the ineffectuality of the individual in the face of world-scale problems, such as poverty, famine, and war; gender conflict; class struggle and madness.

The novel goes on to consider at some length, the failure of a single world view to encompass the whole of the twentieth-century reality. Both Anna and her creator have a particular world view in mind, the orthodox Marxism of the mid-1950s, which is thoroughly repudiated as Anna herself moves toward ‘crack-up’, precisely because it fails to stand for ‘the whole person, the whole individual, striving to become as conscious and responsible as possible about everything in the universe’ (360). But the critique of ideology in this novel goes much further, beyond narrowly Marxist principles to the more general set of presuppositions governing Western culture in the modern period, ultimately addressing the assumption that any world view can be adequate, that reality is the sort of thing that can be held together as a unified whole.

This assumption was what Lessing had found most congenial in Marxist aesthetics; she stated it in her 1957 essay *A Small Personal Voice*, in which – it is worth reminding – she made unity of vision the hallmark of the novels she termed ‘the highest point of literature,’ the classics of nineteenth-century realism. *The Golden Notebook*, however, is the counterpoint; Lessing, through Anna, expresses thus her disillusion with both realism and the notion of an encompassing view of life. Aiming to ‘break a form’ and ‘certain forms of consciousness’, Lessing ‘commits’ herself to fragmentation and discontinuity. For despite the rhetoric of wholeness informing this encyclopaedic novel, her emphasis is on the complexity of experience, its difficulty to integrate, the difficulty of achieving coherence without inevitably succumbing to reduction. As a consequence, discontinuity achieves a significance that does not allow it to be simply subsumed under a higher unity; fragmentation, gaps, and lapses are precisely what allow for the unexpected.

Anna perceives the events of the post-war period as ‘a record of war, murder, chaos, misery’ (251). She herself functions as a microcosm, and her internal conflicts and eventual healing through psychological disintegration are synonymous to the reality of the world in which she lives.

The Golden Notebook does not, however, delight in despair, for its reason is to work through the chaos and to go beyond it. As Lessing observes in her *Preface*, ‘the essence of the book, the organisation of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalise’ (*Preface* xv). But in an effort to resist the pull of madness and the dissolution of the self in chaos, Anna can only maintain a hold on reality by dividing her experience into four categories. The four notebooks are, in short, an admission of defeat. Contributing to Anna’s writing block by consuming her creative energy, they also disclose her inability to perceive herself and her society holistically. In order to heal herself, to put ‘all [her] self in one book’ (585), she must succumb to temporary madness in the *Golden Notebook*. By doing so, she overcomes her creative impasse and gives us *The Golden Notebook*, which contains both the orderly parodic frame *Free Women*, and the disorderly notebooks.

Two interrelated concerns underpin *The Golden Notebook*’s structure: first, it dramatises Lessing’s conviction that the fragmentation of society is such that it cannot be

contained by traditional novelistic forms; second, it investigates the collapse of Marxism, which for Lessing was an ethical concern. It suggests that, with its dissolution, no systematic world-view is possible any longer. These twin concerns undermine Lessing's faith in the realist novel.

The text disrupts the coherent world-picture of realist writing both thematically and structurally. The notebooks allow Anna to hold herself together, but they also enable her to control her impulse to fictionalize her experience. She fears that her tendency to turn everything that happens to her into a story pushes her out of reality. For example, *Frontiers of War*, her one successful novel, was written out of a nihilistic self-disgust that she repudiates, yet she fears that she requires this very emotion in order to write. Similarly, her fictional double, Ella, allows her to face repressed facets of her own psyche, yet at the same time threatens to obscure others:

It struck me that my doing this – turning everything into fiction – must be an evasion... Why do I never write down, simply, what happens? Why don't I keep a diary? Obviously, my changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself. (232)

The notebooks reveal the contradictory nature of Anna's self. On the one hand, while disclosing her fragmented existence, they protect her from collapse into chaos and madness. On the other hand, fictionalizing of her experience allows her to perceive it in terms of distorting patterns.

Surrounding the chaos of the four notebooks is still another fiction, *Free Women*. What initially appears to be the truth about Anna's life, the genuine account of her experience, turns out to be a novel within a novel, which is written by Anna herself. It is, in short, one more reworking of the material that has gone into the notebooks. Furthermore, it is soon apparent that *Free Women*, with its ironic title, its conventional narrative structure, its tidy dialogue and its flat tone, is a parody of realist writing. The reader thus suffers a double shock – he/she realizes not only that the supposed 'reality' of *Free Women* is actually fiction, but also that it is a critique of fiction.

The Golden Notebook is a metafictional text that is constructed out of, and through, the interaction between its constituent parts, the notebooks and their outer frame, *Free Women*. Patricia Waugh defines the genre as 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (*Metafiction* 2). According to Waugh's definition, *The Golden Notebook* is clearly metafictional. Moreover, it combines its metafictional elements with its political concerns. As Jenny Taylor notes, it is 'an explicitly political novel which contains within it a discussion of its own position and status as a cultural object' (Taylor 13).

The notebooks and the parody that summarizes them offer parallel accounts of the central problems raised by the novel as a whole, but no single part of the text can resolve these problems. Furthermore, by dividing each notebook into four segments and by framing the resulting four blocks (each of the four segments) with five chapters of *Free Women*, the text disrupts perspective, linear chronology, and authorial omniscience. Every chapter of *Free*

Women is followed by four notebooks, each dealing with the same time interval, but from a different viewpoint, which ensures that the complex reality portrayed remains open-ended. As Roberta Rubenstein has suggested, the novel's structure forces the reader 'to consider the simultaneity of events described from several perspectives as if at once' (90) and to realize that its different sections function as 'fictional variations on equivalent themes' (Rubenstein 102).

Thematically the novel works on many levels. As Greene observes, the central question posed by *The Golden Notebook* is, '... how [do we] oppose a system by means of linguistic and literary conventions that have been forged by that system...' (Greene 106). It also asks the questions 'how can literature be truthful; how can writing accommodate experience; how can language still communicate when the world is turned upside down' (Cheng 80). Danziger also suggests that, '[*The Golden Notebook*'s] explicit subject is the play of overlapping paradigms: both its form and content are resolute attempts to come to terms with multiplicity and fragmentation' (Danziger 47).

In the *Preface* to *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing states that 'the essence of the book, the organization of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalise' (x). However, Anna Wulf's segmentation of her life has limited her development as an artist, and the breakdown she suffers during the novel is one of boundaries, categories, and language.

Anna's writing block is related to her personal sense of alienation, but cannot be explained by it alone. To speak of her struggle to write in terms of a personal block is to dismiss the issue, to imply that it is Anna's problem rather than a social one. This is misleading, for Anna's refusal to write stems from deeply held reservations about the validity and meaningfulness of art in the post-war world. She is experiencing a creative drought, which manifests itself in her personal inability to write, but its origin is social. Anna has not so much lost the power to produce novels, as she has lost faith in their relevance. There are two reasons for this: she fears that to write while society faces problems that may lead to its collapse is an abdication of responsibility, a turning away to the consolation of art. She fears that society has become chaotic and horrifying. Literature, she believes, should engage social reality, should get involved in the conflicts of its time, and not evade them. This view, which is a plea for commitment in art, contains the seeds of Anna's crisis. To believe in committed art, the writer must be confident that society can be improved and that art, by provoking people to think, can play a role in changing it for better. But Anna's confidence in political solutions to social problems has been destroyed. She fears, moreover, that the death instinct is flourishing, and that literature is powerless to oppose it.

In *Free Women I* Anna explains to Molly that she cannot write because she thinks that 'the world is so chaotic, art is irrelevant' (60). She informs Mrs. Marks that although she is not suffering from a writer's block, she 'no longer believe[s] in art' (235). Whereas her analyst persistently interprets Anna's problems in terms of personal neuroses, refusing to accept that their causes are largely social, Anna focuses on this latter dimension. Why does Mother Sugar not understand, she asks, 'that I can't pick up a newspaper without what's in it seeming so overwhelmingly terrible that nothing I could write would seem to have any point at all?' (252). Anna's torments derive from her passionate empathy with suffering and

oppression. She is paralyzed at the thought that her failure to participate in social struggle means that she has abandoned it.

Moreover, her suspicion that literature is irrelevant to post-war life relies on her inability to find a literary form that could evoke reality. There are three reasons for this: first, she believes that language itself is decaying; second, she sees fiction as distortion and evasion; third, she rejects as corrupt the creative spirit in herself that enables her to write what she feels is genuine literature.

The Golden Notebook challenges the notion that language has the capacity to contain 'reality'. Metafictional texts, observes Patricia Waugh, 'often take as a theme the frustration caused by attempting to relate their linguistic condition to the world outside' (Waugh 53-4).

As Anna's personality loses coherence, her belief in language's ability to convey meaning fades. She says:

I am in a mood that gets more and more familiar: words lose their meaning suddenly. I find myself listening to a sentence, a phrase, a group of words, as if they were a foreign language – the gap between what they are supposed to mean, and what in fact they say seems unbridgeable. (299)

This also echoes Derrida's theory that there is a 'meaning-creative' gap between words (as signifiers) and the reality/objects they are trying to depict.

Anna perceives a growing gap between language and reality. Language seems to be dissolving; it is sub-dividing into specialised discourses, losing its comprehensiveness and, as such, it is unable to evoke the fragmentation of the world without disintegrating. This partly results from a misuse of language that discloses a failure of the intellect and the imagination, a refusal to face a changed reality with fresh eyes and explain it anew. People seem to be trapped in old modes of thought, and they search neither for new explanations, nor for a living language in which to couch them. This leads to disturbing ambiguities. Anna cannot frequently decipher a writer's intentions, cannot decide whether works are serious, humorous, or parodic. Their lifeless, imprecise language furnishes too few clues as to their meanings. She comments that, 'It seems to me this fact is another expression of the fragmentation of everything, the painful disintegration of something that is linked with what I feel to be true about language, the thinning of language against the density of our experience' (298). Not only is she commenting here on the fact that language no longer seems to have the capacity to reflect or capture 'reality', but it is also a comment on the way 'grand narratives,' such as Communism, lose meaning when the language they employ turns into jargon. This also results in language becoming a kind of 'surface without depth'. Anna eventually concludes that her writer's block is a direct result of this loss of meaning. She reads her diary entries and finds herself 'increasingly afflicted by vertigo':

I am increasingly afflicted by vertigo where words mean nothing. They have become, when I think, not the form into which experience is shaped, but a series of meaningless sounds, like nursery talk, and away to one side of experience... the words dissolve, and my mind starts spawning images which have nothing to do with the words, so that every word I see or hear seems like a small raft bobbing about on an enormous sea of images. So I can't write any longer. (452)

Yuan-Jung Cheng, in *Heralds of the Postmodern: Madness and Fiction in Conrad, Woolf and Lessing* (1999), links Anna's description of language to a generalised postmodern mood, suggesting that, 'As the change of the world is paradigmatic, so the traditional dualistic, hierarchical basis of representation must be subverted. Consequently, language becomes misleading, doomed to confusion or self-contradiction. Language turns schizophrenic, self-alienating. (Cheng 85)

The 'mood' of the age is a strong theme in *The Golden Notebook*. Draine describes this 'mood' as 'a paralysing fear of the formlessness of the present, a despairing sense of emptiness and futility... The postmodern sensibility is that of Anna Wulf' (Draine 87). Although Anna has visions of '...a life that isn't full of hatred and fear and envy and competition every minute of the night and the day...' (463), her perception of the age as one of violence, fragmentation and anxiety also carries '...at times the implication that mental breakdown may be the only appropriate response to the condition of living in the twentieth century' (Alexander 85).

Anna recognizes that formlessness may lead to the dissolution of the self. She also realizes that just as the personality is 'nothing' without form, so too is art. Yet her fear of form's limitations plagues her. Throughout the notebooks, she distinguishes between fact and fiction, which she translates into a distinction between truth and fiction. Fiction, she decides, falsifies reality. It does not convey the simple truth of events, does not evoke them as they happened, but interprets them, dresses them up, adds to them. Fiction alters reality; it does not represent it.

In a style of metafiction that questions realist form and its ability to produce meaning, the complex structure of *The Golden Notebook* foregrounds its textuality, its status as a material artefact.

This conclusion prompts Anna into an investigation of the possibility of recording 'real' experience and the ideological grounding of the realist mode. For Anna, realism has to be able to represent actual events and relationships truthfully. But her self-reflexive response to her writing begins to question the precise nature of experience and truth when it is filtered through writing. To investigate this process, Anna tries to re-write the source material of her novel as truthfully as possible, in an attempt to overcome the false emphasis she now recognizes that her novel placed on events. She writes, after mock-reviewing her novel, that 'the emotion it came out of was something frightening, the unhealthy, feverish, illicit excitement of war time, a lying nostalgia, a longing for licence, for freedom, for the jungle, for formlessness' (82). While showing the psychological impulse behind the writing, this passage also suggests the historical and ideological contexts informing the writing of her novel. What this has produced is a 'lying nostalgia' rather than the truth. This conclusion also forces Anna to question critically the basis on which a committed literature might be produced. How can committed literature be sure that it escapes the false consciousness that the dominant ideology produces at its moment of construction? Anna now sees that *Frontiers of War* is an example of false consciousness which causes her to ask, 'Why a story at all – not that it was a bad story, or untrue, or that it debased anything. Why not simply, the truth?' (81-2); she makes a distinction between the truth of her experience and her moulding it into literature. It is interesting to note, however, that although she contrasts 'story' with 'truth,' as

though they were complete opposites, she admits that her story was not ‘untrue.’ She senses, in short, that her view of truth and fiction as opposites is simplistic. Yet she is unable to move beyond it. She is caught between her desire to capture the truth, to portray reality exactly, and her awareness that literature cannot avoid being the expression of an individual artistic vision that gains its power from the subjective shaping that creates it.

This discrepancy constitutes a large part of Lessing’s achievement. She creates a character who articulates the major artistic questions that torment Lessing herself. By paralyzing Anna, Lessing frees herself. Anna’s private, hidden outpourings become Lessing’s public, open art-work. By making *The Golden Notebook* an account of why it could not be written, the text gets written, and it also manages to include the very complexity and richness of detail that were apparently preventing it from coming into being. This is the beauty of the narrative structure, the reason why it does indeed ‘talk through the way it [is] shaped’ (*Preface* xix). Anna is blocked, but writes voraciously; she is publicly silent, but privately clamorous. Through the text’s ingenious construction, this paradox becomes Lessing’s equally paradoxical ‘wordless statement’ (*Preface* xix), a book that says what it apparently cannot say, disclosing chaos and despair, without giving in to them.

What Anna discovers is that writing the truth is far from a simple process, and is inevitably caught up in the ideology of the form in which one chooses to write. Truth thus becomes contingent and dependent on the way in which it is presented. By focusing on the process of turning experience into fiction, she discovers the contradiction out of which realism is born.

The Golden Notebook is partly the account of Anna’s growing realization that fiction and truth are not opposed, that, although fiction does not reproduce reality, it can approximate it. She understands that she cannot ‘cage the truth’ (632); she can merely disclose it. Anna’s revelation relies on Lessing’s challenging part of the Leftist thinking as to the role of committed literature and its realist form. This is a critical point for Anna in terms of realism. More importantly, it registers a crisis in the ability of literature to act politically, as committed aesthetics.

The notion that truth has become alien to the forms originally created to express it is analogous to the notion, also pervasive in the novel that history no longer allows for Marxist interpretation. In both instances there is an apparent paradox: reality and realism are not compatible; historical developments have rendered the historical view point obsolete. In both instances, the containing form – realism, Marxism – has become irrelevant because of a resistance on the part of the real, of history to being contained. *The Golden Notebook* refers to this as crack up, fragmentation, or chaos.

In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing chose to build on a metafictionally split consciousness, by incorporating the dialogue about stories and truth into what is after all another story. She was using the established form in order to comment on its own limits. She also tried to invent a form that could accommodate the ‘cracked’ and ‘split’ characters she was interested in depicting.

Anna/Lessing writes *The Golden Notebook* as her own approximation of reality, making the chaos of her private life a homonym for that of the world. She turns chaos into art through a heavily artificial structure – which reveals the arbitrariness of structure in the

absence of teleology – as a framing envelope that provides a secondary perspective on the chaos that it encases.

While Lessing's fiction taken as a whole raises more questions than provides answers, we might appreciate Hite's conclusion that Lessing has not solved the problem of fragmentation as unfair, and appreciate it in the light of Hutcheon's remarks in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* that 'there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth' (Hutcheon 109), and that *The Golden Notebook's* multiple endings is another metafictional device of laying bare the literary conventions Lessing has used here and elsewhere. Lessing creates both order and a new way of looking at things without offering premature resolutions of conflict. The chaos that has tormented Anna is not smoothed over; actually it assumes centre-stage. At the same time, it is artistically held in check by the novel's patterned structure. Thus the novel admits chaos, fragmentation, and alienation as the central problems of our time, but refuses to succumb to them. It remains both structured and fractured.

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