Women’s Writing and Writing about Women:
Analysis of *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing

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1. Introduction
Finding an appropriate topic for my MA thesis turned out not to be a sinecure. After a few side steps, I finally chose a direction I knew would not disappoint me. I decided to write about women: their position in society, both as a woman and as an artist, as well as their creative contributions to society as an artist; or more specifically as a writer. During my research, I learned that a whole area of investigation has been left out of the curriculum of English Literature of my Bachelor and Master years at the Ghent University. Another compelling reason for me to further investigate a subject that would offer me knowledge that hitherto had been left in the cold. Surely, in writing this thesis, I have not been able to cover every aspect that deals with the woman writer. In the prolific maze of women’s writings, I was forced to make a selective approach and concentrate mainly on one writer, which eventually brought me to Doris Lessing and her novel *The Golden Notebook*. A somewhat obvious choice, considering the fact that she has won the Nobel Prize in Literature in December 2007.

What attracted me in the first place about *The Golden Notebook* was the way Doris Lessing succeeded in accurately portraying the relational problems between men and women, and how she embedded those problems in the currents of that time. The novel was published in 1962, yes, but it seems that Lessing is speaking a universal language and I genuinely felt I could identify with most of the conversations and situations described in the novel. Additionally, the novel also deals with “Woman’s emancipation” and the difficulties that went along with it. A struggle that, although many battles have been won, is still going on in many countries.

A second important aspect that is related to women’s writing and to *The Golden Notebook* in particular, is the fact that writing by and about women is assessed from a completely different point of view compared to writing by men. It almost seems that female authors today are still located in a marginal position – or at least very easily overlooked. Women’s writing, as will be made clear in chapter one, have always been inscribed in definitions made by men. Subsequently, when a woman writer could not be included in the dominant tradition, her work was described as inferior, inadequate or negatively connoted as “feminine”. What appeared to me as the main characteristic in the theoretical books I covered, is that female or feminist writing, in one way or another, searches, aspires and (sometimes desperately) looks for a way to represent “female authenticity”. A way to break free from the dominant masculist tradition by which everything is labelled and compared to; to be able to write as a woman and give a truthful account of the female identity without it being delineated as second-rate or a minor subgenre. This notion of telling the other side of
the story in many ways describes the enterprise of feminist criticism, perhaps even of feminist theorizing in general.

What indeed would have happened if Shakespeare had a sister? Unlike her brother William who had every opportunity to cultivate his interests and eventually materialize his ambitions, “Judith”, as Woolf named her, her ambitions presumably would have been narrowed down from the moment she was born. If she had any ambition that would not include a domestic career, it would not have been accepted. Many stories by and about women will never be known, discussed in class, or taken up in history books. The history of “female literature” would have had a much wider scope today, if it was not for woman’s supposedly inferior position that did not allow her to develop any artistic qualities. However, female writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century found a way to insert a critique in their stories which provides an implicit way to express their disapproval.

Hence the first part will deal with how, just like in society, a woman’s role in fiction was reduced to a small potential. Gradually woman writers started to produce counternarratives and started to define themselves according to their point of view. The second and third part will deal with two aspects of The Golden Notebook which are important in the light of this discussion. Firstly, I will devote a chapter to the fact that Doris Lessing consciously engaged in a modernist experiment. This important feature however was frequently ignored, due to the fact that she is a woman. Secondly, I will discuss the feminist theme that, although Lessing herself repeatedly claimed it was not the most important aspect of the novel, was laurated by the Women’s Liberation Movement. In writing The Golden Notebook Doris Lessing thus produced a “different” narrative, both from a formal and thematic point of view.

When I started my research and collected the necessary reading material, I discovered that Lessing has a most peculiar opinion about studies that try to provide a critical approach to her literary work. “If you have yourself chosen my work as your subject, and if you do have to write a thesis -and believe me I am very grateful that what I've written is being found useful by you- then why don't you read what I have written and make up your own mind about what you think, testing it against your own life, your own experience. Never mind about Professors White and Black.” (Schlueter, 1974, 37) She apparently condemns second-hand criticism and “quoting from the authorities”. It is, however, still necessary to base this thesis on other people’s criticism and analyses, but with this information in hand, it gives me the courage to insert my personal point of view wherever possible.

2. The Representation of Female Characters
Social conventions, historically and culturally determined, are fundamental for the comprehension of cognitive paradigms at work in society. Furthermore these social conventions are mirrored in the ideology and plotstructure of narratives, characteristic of a certain society. This premise is corroborated by Franco Moretti who claims that “narrative outcome is an appropriate criterion to capture the ideological and rhetorical essence of a historical narrative culture” (Keunen, 2007, 42). Duplessis asserts that the teleological structure of romance plots traditionally work towards two conventional endings, deemed appropriate for women. Either the heroine is rewarded by marriage for remaining chaste, or she is “condemned to death” for failing to fit the strictly outlined boundaries society layed out for her. There is no room for the female protagonist to aspire to a combination of romantic love interest and achieve a degree of Bildung. Indeed “[t]hese endings were dominant, related to real practices of sexuality, gender relations, kin and family, and work for middle-class women” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 4). It is the conventional plotstructure for most of the eighteenth-century narratives and, even though the nineteenth century at first sight looks rewarding with respect to Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, “love” and “quest” were still mutually exclusive in the narrative plot, the latter traditionally being suppressed in favor of the first. 

Showalter equally validates this fact and states that “[e]ighteenth-century women novelists exploited a stereotype of helpless femininity to win chivalrous protection from male reviewers and to minimize their unwomanly self-assertion” (Showalter, 1977, 17). Additionally, Gilbert and Gubar correctly observe that the “heroine’s text” persists until the ideological and material bases of that narrative choice was sharply modified, not just on an individual, but more importantly, also on a cultural level. (Blau Duplessis, 1985) Although in my opinion it seems improbable, Hite suspects that the reason for the fact that the “heroine’s text” remained vital for so long might be exactly because female novelists introduced a cultural critique in an apparent conventional story. (Hite, 1989)

2.1 Four alternative Stories

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1 Translation of the original in Dutch. “[P]lotverschillen [zijn] het meeste pertinent om de retorische en ideologische essentie van een historisch-narratieve cultuur te vatten”.

2 With respect to my Bachelorpaper last year, I dealt with the evolution of morality reflected in the genre of “melodrama”. Aside from a few differences that started in the nineteenth century, this same plotstructure remains dominant until the beginning of the twentieth century. Only when society changes its attitude in a manner that is more kindly disposed towards women, do female protagonists receive a different ending.
In *The Other Side of the Story* (1989) Molly Hite argues that many female writers during the eighteenth and nineteenth century considered it their task to represent “the other side” of this romance story and emphasize its restrictions. The first rupture in these dominant narrative patterns and the inchoate birth of an alternative plotline, mediating between what befitted the social expectations for a middle-class woman and the heroine’s own interests, started in the nineteenth century; well-known examples are Jane Austen, George Elliot and the Brontës. It was a modest change that involved the heroine’s education and her attempts to achieve a balance between her own and society’s expectations. After being taught a few lessons she *does* get rewarded with a happy, usually upper-class marriage (Second Bachelor literary course “Enlish Literature II: Historical Overview, Buelens) or as Duplessis analogously observes, “[r]ising up the imaginary ladder of maturity or class is a substitution for independent quest” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 8).

Another scenario occurs when the male protagonist is converted by the heroine, insomuch as that the improvement of the man she will marry becomes her occupation. A third possibility is for a female character to mirror personality traits the heroine herself cannot express, due to the social limitations imposed on her. “So the energies of self-aggrandizement, displaced, can appear at the closure of the narrative, set in a character or a force that opposes the heroine precisely because it is the heroine's own trait factored out” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 8).

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) for example, embodies all three aspects stated above. When Jane acquires economic independence, she marries Mr. Rochester out of her own romantic love interest and she will devote her life to serve Rochester in his mutilated state. Bertha Mason, “the madwoman on the attic”, representing the trapped Victorian wife, expresses Jane's rage over her limited possibilities. On the other hand one cannot ignore the fact that Jane only achieved her independence through a convenient “deus ex machina” inheritance. Additionally Mr. Rochester’s physical restraints make him more of a father-like figure instead of her lover, thereby denying any erotic or sexual elements to the relationship. (Second Bachelor literary course “Enlish Literature II: Historical Overview, Prof. Buelens) According to Elaine Showalter, the wounding of male heroes is a symbolic way of making them experience the passivity, dependency and powerlessness of women. “If he is to be redeemed and to rediscover his humanity, the “woman's man” must find out how it feels to be a woman” (Showalter, 1977, 152).

Jane Austen too foregrounded the fact that marriage frequently proved a “painful necessity”, the economic dependence of women being an important factor to be considered in chosing a suitable husband. (Hite, 1989)
A fourth revolt against conventional “male-dominated” plotlines starts to evolve in the second half of the nineteenth century, when romance is less depicted as a means for satisfying the heroine's ambitions for self-development. The “death of the heroine” plot now claims its place as an equal counterpart of the “happy marriage plot”. Death occurs when a woman tests “the social and historical rules governing the tolerable limits of her aspirations” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 16).

In brief, female power is generally defined by courtship. “As a gendered subject in the nineteenth century, she [the heroine] has barely any realistic options in work or vocation, so her heroism lies in self-mastery, defining herself as a free agent, freely choosing the romance that nonetheless, in one form or another, is her fate” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 15). (Blau Duplessis, 1985)

2.2 The Künstlerroman

One specific theme where tension between the designated role of a woman and a meaningful vocation is displayed, bears close resemblance to the theme in The Golden Notebook: The figure of the female artist, as represented in the Künstlerroman. The Künstlerroman is a subgenre of the Bildungsroman and covers the growth of an artist to maturity; it displays the struggle of a young person against the ideology of a bourgeois society of his or her time.³

Using the female artist as a literary motif dramatizes and heightens the already-present contradiction in bourgeois ideology between the ideals of striving, improvement, and visible public works, and the feminine version of that formula: passivity, “accomplishments,” and invisible private acts (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 84).

Being an artist, whether painter, writer or poet, was not included in a woman's daily domestic obligations. Potential artistry remained undeveloped and came to be seen as oppositional for the female gender. Subsequently, in using the notion of a “female artist” as a fictional character and heroine of the novel, one does not only oppose the conventional notions of womanhood but also the “conventional romantic notions of the genius”, who because of her particular status as “intelligent” can break the chains of society's straitjacket.

³ For this part of the text, I also used information of the following website: (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Künstlerroman)
Another conscious strategy of playing out the tension between corporate and incorporate areas, is reflected in the motif of “embedded artwork”. Many examples however, show that the artistic career is mostly thwarted by the husband or the suitor. Thus the female protagonist mostly conforms to her rigidly constructed female role, as for example of the Aurora Leigh (1856) by Elizabeth Barret Browning, where the “Angel versus Artist” struggle is represented. (Blau Duplessis, 1985) Showalter remarks that “Aurora succeeds as a poet. But she marries Romney in the end, having learned that as a woman she cannot cope with the guilt of self-centered ambition” (Showalter, 1977, 23). The will to write required a radical “transcendence of female identity”. A Victorian woman had no rights to a “vocation” since to work towards a sense of self-development “was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal”. For a woman, whose work traditionally revolved around working for others, the self-centeredness implicit in the act of writing signified a threat to a woman's domestic career. Therefore many writers sought to justify their ambition and that is why their novels frequently display a heroine whose aspirations for an independent life are punished or eventually do end up in a marriage. (Blau Duplessis, 1985)

The transgressional stage between nineteenth and twentieth century fiction is the “triangular plot of nurturance offered to an emergent daughter by a parental couple” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 91). Twentieth-century novels impose a countermovement on the previous traditional romantic narratives by making it the heroine's task to complete the unanswered artistic aspirations of her mother. A good example can be seen in Virginia Woolf's To The lighthouse (1927), in the character of Lily Briscoe, or Surfacing (1972) by Margaret Atwood. (Blau Duplessis, 1985)

Summarily one can pose that in nineteenth-century texts many female writers already inscribed certain notions of critique regarding the dominant notion of gender, female identity and destiny, which introduced complication and innovation. Although the plot does not involve a substantial change and both male and female authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced mainly “heroine's texts”, these texts did enclose a mild critical stance. Unfortunately these attempts to constitute a rupture with the traditional heroine's narrative were “integrated into the familiar account of femininity” as a failure within the dominant tradition. These stories were simply regarded as “further evidence of women's subordinate and supplementary otherness” (Hite, 1989, 4). The twentieth century, on the other hand, has produced a whole group of female writers that question these dominant narrative patterns to criticize the ongoing social and ideological organization of the sex-
gender system reflected in the latter, of which the romance plot is the most common expression. (Hite, 1989)

3. Women’s Identity in Literature and Society

Many writers who comment on women as a group or on female identity in general assume women take up a dual position in the definitions given by dominant forces; id est they are both part of culture in general and part of women's culture in particular. According to Gerda Lerner this accounts for an explanation for the fact that women can be both victims and upholders of the status quo. “[W]omen writers as women negotiate with divided loyalties and doubled consciousnesses, both within and without a social and cultural agreement. This, in conjunction with the psychosexual oscillation, has implications for “sentence” and “sequence”-for language, ideology and narrative” (Duplessis, 1985, 40). This approach is not mutually exclusive with other definitions, but it offers one way of seeing a group that is at least partially marginal or excluded from the dominant system of meaning and values. (Blau Duplessis, 1985)

Raymond Williams in Marxism and Literature (1977) claims that the corporate culture has a set of regulations and implicitly accepted conventions that have penetrated within every aspect of our ways of living. Yet there are always dissent forces that will try to overthrow, renew or question this set of dominant values, which is subsequently translated in both social and narrative texts.

These hegemonic processes are a site for both sociocultural reproduction and sociocultural dissent. The debate that women experience between the critic and the inheritor, the outsider and the privileged, the oppositional and the dominant is a major example of a hegemonic process, one whose results are evident in both social and narrative texts. Constantly reaffirmed as outsiders by others and sometimes by themselves, women's loyalties to dominance remain ambiguous, for they are not themselves in control of the processes by which they are defined (Duplessis, 1985, 41).

Elaine Showalter in A Literature of their Own (1977) coincides with Williams' argument and states that women take up a subcultural position from which they form a unity and respond with fictional and biographical strategies. A woman writer must balance between marginality and inclusion, but with one overriding goal: Rewriting gender in dominant fiction. Therefore it is not at all surprising that one of the major aspects of twentieth-century
women writers is “critique of story”, “[which] is not only a thematic fact but an indication of the moral, ideological, and political desire to rescript the novel” (Blau Duplessis, 1985, 43). (Blau Duplessis, 1985)

3.1 Breaking the Sentence, Breaking the Sequence

One approach to engage in a counternarrative that would establish a radical break with this dominant narrative structure as previously explained, is defined by the fictional author Mary Carmichael in Virginia Woolf’s plead for a woman to have A Room of one’s own (1929). “Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. In these matching statements are telescoped a poetics of rupture and critique” (Duplessis, 1985, 32). Duplessis further explains that

[t]o break the sentence rejects ... the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender - in short, any way in which dominant structures shape mute ones (Duplessis, 1985, 32).

Lauret (1994) makes use of the same quote by Virginia Woolf to describe feminist first person narratives of the 1970s, which attempt to restructure the “sentence of women's lives”. Not only technically, but the “sentence” which passes a cultural verdict upon women in dominant, masculinist representations as well.

Eventually Mary Carmichael produces a woman’s sentence: this sentence gives access to the consciousness of a woman and it elicits a dissent opinion on that same consciousness, previously embedded in “discourses of dominance”. Women’s minds and concerns have never been accurately portrayed in literature, and “breaking the sentence” is a way of radically changing language and tradition to allow a female point of view. A woman's sentence is Woolf's definition of “a writing unafraid of gender as an issue, undeferential to male judgement while not unaware of the complex relations between male and female. A woman's sentence will thus be constructed in considered indifference to the fact that the writer's vision is seen as peculiar, incompetent, marginal (Duplessis, 1985). Consequently Mary Carmichael's first lesson, as Woolf states, is that she writes as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten she is a woman. This double emphasis is a significant strategy, claiming freedom from the tyranny of sex.

Furthermore, narrative strategies of twentieth-century writing by women are the expression of two systemic elements of female identity: a psychosexual script and a
sociocultural situation, both structured by two major traits, situated in the gendering process and in the hegemonic process. This signifies that a female character in twentieth-century novels is situated in an environment where she both has to deal with gender prejudice in her personal life and in society as a whole. (Blau Duplessis, 1985) This will be elaborately discussed in chapter five of this dissertation, as it is one of the major themes of The Golden Notebook.

3.2 The Female Tradition

Showalter indicates that the female literary tradition, from the Brontës onwards to the present day, shows a development similar to any literary subculture. Women are embedded within the framework of a larger society “and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors impinging on each individual” (Showalter, 1977, 11). Nevertheless it is impossible to discern a “movement” because there is no indication of deliberate, conscious progress in their writing. Therefore it is unmistakably important to view this literary tradition in relation to the wider evolution women's self-awareness and the struggle to conquer their (legitimate) place in a male-dominated world. Three stages can be discerned in the development of women's writing.

First, there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity (Showalter, 1977, 13).

An appropriate terminology is suggested: Feminine, from the 1840s to the death of George Eliot; Feminist, from 1880 to 1920; and Female from the 1920s onwards until present day.

In the 880s a new generation of writers emerged who wanted to confront (male) society who had cultivated these sexual stereotypes. Their fiction was used as an implicit indictment to demand social and political change that would soften a woman's restrictions and require fidelity and chastity from men.

The feminist writers then were not important on an artistic level but rather in their insistence on self-development and defining the female identity; they represented a “declaration of independence” in the female tradition. They opened up new possibilities,
such as the right to use sexual vocabulary as men do; they questioned the monopoly of male publishers and establishment and advocated to be freed of patriarchal commercialism.

Female writing courageously moved towards an exploration of the female identity. In their rejection of male society and masculine culture, feminist writers had turned gradually toward a separatist literature of inner space of which the symbol of “the enclosed and secret room” was a powerful image as a flight from men.

After Woolf died in 1941, women's writings did not seem to engage in the modernist mode, but the 1960s on the other hand, inspired by the fierce enthusiasm of Second Wave Feminism, produced a whole new phase for the novel. The novel of the 60s and 70s operates in nineteenth-century realism, but also in the contexts of twentieth-century Freudian and Marxist analysis which produced an authentic female literature, concentrated on women's experience. Fiction writers such as Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt are concerned with the conflicts between art and love, between self-fulfillment and duty. They have insisted upon the right to use vocabularies previously reserved for male writers and to describe formerly taboo areas of female experience. For the first time anger and sexuality are accepted not only as attributes of realistic characters but also, as sources of female creative power. … Lessing and Drabble particularly, see themselves as trying to unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision, and they are concerned with the definition of autonomy for the woman writer (Showalter, 1977, 35).

3.3 An Appropriate Definition

Because standards of literary value have always been masculine standards, and theories of narrative have generally been rooted only in readings of texts signed by men, then it is important to intervene into the production of literature and criticism from the points of view of gender” (Robinson, 1991, 10).
Robinson warns that the term “women's writing” must be implemented with caution, insomuch as this term connotes a definition of a homogeneous object of study instead of a diverse field of cultural production; it threatens to erase differences between and within writing of women originating from different cultural locations. Although this assertion is justified to a certain extent, Robinson still believes that “women's writing” can be investigated with a notion of consensus, more particularly in the fact that narrative is an excellent indicator in which “gender and subjectivity” are represented. This enunciation of “gendered subjectivity” is a process that can be ruptured through women's self-representation, which is “a process by which subjects produce themselves as women within particular discursive contexts” (Robinson, 1991, 11). Women's self-representation is most often underscored by a double movement: “simultaneously against normative constructions of Woman that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and social practices, and toward new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions” (Robinson, 1991, 11). This double position, where women are simultaneously part of culture and an outsider, provides a fracture in women's subjectivity as it is mirrored in women's writing; and lead towards particular characteristics in women's self-representation. Subjectivity, as Robinson applies the term, is

an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices, not some immanent kernel of identity that is expressed through that same engagement. It is not constructed, once and for all, at some locatable point in the individual's history; rather it is a continuous process of production and transformation (Robinson, 1991, 11).

The terminology Showalter (1977) applied to the literary history of women’s writing, namely “Feminine”, “Feminist” and “Female”, can be easily connected to Robinson’s definition of subjectivity. During the last centuries, women writers have made various attempts to redefine themselves and one can be certain that along with changes in society on a political and cultural level, the female identity is far from being in its last stage of development. Subjects are constituted through historically different attitudes that involve relations of subjectivity towards sociality, power and knowledge. “Woman writing” in patriarchal society is simultaneously subject to the (masculine) hegemonic practices, but also subject of her own cultural productions. Hence it is in the process of trying to overcome this contradiction that one is able to occupy different subject positions marked by gender, race, class, and other cultural differences; i.e. it is a means to challenge the masculine superiority in narratives and provide a counternarrative. (Robinson, 1991)
3.4 Anxiety of Influence

In trying to break free from the dominant tradition, the concept “anxiety of influence” as formulated by Gilbert and Gubar (1979) is indispensable. The explanation starts with Harold Bloom, one of the foremost researchers on the psychology of literary history. This is characterized by what Bloom coined “anxiety of influence”: “fear that he [the writer] is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and beyond him, assume essential priority over his own writings” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 47). Bloom's “model of literary history” is essentially male, describing the tension between literary artists as a relationship between father and son. Nevertheless, from a feminist point of view, it still proves a useful paradigm. As Western literary history is overwhelmingly male, Bloom has investigated this very fact and “clarified the implications of the psychosexual and sociosexual con-texts by which every literary text is surrounded” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 47). Bloom's model thus proves useful to define, firstly, the patriarchal context in which so much Western literature was conceived and, secondly, it is a useful criterion to indicate the female author’s fear from her male counterparts.

The woman author does not experience the “anxiety of influence” the same way men writers do, since she must confront predecessors who are almost exclusively male and from which she is obviously significantly different. Additionally, she is inscribed the female in demarcations that radically oppose her true nature. On the one hand these male writers exact authority and, on the other hand, their representation of a woman's consciousness is rendered inaccurately. Consequently, the “anxiety of influence” of a male author “is felt by a female poet as an even more primary “anxiety of authorship” - a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a “precursor” the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 49). The female's battle then revolves around trying to establish another version of herself, rather than accept what her male precursors make of her. In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization. This “revisionary struggle” therefore must, as also Lessing ardently pleads for with respect to the valuation of a novel, try to approach it from a new direction that is situated outside our familiar premises of knowledge. In 1973, Lessing was still very critical about her book. “If it were coming out now [1973] for the first time it might be read, and not merely reacted to: things have changed very fast. Certain hypocrisies have gone. For instance, ten, or even five years ago -it has been a sexually contumacious time- novels and plays were being plentifully
written by men furiously critical of women... But these attitudes in male writers were taken for granted, accepted as sound philosophical bases, as quite normal, certainly not as womanhating, aggressive or neurotic. It still goes on, of course – but things are better, there is no doubt of it” (Preface to The Golden Notebook, 1973, ix-x).

Gilbert and Gubar suggest that this revolt would best commence by seeking a female precursor who proves that this struggle against patriarchal literary authority can be won. Moreover, as confirmed by Bloom's theory of “anxiety of influence”, male writers feel exhausted by their need to revise, whereas women writers see themselves as pioneers in creative writing. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979)

3.5 Liberating Literature

The Golden Notebook was published in 1962, at the time when Second Wave Feminism began to emerge and one year before Betty Friedan's path-breaking novel The Feminine Mystique (1963). It is not surprising therefore that the novel was received as the feminist Bible of the Women's Liberation Movement. Doris Lessing can be designated as a pioneer in discerning social trends, anticipating rather than merely confirming them. The Golden Notebook’s highly intellectual, politically involved “Free Women” preceded the Women's Liberation Movement. (Showalter, 1977) In the newly added introduction to the 1972 edition of The Golden Notebook, Lessing writes that “[s]ome books are not read in the right way because they have skipped a stage of opinion, assume a crystallisation of information in society which has not yet taken place. This book was written as if the attitudes that have been created by the Women's Liberation movements already existed” (ix).

Ellen Morgan too signals the emergence of a new kind of literature from Second Wave feminism which constituted a break with the traditional Bildungsroman: a neo-feminist text manifested itself in which adulthood, previously equated with marriage, now meant “the achievement of authentic selfhood” (Lauret, 1994, 90).

4 The title corresponds with the title of Lauret’s critical study Liberating Literature (1994)

5 For this part of the text, I used used information of the following website: (http://www.rosadoc.be/site/nieuw/nieuws/duiding/doris_lessing.htm)
Women's Liberation writers consciously chose to challenge the literary standards and representational strategies which they had encountered as 'the dominant' in American culture. Not only did writing promise freedom of self-definition in the search for a female authenticity, not only would feminist writing liberate its readers to recognise the real conditions of their existence, but it might also serve to liberate literature itself from its restrictive and prescriptive male-determined standards of good and serious writing (Lauret, 1994, 77).

The first person narrative of the female Bildungsroman were exemplars of a new sub-genre, “portraits of the artist as a young woman or female Künstlerroman” (Lauret, 1994, 90). This new feminist fiction could not be categorised according to traditional modes of literary classification, since the application of new themes exacted new forms of representation and new ways of reading. As Lauret indicates, feminist writers wanted to start completely afresh and transgress the boundaries men had confined them to for centuries. In the 1930s they turned away from “modernist impersonality” and revived realist modes of writing as to write about “the female experience”. To restructure the “sentence”, as indicated earlier by Woolf, was the main project feminist writers engaged in. The fact that this restructuring was indeed a conscious project, and not “a spontaneous overflow of feminist emotion or narcissistic indulgence, becomes clear when we read feminist first person narratives as self-conscious fictions of subjectivity in which new scripts for women's lives are being written” (Lauret, 1994, 97). (Lauret, 1994)

3.5.1 The Golden Notebook: An Icon

In deconstructing the conventional ideological and cultural gender institution in narratives, Doris Lessing is an important female author who offers an oppositional narrative strategy. In this context, being a white South-African and a woman, Lessing can be said to display “double marginalization”; she came to England in 1949 to escape the troubles her own country, Rhodesia, was facing at the time. (Blau Duplessis, 1985)

On a thematical level, although she does sometimes object that term, writing The Golden Notebook, she was crowned a feminist icon by the Women's Liberation Movement. The novel epitomizes Second Wave feminism, in which the formal characteristics “align feminist first person narratives with the political literature of other non-dominant groups” (Lauret, 1994, 98). In brief, the personal is connected to the political. The protagonists are “Free Women” who embody the modernity of the late fifties: they are divorced, take lovers
and have a career; they want to lead an independent life and obtain the same liberties men enjoy. This personal story is encompassed by their political engagement as communists and, as communism in the end altogether failed to engender social change, the upcoming women's rights movement did succeed in altering society profoundly, by conflating the personal and the political. (Lauret, 1994)

Being raised in Southern-Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Doris Lessing has had an unusual childhood. Her father, Alfred Cook Taylor, had bought a farm from the colonial government and moved away from London with his wife Emily McVeagh, five-year old Doris and her brother Harry. Lessing claimed to have had an unhappy childhood, leading a solitary existence on the deserted farmland and because her mother enforced a strict regime of hygiene and rules on her, concerned with raising a proper daughter. Lessing attended the “Girl’s High School”, a convent school in Salisbury, where she left at the age of fourteen and subsequently the end of her formal education. Lessing became a self-educated intellectual which, although at the time she felt regret not having had a formal education, she now sees as one of her biggest advantages.

So I did an immense amount of reading and I came up with certain basic facts. One basic fact was that our education was extremely lacking informationwise. You could be brought up in this culture and not know anything at all about the ideas of other cultures. We are brought up with this appalling Western arrogance, all of us. This is the reason I am glad I haven’t been educated because it seems to me almost impossible not to have this arrogance if you are brought up inside the Western education system (Denewet, 84, 8-9).

In my opinion this important fact of her childhood, being raised outside of Western culture, can account for her innovative point of view, looking at things from a completely different perspective (exactly a characteristic of feminist writers). She does not take things for granted and, as stated in my introduction, she does not want critics or readers to blindly copy from the “authorities” but to rely on his or her own experience and imagination. (Denewet, 1984)

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6 For this part of the text, I also used used information of the following website: (http://www.rosadoc.be/site/nieuw/nieuws/duiding/doris_lessing.htm)

7 For this part of the text I also used information of the following website: (http://www.dorislessing.org/biography.html)
3.5.2 Two Important Themes

The Golden Notebook was in several aspects considered as a prototype for “American feminist fictions of subjectivity”, exploring the social, political and psychic features of a woman's consciousness. In the complementary introduction of the 1973 edition, Lessing explains one of the major themes of the novel: “the predicament of the artist in the modern world”. Although with Anna Wulf, Lessing created a strong personality, it was never her intention to envelope the story in a strictly gender-related context. Lessing wanted to encompass “connections between the dynamics of gender relations, the history of the Left, postcolonial struggles, the nature of love, the insights and limitations of psychoanalysis, and the crisis in literary representation – all at once” (Liberating Literature, 1994, 109). Nevertheless, two important features of the novel were received as and influenced feminist writing.

Firstly, the theme of the alienated female artist who suffers from a writer's block and who attempts to create order out of the modern chaos, was taken up by (American) feminists who saw the struggle with traditional modes of representation and language as a condition for social change.

Secondly the formal innovations Lessing applied make the novel a multi-layered text which mirrors Anna Wulf's own consciousness. She uses a first person voice in some notebooks, third person fictional narrative in others and “the Russian doll-like framing technique of novels within the novel” (Lauret, 1994, 109). Lessing succeeds in collapsing the formal differences between realism and modernism, and, at least on a superficial level, even postmodernism. The Golden Notebook embodied a radical (modernist) change from a formal point of view; a characteristic which was, however, mostly seen as a shortcoming. These two aspects will now be discussed in the next two chapters.

4. A literature of Their Own

The postfeminist conviction that sufrage for women signified a huge leap forward and that women’s emancipation had bridged a gap between the traditional masculine and
feminine roles, found its roots in the fact that women of Woolf’s generation for example, enjoyed far less opportunities with respect to a higher education, compared to women writers born in the twentieth century. Additionally, during the postwar period, the “boundaries of the female subculture”, still very dominant for working-class women, were not as rigid anymore for the cultural elite. Nevertheless, novels of the 1960s proved a direct evidence that the supposedly “liberated woman” turned out not to be so liberated after all; particularly examplary in this aspect is Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. Lessing's “Free Women” lead independent lives, providing for themselves and their child, but in the end they seem fragmented and helpless, still highly “unfree” by their dependency upon men. Rebecca West claimed in her essay “And They All Lived Unhappily Ever After” (1974) that feminist reform had not contributed to a change in the fundamental way women viewed themselves.

We have an elegant sufficiency of women novelists, and they give us a great deal of evidence, which will enable us to make up our minds whether the feminist pioneers have been disappointed in their hope that, if women were admitted to the universities and the professions and commerce and industry and exercised the vote and were eligible for both Houses of Parliament, they would not only be able to earn their own livings and develop their minds and live candidly, but might also be luckier in love than their mothers and grandmothers, and would take it better if they were unlucky. But this evidence is not forthcoming. After a course in Contemporary Women Novelists, it is as if one heard a massive female choir singing … “Oh, don’t deceive me, oh, never leave me, how could you use a poor maiden so?” (“And They All Lived Unhappily Ever After”, originally in *Times Literary Supplement*, July 26, 1974; quoted from Showalter, 1977, 301).

Women writers continue their ongoing strife for their personal and artistic autonomy, through criticism, essays and fiction. Although many writers use modern features, they have been thoroughly permeated by nineteenth-century feminine literature; many women novelists have written biographies of nineteenth-century women novelists or published collections of their letters. Additionally, they are also feminine in their struggle to keep a healthy balance between their artistic vocation and their personal relationships. It has been difficult for a woman writer, restricted by feminine chains of love, marriage and loyalty, to transcend social and familial pressures and not only write about what was considered permissible for a woman. “Indeed, [for men] the violation of private affection, the public exposure of someone else's suffering, has become almost a rite of passage for male writers, a display of manliness that critics take as a sign of true artistic dedication” (Showalter, 1977, 303). This does not mean that female writers' concerns are irrelevant or old-fashioned;
women writers, as Lessing, Drabble, Murdoch and Byatt continue to raise the stakes and are too moving into modes of writing: They combine feminine self-analysis and protest in the context of twentieth-century social and political concern. These novels deal with the way men and women use language differently -and therefore sometimes fail to communicate- and of a male incapability to love.

Despite her heroine Anna's insistence that she and her friend Molly are completely new types of women, there is an explicit and implicit continuity between their experiences, emotions, and values and the “great line” of independent artist-women of the past.” Showalter even claims that The Golden Notebook is such a “monumental achievement” that one is tempted to see Lessing's novel as “the ultimate statement about twentieth-century women and the female tradition (Showalter, 1977, 308).

Since The Golden Notebook, Lessing is less concerned with feminity and persistently moves away from social realism which she valued highly in the late 1950s. Lessing feels that the “sex and gender issues” are less important in the face of the global catastrophe which she believes the world is headed for: germ warfare, nuclear warfare, or simply the breakdown of civilization, as for example in The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974). Showalter believes this to be a conscious escape-process from the “anguish of feminine fragmentation”. Ever since the beginning of her literary career, Lessing has been struggling with her feminine side, especially as they have expressed themselves in narrative techniques. In “Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's fiction” Lynn Suckenick claims that “Lessing's aversion to the feminine sensibility has progressed from satiric asides in the early novels to a resolute stand against all emotion and irrationality” (Showalter, 1977, 309). On the one hand, Lessing feels that women's subconscious displays a certain sensitivity regarding “unconventional signals”, which give them an advantage in communication men don't have. On the other hand she does not want the reader to see women's talent to manipulate the subconscious in the light of a stereotyped “feminine intuition”. She believes women to be more practiced than men in interpreting “inner space”, but does see to it that she emphasizes the nonexclusivity of this, e.g. by using a male protagonist in Briefing for a Descent into Hell (1971). (Showalter, 1977) In “Doris lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview by Jonah Raskin” Lessing even asserted that she is “impatient with people who emphasize sexual revolution. I say we should all go to bed, shut up about sexual liberation, and go on with the important matters (Schlueter, 1974, 71).
4.1 The Golden Notebook: An Introduction

The reader meets Anna and Molly, two articulate women with a shared political (communist) interest, both dealing with problems related to their love life as well as motherhood. Anna has written a successful novel, “Frontiers of War”, of which she still receives royalties and therefore is free to do volunteer work for the Party; Molly is a minor actress in the theatre. Both are divorced and entrusted with the care of a child, Janet and Tommy respectively. After a year of separation, the two women catch up with each other and soon it becomes clear that Tommy is a worrisome teenager and that Anna is dealing with a writer’s block. (Brewster, 1965)

Anna Wulf, Freeman before she got married, experiences a mental breakdown largely as a reaction to the fact that the world around her is falling apart; she sees her own reaction as perfectly normal due to the chaos and horror surrounding her. Anna tries to take control of her life and resolve her writer’s block by writing in four different notebooks “and not one because, as she recognises, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness -of breakdown” (Schlueter, 1974, 23). She has a red notebook concerned with her communist politics; a black notebook to record her life in Africa in the 1940s; a blue one that attempts to be a diary and finally a yellow notebook in which she creates her fictional alter-ego Ella; Paul, an alter-ego for Ella; Julia, an alter-ego for Molly. (Joannou, 2000)

Every notebook is written in the first person and cover the years from 1950 to 1957. Additionally, the novel has a fifth notebook, called “The Golden Notebook” written in 1957, also about the events taking place in that year. Besides the notebooks, there are five sections entitled “Free Women”, written in the third person and which cover the year 1957 and the events of that summer. It is written in an objective manner in which Anna serves as the central consciousness. The novel opens with a “Free Women” section, followed by entries of the black, the red, the yellow and the blue notebook, every time in that order. After this pattern is repeated four times, the novel ends with “The Golden Notebook”, which is a synthesis of her blue diary and a final “Free Women” section. (“Art and Reality in The Golden Notebook by John L. Carey in Doris Lessing: Critical Studies, Pratt and Dembo, 1974)

Anna's split, symbolized by the four notebooks, is conflated in “The Golden Notebook” section, which Anna gives to her lover Saul Green, who is even more fragmented within
himself than Anna is. “Anna and Saul Green the American “break down”. They are crazy, lunatic, mad-what you will. They “break down” into each other, into other people, break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts, the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other, dissolve” (Schlueter, 1974, 4). At the end of their affair Saul Green gives Anna the theme for her next book, which begins with “The two women were alone in the London flat”, exactly as the beginning of the real novel *The Golden Notebook*; vice versa Anna gives Saul her Golden Notebook and the theme for his next book, of which the first sentence is written in it: “On a dry hillside in Algeria a soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle.” “Pressures, inner and outer, end the Notebooks; a heavy black line is drawn across the page of one after another. But now that they are finished, from their fragments can come something new, *The Golden Notebook*” (Preface of *The Golden Notebook*, 1973, vii).

Almost at the end of the “Golden Notebook” section, Anna looks back at her life in the form of film sequences run off by a projectionist and directed by herself. She names each section of her life: “the Mashopi film”, “the film about Paul and Ella”, “the film about Michael and Anna” etc. It is here that Anna finally is able to confront herself with the chaos her life has become. “Time had gone, and my memory did not exist, and I was unable to distinguish between what I had invented and what I had known, and I knew that what I had invented was all false. It was a whirl, an orderless dance, like the dance of white butterflies in a shimmer of heat, over the damp sandy vlei” (Brewster, 1965, 151)

4.1.1 The Yellow Notebook

The most technical devices Lessing uses in her attempt to “break certain forms of consciousness” are to be found in the yellow notebook. Most sections of this notebook deal with another book Anna is writing, called *The Shadow of the Third*, which in the beginning resembles the “Free Women” section but later on is reduced to mere incomplete fragments.

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8 Although Doris Lessing does not like an autobiographical explanation of her work, I suspect this was based on her own experiences. “The point is, as far as I can see, everything is cracking up. Lessing believed society to be breaking up at the time, ever since the “Bomb” was dropped on Hiroshima. She felt appalled by the fact that the west used more powerful weapons they had; she supported the war against Japan and Germany but felt disgusted by the bombings in Dresden. “I was split in the middle... I feel as if the Bomb has gone off inside myself, and in people around me. That's what I mean by cracking up” (“Doris lessing aqt Stony Brook: An Interview by Jonah Raskin”, Schlueter, 1974, 65).
When Anna starts her yellow diary about Ella, she contemplates: “I see Ella, walking slowly about a big empty room, thinking, waiting. I, Anna, see Ella. Who is of course, Anna. But that is the point, for she is not. The moment I, Anna, write: Ella rings up Julia to announce, etc., then Ella floats away from me and becomes someone else. I don't understand what happens at the moment Ella separates herself from me and becomes Ella”. It is clearly the moment when Anna starts to fall apart; Lessing stops her right before the point of suicide. (Brewster, 1965)

Instead of a coherent narrative about Ella, the last entry of the yellow notebook comprises nineteen fragments of possible stories. Each story is entitled “a short story” or “a short novel” and dates which are otherwise carefully noted down are omitted. Then Anna’s diary follows in the blue notebook where, amongst other things, her love affair with Saul Green is described. This affair seems to contain the semen of the nineteen stories that precede it. It is not clear why Lessing has put the story ideas first, and then the experience out of which they might have come, but it might be a last indication of how far Anna’s mind has been fragmented. Lessing herself stated in a newly added preface of the 1973 publication that many people may have already addressed the breakdown theme, but “[h]ere it is rougher, more close to experience, before experience has shaped itself into thought and pattern” (“Art and Reality in The Golden Notebook by John L. Carey in Doris Lessing: Critical Studies, Pratt and Dembo, 1974).

Through the character of Anna, Lessing is able to question the appropriateness of realist forms to represent the fragmented nature of modern reality (which she had come to believe was unrepresentable), and the crises of belief with which intellectuals on the New Left were having to grapple. In abandoning conventional narrative, The Golden Notebook also explores the relationship between language and ideology and the possibility of a new revolutionary literary form (Joannou, 2000, 24).

4.2 The Other Side of the Story

9 The title corresponds with the title of Molly Hite’s critical study The Other Side of the Story (1989)
“Why don't women writers produce postmodernist fiction?” is the introductory question Molly Hite postulates in The other side of the story (1989, 1). As I questioned myself or my direct environment about which writers characteristically can be defined as (post)modern, a handful of male writers readily come to mind, while it is much more difficult to come up with important female writers in that same aspect.

Why have women writers been reduced to the margins of postmodern fiction? Liberating Literature correspondingly strengthens this statement, alluding to the fact that many female students in the 1960s, who engaged in a literature course, were confronted with a sense of “alienation in the classroom” because of an almost exclusively male literary canon. “Like their female peers in sociology, psychology and history, literature students were faced with a heavily male-dominated curriculum, overwhelmingly devised by men, taught by men, assessed by men” (Lauret, 1994, 75). The fundamental difference between the first wave and second wave of feminism is that there came into existence “feminist scholarship”, which constituted a vital, oppositional force; there, questions were asked related to the conventional structures and institutions of society, inter alia marriage, family and traditional gender roles and the structure of knowledge itself. “In this, critical theory has been an invaluable tool, for it has provided means to dismantle epistemological categories and reveal systems as systems, as conventional rather than “natural” (Greene and Kahn, 1993, 13).

It appeared evident to the point of being a truism that the important male fiction writers of the period after 1960 were characteristically engaged in certain kinds of stylistic and structural innovation and that the important female fiction writers of the period were engaged in no sort of innovation at all (Hite, 1989, 1).

Be that as it may, it is a fact that many contemporary female writers are engaged in narrative innovations which, additionally, are more challenging than the dominant modes of fictional experiment, precisely in this aspect: “the context for innovation is a critique of a culture and a literary tradition apprehended as profoundly masculist” (Hite, 1989, 2). The reason why Lessing, Atwood and Walker for example are not regarded upon as experimental fiction writers is because they seem to differ profoundly from the postmodernists. They equally share “the decentering and disseminating strategies of postmodernist narratives; they contain, however, a different approach towards the implement of those particular strategies, because of their emphasis on marginal characters and themes, in this way re-centering the value structure of the narrative.
Exactly because of the fixed ideological institutions from which we label and criticize certain fictional modes, which are defined by “masculinist presuppositions”, it may be considered as exceptional to claim experimental women's writing as a fact. In the preface to *The Golden Notebook* (1973), Lessing too complains about the fact that our culture in general, and more specifically our educational system, works by labelling, compartmentalizing and criticizing everything from the same institutional values that are internationally implemented. Critics and reviewers have only been taught to compare a book or play with current patterns of feeling and thinking. Lessing defends a more imaginative and original judgement that situates itself outside these dominant modes of thinking and encourages individuals to educate their own judgement. Both Lessing and Hite postulate that it is necessary to plead for a different approach, to read other-wise and consider women's writing as part of mainstream fiction, and especially to regard experimental writing by women as a deliberate strategy, instead of an inattentive shortcoming. Instead of trying to inscribe women's writing in the dominant (masculinist) tradition, one has to try to see these writings not only as “the other side of the story” but simply as another story. (Hite, 1989)

4.2.1 Feminism Versus Modernism

“[L]iterary movements of the twentieth century that arose in opposition to realism -most evidently modernism and postmodernism- have strong affinities with a specifically feminist interrogation of the assumptions encoded in realist conventions” (Hite, 1989, 11). However, very few women writers have been taken up in the twentieth-century canon of Modernist writers. A quick look at the general overview of modernist writers in the Second Bachelor course “Enlish Literature II: Historical Overview” (Prof. Buelens) shows that only Virginia Woolf has been taken up in the list of “modernist writers”, conventionally surrounded by James Joyce, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. In his study *Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-bibliographical Guide* (1986), McCaffery only comes up with 95 men and only eleven women. (Quoted from Hite, 1989, 2)

Showalter's observes that women's literary history has reduced a great variety of English women novelists to a narrow summation of only five writers: Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf. As the so-called “minor” novelists have been left out the anthologies, it was difficult to discern certain continuities between women's writing. Since the Women's Liberation Movement in the 60s, however, a renewed interest in women's experience emerged and considered in relation to each other, which has opened up new areas of investigation. (A Literature of Their Own, 1977)
Even more so, male writers obtain the exclusive right on postmodernism in postmodernist catalogues. It is generally assumed that women do not write in the modernist mode and are subsequently “conservative”, “traditional” and are continually assumed to be writing in the realist tradition. This predication has produced a wide range of feminist criticism. Nevertheless, many of the feminist critics who wanted to do justice to “women's fiction as a chronicle of female experience” found themselves in the process of writing to be using “an exaggerated theory of mimesis”, where authors are simply mirrored in their texts. (Hite, 1989) This lead to “anxiety of authorship”, a term explained in chapter three.

When a woman writer is regarded upon as “different”, it is rarely attributed to her conscious doing, but rather to her different temperament, her position in society or simply because she is a woman. Doris Lessing angrily commented on certain reviews: “They thought it was personal -it was, in parts. But is was a very highly structured book, carefully planned. The point of that book was the relation of its parts to each other. But the book they tried to turn it into was: The Confessions of Doris Lessing” (Schlueter, 1974, 20).

While some feminist criticism has concentrated on representing “the female experience” in a realist, confessional mode of writing, “another strain of feminist criticism has demonstrated that the decentering and destabilizing tendencies of recent experimental writing have a great deal in common with the feminist project of overturning culturally constructed oppositions, among them the oppositions that constitute the powerful codes of gender” (Hite, 1989, 16). Theorists of postmodernism actually confirm that their movement shares a common political project with feminism, in that both want to destabilize narrative relations between dominant and subordinate, container and contained; with regard to “écriture féminine”, it specifically revolves around the breaking with cultural and social conventions towards women in a patriarchal society. “Because feminism has a stake in the undoing of hierarchy and containment, it appears that writing commonly described in terms of its subversive newness, as avant-garde or postmodern, can also be described in terms of its subversive political implications, as “feminine” or feminist writing” (Hite, 1989, 16-17). (Hite, 1989)

10 The narrative innovations in Dorothy Richardson 's “Pilgrimage”, such as the stream of consciousness narrative mode, were disregarded at the favor of simply being the “confessions” of the female protagonist. (Hite, 1989, 9)
4.2.2 Criticism on The Golden Notebook

*The Golden Notebook* is a highly self-conscious and experimental work, as Doris Lessing herself claimed: “*The Golden Notebook* was an extremely carefully constructed book. And the way it's constructed says what the book is about...”. Yet after the book was published in 1962, “…very few people have understood” (A *Talk with Doris Lessing* by Florence Howe in Schlueeter, 1974, 79). The book was mainly praised for Lessing’s perceptive representation of women's consciousness and subsequently, the book was almost exclusively defined as a work that “has left its mark upon the ideas and feelings of a whole generation of young women” (Elizabeth Hardwick in *The New York Times Book Review*, on the cover of *The Golden Notebook*, 1973). Few critics commented on what type of novel it was.

Robert Taubman's review in *New Statesman* (April, 1962) is representative for the overall criticism Lessing received. Taubman writes that the book “will soon displace the Simone de Beauvoir paperbacks in the hands of all those who want what she is supposed to provide -a sort of intelligent woman's guide to the intelligent woman”. He perceives an “unusual structure” but believes it to be “less a matter of subtle organization than of simple, rather haphazard naturalism. ... If there is anything new here, then it is an advance in naturalism” (Hite, 1989, 56).

In *Neither Compromise nor Happiness* (New Republic, 1962, 17) Irving Howe states that Doris Lessing is radically different from other women writers in the sense that “she grasps the connection between Anna Wulf's neuroses and the public disorders of the day, and second in that she has no use either for the quaverings of the feminist writers or the aggressions of those female novelists whose every sentence leads a charge in the war of the sexes” (Hite, 1989, 60). In short, Howe asserts that writing by and about women is an inferior genre, which Lessing herself has overcome by surpassing apparently typical feminine narrative conventions, subsequently described as: the inability to see personal experience in a bigger whole, bitchiness, melodrama or “minute gradations of ... sensibility” (Hite, 1989, 61). Lessing has transcended typical female writing in that she treated the sphere of personal relations, with regard to a wider social and political context. As Lessing writes about “what's real”, therefore she must write the kind of realist novel, to which Howe refers. In doing so she surpasses expectation, rising above “feminine” conditions which restrict female authors generally and in particular those female authors who continually deal with the topic of female experience.(61) This is, however, the last thing Lessing intended to write, a realist novel; and even though Doris Lessing herself is uncomfortable about people reading her book with a primary focus on “women’s issues”, or the “sex war”, which was not her main concern, this “does not specify a kind of holism in which women's issues are
exposed as partial and minor by being subordinated to an overarching intellectual framework. (Hite, 1989)

4.2.3 (Post)Modern Structure

The starting point of *The Golden Notebook* is that it considers “the treatment of the failure of a single world view to encompass the whole of the twentieth-century reality” (Hite, 1989, 63). Anna Freeman adopts the “orthodox Marxism of the mid-1950s” in order to find unity, a sort of structure that creates order, and “will bring an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live” (*The Golden Notebook*, 1973, 161). Marxist literary theory in the mid-1950s was mainly concerned with a resurgence of the realist novel, with an emphasis on “unity” whereby personal and social experience would by synthesized and integrated into a coherent whole. (Hite, 1989) In her 1973 introduction, Lessing admits it was no surprise for her that she got “intelligent criticism from people who were, or who had been, marxists. They saw what I was trying to do” (Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, xiv).

Nonetheless, later on in the novel Marxism is thoroughly rejected as 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” (GN, 360). This restraint has to be implemented in a more broad structural critique that encompasses the whole of the book, namely an indictment of “the general set of presuppositions governing Western culture in the modern period”, up to the point where it is stated that any world view can be adequate and represent a unified whole (Hite, 1989, 63). Therefore Lessing wanted to transcend the realist tradition, which she previously regarded as the highest achievement in literature. She aspired to break “form” and “forms of consciousness” and attempted to move beyond them. “[H]er emphasis throughout is on the complexity of experience, its intractability to integration, the difficulty of achieving coherence without inevitably succumbing to reduction” (Hite, 1989, 64). It is not the “unified” whole that achieves significance but fragmentation and discontinuity that allow for new possibilities to emerge. Hence *The Golden Notebook* can be seen, in the light of her later novels, as a transitional work that does not only oppose itself to realism but also to the modernist tradition, opening up new directions for the novel. (Hite, 1989)

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11 All subsequent references in the text are to this edition and will be further indicated parenthetically by GN.
4.2.4 Realism Versus Modernism

Doris Lessing’s most obvious attack is on the coherence realist fiction demands of characters and on the conventional notions of identity. The Communist Party and Marxism provide a framework for Anna, which facilitates her understanding of her psychic disorder. Her disillusionment with the Party makes her consult a Jungian psychoanalyst, whom she and Molly call Mother Sugar. The problem however with Mother Sugar is that she tries to “situate a personal self within the Jungian framework of mythological archetypes, which are themselves outside history. According to her psychoanalyst, people's identities can be reduced to a fixed number of possibilities or archetypes that comprise all the human variations. It is possible to recognize a certain “character”, using only a number of preexisting forms. “‘Mother Sugar used to say, “You’re Electra,” or “You’re Antigone,” and that was the end, as far as she was concerned,’ said Anna” (GN, 5). (Hite, 1989)

Sydney Janet Kaplan suggests that perhaps it is not a coincidence Lessing has used a Jungian psychoanalyst, Mother Sugar, to signal a link between Anna’s individual consciousness implicated within the larger “universal” picture, referring to what Jung termed the “collective unconsciousness”; this can be explained as a wire of images, accessible to everyone. The Golden Notebook comes closest to this idea because of the fact that the fragmented consciousness of the protagonist is mirrored in the novel’s structure. “Anna's consciousness of herself is split up in four, differently coloured notebooks and this separation symbolizes her relation to herself, her body, to other people, and to society in general (Pratt and Dembo, 122)”. However, to communicate a connection between the “individual” with the “collective” and achieve a new sort of unity, without making a work abstrusive, as for example James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake, calls for the development of a completely new kind of novel, which, as Kaplan claims, does not yet exist. (“The Limits of Consciousness in the Novels of Doris Lessing”, by Sydney Janet Kaplan in Pratt and Dembo, 1974)

Ana on the other hand argues that people who correspond to a certain archetype, or stock character, are people who have “chosen to block off at this stage or that. People stay sane by blocking off, by limiting themselves. To be whole by present-day societal standards is not to have resisted fragmentation but to have been reduced to a single fragment” (GN, 469). Anna, however, values her problems in the light of the contemporary social problems; her longing for psychic wholeness is reflected in her nervous breakdown at the end of the
book, which imbues her with feelings of powerlessness. (Hite, 1989) This split is due to the fact that two oppositional sides of Anna's personality are contesting each other: Anna, the woman and Anna, the Communist.

[W]hat Anna perceives here as an individual problem was in fact representative of the split between their reason and their emotions that women on the left frequently experienced, but which they lacked the language, support and confidence to express. Anna's predicament is a response to a masculinist political culture and to the misogyny which was endemic to both the old and the new Left (Joannou, 2000, 31).

So it is obvious that the structure of the book mirrors Anna Wulf's belief of the consciousness being fragmented.

*The Golden Notebook* ... deals with the political perils of assuming that there is a coherent, explicable universe and a “real story” that adequately reflects it. It is full of gaps that leave room for subsequent developments and full of different kinds of writing that hint at techniques for realizing the future in a different shape, especially Lessing's own future productions in a variety of genres: space fiction, allegory, apocalyptic (Hite, 1989, 62).

This also means that, for a writer, to conceive a character in a preestablished form, does not allow a “new future in a different shape”; it prevents the elicitation of any new idea that could oppose dominant culture. (Hite, 1989)

4.2.5 The Limits of Representation

*The Golden notebook* deals with questions of representation, particularly with the failure of (realist) language to reflect contemporary life. Hite argues that language “is a means of making safe, of restricting to manageable dimensions, of ruling out the radically unknown”. It confirms the fact that “humanity consists of a limited number of recurring variations on an eternal theme” (Hite, 1989, 66).

As Lessing has often expressed her concern about the limitations of language, the medium of fiction might not be sufficiently accurate to express her vision of unity, and especially with respect to the communication of dreams and other deeper levels of
consciousness. Kaplan observes that Anna's sense of self-definition is inextricably related to the power of the written word, because words are form and “without the application of words the individual units of life have no form of themselves; without this application the possibility of fixing the chaos does not exist” (“Art and Reality in The Golden Notebook by John L. Carey in Doris Lessing: Critical Studies, Pratt and Dembo, 27, 1974).

When Anna gradually discovers that words can never comprise reality completely, because words they are no loner sufficient to keep the chaos contained, Anna's personality starts to dissolve and there exist no clear boundaries anymore between her own and other people’s consciousness. “Her self-identity has become so amorphous that what she receives becomes part of herself. As a consciousness not totally self-contained, it displays within it the disorder and confusion of the world outside. But “outside” and “inside” are losing their meanings” (Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 125). This becomes especially clear in Anna's relationship with Saul Green, where Anna has difficulties to separate her consciousness of Paul's and they consequently engage in a mutual mental breakdown. In any respect, their shared mental disturbance marks a new starting point. (“The Limits of Consciousness in the Novels of Doris Lessing”, by Sydney Janet Kaplan in Pratt and Dembo, 1974)

Reflecting on how a writer is able to portray fictional characters accurately so that they would be represented as “real”, the characters of the novel mirror the adage Lessing proposes, in the character of Anna: Anna/Lessing concludes that people either “achieve coherence by blocking off, to the point where they become virtual caricatures … or alternatively, so cracked and split that existing conventions seem wholly inadequate to portray them” (Hite, 1989, 71).

The caricatured figures are overwhelmingly male. They tend to be characterized as embodying professional, national and sexual stereotypes which can be defined according to certain standard expressions. Richard, Molly's ex-husband, has a blocked-off nature since he separates emotional from physical, having a wife (Marion) who takes care of him and the children, and a mistress to satisfy his sexual needs. Anna and Molly do not lead the physically independent lives of the men in the novel, inasmuch as they are always emotionally involved, “[b]ut at least we've got more sense than to use words like physical and emotional as if they didn't connect” (GN, 131), she dryly comments on Richard’s remarks. The Ceylonese De Silva equally proves to be a emotionally flattened male. The Canadian Nelson “combines political acumen with a profound and wholly unacknowledged mysogyny” (Hite, 1989, 72), stating almost as a caricature, Anna observes, that he only needs three things, a wife, a career and a mistress. Anna classifies her colleague Jack as “the efficient type of lover. “ ‘The man who is not sensual, has learned love-making out of a
book, probably called *How To Satisfy Your Wife*” (GN, 453). Anna sadly concludes that “in their emotional life all these intelligent men use a level so much lower than anything they use for work, that they might be different creatures” (GN, 457).

Tommy, Molly and Richard's son, may be the most developed of stereotyped figures. In the beginning he is presented with an indefinite amount of choices as he has to decide what his future will be. When he tries to commit suicide, he only “succeeds” in blinding himself, which would normally demand and exigent mental adjustment, yet Molly, after their return from the hospital, remarks that “'[h]e's happy, Anna.'... 'He's happy for the first time in his life... he's all in one piece for the first time of his life'” (GN, 378). When his vision is literally and figuratively restricted, he first engages in political activism with Marion, like his mother; then he pursues a business career like his father Richard. He thus changes his very complex nature to a one-dimensional personality which “constitutes a fable pointing up how other characters are also self-maimed, self-blinded” (Hite, 1989, 73). (Hite, 1989)

*The Golden Notebook* is not constructed according to a conventional linear narrative: Formally, it reflects Anna Wulf's mental fragmentation, alienation and disintegration. The reader engages in the decoding of Anna's mental puzzle which coincides with Anna's own reconstruction of what happened. The formal aspects of the novel, thus, corroborate the subject matter and reflects “the relationship between language and ideology”. Lessing asserted that the form of the (realist) novel was no longer appropriate to represent “experience” and one had to try to develop new forms by self conscious experimentation. (Joannou, 2000)

“[B]y incorporating the dialogue about stories and truth into what is after all a story, using the established form to comment on its own limits, and went on to remake form to accommodate the “cracked” and “split” characters she was interested in depicting” (Hite, 1989, 68). In this way the “Free Women” section is actually a conventional novel which uses the main character Anna Wulf to contemplate about the shortcomings of language and the realist novel.

Brewster (1965) substantiates that Lessing felt that the formal novel would not be an accurate means to represent such a character and therefore chose to partly use a conventional style and, as she stated in an interview in *The Queen*: “I also split up the rest into four parts to express a split person. I felt that is the artist's sensibility is to be equated with the sensibility of the educated person, then it is logical to use different styles to express different kinds of people.” She adds “If I had used a conventional style ... I would not have been able
to do this kind of playing with time, memory and the balancing of people” (August 21, 1962; quoted in Doris Lessing by Brewster, 1965, 144-145).

4.2.6 The Novel’s Shortcomings

“The Golden Notebook documents, in its depiction of the many contradictory forces governing Anna's life, the breakdown of the master narratives of psychoanalysis, Marxism and also literary tradition, as well as those of true love and sex” (Lauret, 1994, 109). In the end Anna Wulf resists her psychic fragmentation -which normally would have led to madness or death, the usual fate inflicted upon non-conformist heroines- but she does not discover a satisfactory alternative way of being either. The Golden Notebook has an ambiguous ending and Anna Wulf ends up alone and separated from her sister Molly. Anna gains insight into the fragmented nature of her existence, continually torn between her own needs and what society expects from her, past and present, but she lacks the conceptual framework in which this understanding can be articulated. The novel tries to reflect in the protagonist the dilemma of the woman writer searching for a form that is appropriate to reflect her experience, but it is Lessing, in writing this novel with its particular structure, who finds this form, not Anna Wulf. (Lauret, 1994)

The basic powerlessness of individuals who are determined by their personal and cultural histories makes the kind of search for “freedom” which characterizes the Bildungsroman difficult to achieve indeed. And since Doris Lessing always tried to consider individual consciousness in terms of its connection with the larger system -social, political, or psychological- the picture of human effort which emerges from her novels continually suggests the smallness and weakness of individual human beings. Consequently, the whole subject of consciousness itself needs to be considered within this perspective (“The Limits of Consciousness in the Novels of Doris Lessing”, by Sydney Janet Kaplan in Pratt and Dembo, 121, 1974).

5. The Golden Notebook’s Feminist theme

In A Room of One's Own (1928), Virginia Woolf expressed her belief that after one more century, a truly liberated woman writer would finally emerge. Zeman (Presumptuous Girls) postulates that so far (the book was published in 1977) it is too early to make this a forgone conclusion. Be that as it may, fifty years since Woolf published her essay, there have been some notable changes from a woman's perspective. Morally, free love is now as acceptable for women as it already was for men. On the other hand, one has to bear in mind
that this freedom has not made women emotionally less dependent on men, as Zeman assumes Woolf's circle believed it would. From a legal point of view, divorce is not considered to be inappropriate anymore for a woman and the latter now has a fair share of the marital property. So with women enjoying the same freedom as men,

[t]he woman's novel is turning now towards both the establishment of a relevant moral code and towards metaphysics. It is only natural that women should be seeking a substitute for the old religion-based morality which released them from the burden of individual, perpetual decisions and affirmed the value of what they were actually doing (Zeman, 1977, 103).

An important characteristic of this “genuine system of values” is that it does not contain a double standard for women: it can be applied to men and women. “Women are no longer advised to wear high (or low) moral standards as a sexual allurement, but to use them as tools of living”. Despite the fact that many laws were billed to improve women’s social condition, The Golden Notebook, in my opinion, shows that this “battle” is mainly won on a theoretical level. For, although culturally and socially certain attitudes have been made acceptable, it takes much more time for people to change age-old ideas and perspectives.

With religion no longer as a steady basis in life, one has to seek the truth somewhere else; Lessing observes that this can be done in two ways: “[F]irstly by an ordered exploration of the frontiers of knowledge, secondly by a dipping ever deeper into the resources of the mind itself; both methods, she warns, can lead to a state which may be called madness” (Zeman, 1077, 105). Lessing experiments with the “madness-theme” and is thoroughly concerned by how this is represented in the novel, since breakdown and madness now have become common themes in (serious) women’s fiction. The Golden Notebook for example displays, besides the protagonist Anna, a number of women “quietly going mad all by themselves”: Molly/Julia; Marion, Richard’s second wife; the women Anna goes canvassing for, which are “desperate housewives” type of women; Patricia, Anna’s boss who is a single woman approaching her fifties. (Zeman, 1977)

5.1 Madness

Five lonely women going mad all quietly by themselves, in spite of husband and children or rather because of them. The quality they all had: self-doubt. A guilt because they were not happy. The phrase they all used: 'There must be something wrong with me' (GN, 167).

Maroula Joannou declares that this figure of the isolated woman, trapped in suburbia
“with or rather despite her husband and children” is a striking image which arouses questions with regard to the link between society and its influence on a woman's mental health. Just like Anna Wulf who eventually collapses, women who suffer from a mental breakdown are variously represented in literature of the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, Lessing claims that madness is a reaction to the pressures all women suffer from, rather than a sheer individual response. “Breakdown, in these novels and others, has a complicated relationship to femininity. What the fiction illuminates are the metonymic links between mental illness and the postwar feminine mystique” (Joannou, 2000, 16).

Why does the image of the “entrapped woman” frequently occur in fiction of the post-war period? To resolve this question, it is important to have a general overview of the historical context, in which a restrictive set of ideas about femininity gradually came into existence in the 1950s. After the Second World War, Britain as well as the United States were very conservative societies and a profound emphasis was exerted on women to become a full-time housewife. There was an anxious desire to create a safe haven of respectability and conformity; a domestic counterpart for the chaos engendered by Communism and the Cold War at the time. These traditional values about femininity and domesticity were enthusiastically promulgated by Women's magazines, as is equally the case with Ella, who works for “Women at Home”, “angled towards working-class women, and had not even a pretence of cultural tone” (GN, 197). It is her job to attend to the “Mrs. Browns” of society who write to her about their frustration and loneliness. The myth of the happy housewife was indeed more of a myth than reality, which proves that women were not entirely happy being narrowed down in their possibility for achievement. (Joannou, 2000)

In The Feminine Mystique (1963) Betty Friedan observes that in 1939 the women who were depicted in women's magazines were overtly “careerwomen”. In the 1950s, however, this image is gradually replaced by the image of the “housewife”. This notion was spread by an overall warning that a women who had enjoyed a higher education would become more manly and this would eventually have negative consequences on the “house” and the children. (Friedan, 1985, 45-48)

Zeman (1977) concludes that this theme of madness which frequently occurs in women's fiction reflects the fact that “women’s liberation” still needs to be pushed further to

12 Other cited examples are The Pumpkin Eater by Penelope Mortimer, about Mrs Armitage who is sterilised against her will; The Fat Woman's Joke by Fay Weldon, where the protagonist is disappointed in her marriage; The Bell Jar' by Sylvia Plath, where Esther Greenwood is deceived by the splendour of the city. (Joannou, 2000, 26)

13 “Mrs. Brown” is a general name Anna uses to name indicate the women whose depressing letters she has to answer.
be truely beneficial for women. They have freed themselves from their traditional servitudes, but the battle is only half won. Fay Weldon sarcastically remarks that “[w]e women thought that if we were unhappy it could only be our fault. We were in some way neurotic, badly adjusted – it was our task to change ourselves to fit the world. We read Freud, Helene Deutsch, Melanie Klein (...), bow our heads in shame in the face of our penis envy, and teach ourselves docility and acceptance”.14

Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) represented the feelings of many women who until then were only compliant in their quiet dissatisfaction.

Friedan's subjects in *The Feminine Mystique* are the generation of women who had received higher education, but who had voluntarily given up their careers to pursue marriage, children and home-making. The “problem without a name” identified in *The Feminine Mystique*, is the intelligent middle-class housewife's unfocused sense of restlessness and discontent because she had failed to fulfil her potential (Joannou, 2000, 20).

*The Golden Notebook* repeatedly demonstrates that although the women in this novel are so-called “free”, they are not truely liberated. As a woman, Anna still has certain domestic obligations which she resentfully refers to as “the housewife’s disease”. Irritated, Anna ruminates:

The tension in me, so that peace has already gone away from me, is because the current has been switched on: I must-dress-Janet-get-her-breakfast-send-her-off-to-school-get-Michael’s-breakfast-don’t-forget-I’m-out-of-tea-etc.-etc. With this useless but apparently unavoidable tension resentment is also switched on. … The resentment focuses itself on Michael; although I know with my intelligence that it has nothing to do with Michael. And yet I do resent him, because he will spend his day, served by secretaries, nurses, women in all kinds of capacities, who will take this weight off him. (GN, 333).

Anna resents Michael, or men in general, because he is not endowed with the same daily pressures as a woman. Nonetheless she quickly changes her mind and forces her not to turn her resentment against Michael, for as Mother Sugar has told her, this resentment is impersonal. Anna goes on: “The woman’s emotion: resentment against injustice, an

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impersonal poison. The unlucky ones, who do not know it is impersonal, turn it against their men. The lucky ones like me -fight it‖ (GN, 333).

Anna is not so lucky as she thinks she is, for if she could face the fact that she resents Michael because he holds the privileges reserved for the males in a patriarchal society, the pressures which keep her from writing would become much lighter. By turning her anger against herself, depersonalizing and depoliticizing it, she is entering into a self-destructive cycle, for deep down she will never take men's higher status for granted‖ (Seiler-Franklin, 1979, 143).

It seems thus as if Anna does not comprehend the fact that the privileges enjoyed by men are a cultural fact, not a natural cause, and therefore not inherent in Mankind and prone to be adapted.

5.2 Alienation of the Woman Writer

Even though Doris Lessing frequently pointed out that The Golden Notebook does not predominantly deal with “the battle of the sexes”, in “Alienation of the Woman writer in The Golden Notebook” (Pratt and Dembo, 1974) Ellen Morgan strongly emphasizes the novel’s significance with respect to its illustration of the heterosexual relationship and the female identity in the middle of the twentieth century.15 Morgan undoubtedly observes a tension between the “Man versus Woman” debate Lessing portrays and the simultaneous denial of discomfort with the sexual status quo. 16 “[T]he novel contains all the perceptions necessary to create a radical transforming and ordering vision of the relationship between women and men.” The Golden Notebook gradually makes the reader aware of how women writers “can be, and have been, alienated from their own authentic, sensitive, and accurate perceptions of

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15 Doris Lessing reiterated her frustration, for example, in a newly added preface to the 1972 edition of The Golden Notebook, about the fact that the novel was frequently one-dimensionally reduced as about “the sex war”. “[t]he book was instantly belittled, by friendly reviewers as well as hostile ones, as being about the sex war, or was claimed by women as a useful weapon in the sex war. … But this novel was not a trumpet fo Women's Liberation. It described many female emotions of aggression, hostility, resentment. It put them into print. Apparently what many women were thinking, feeling, experiencing, came as a great surprise. Instantly a lot of very ancient weapons were unleashed, the main ones, as usual, being on the theme of “She is unfeminine,” “She is a manhater.” This particular reflex seems indestructible.” ("Preface to The Golden Notebook"; Schlueter, 1974, 25)

16 Showalter (1977) conveys her alignment with Morgan’s opinion about the fact that Lessing has not yet confronted the essential feminist implications of her own writing and that she herself is thus “alienated from the authentic female perspective".
sexual politics” (Pratt and Dembo, 54-55). The cultural institutions to which they belong do not sustain such perceptions and are rather ridiculed and part of antifeminist criticism and derision. “The golden notebook, therefore, reveals the peculiar problem of the woman writer working in a climate of assumptions and sympathies about women and sex roles which do not support female authenticity” (Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 62-63).

Apart from the important political background, the red thread throughout the novel comprehends the experiences and inner psychology of the protagonist Anna Wulf, or her alter-ego and literary creation Ella. evaluates, criticizes and judges her own experiences but “her judgements [however] belittle, deny, or distort her experiences and censor her spontaneous responses to them” (Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 55). Ella and her friend Julia - which correspond respectively with Anna and Molly in “real life”- are labelled “Free Women”, which is basically interpreted by men as “available” so that the actual seemingly independence acts as another restraint. (Hite, 1989) They respect themselves as women but, on the other hand, they also seem to have developed a contempt for themselves; claiming that “their real loyalties will always be with men” the relationship between them is valued less than their relationship with men. “The two women share a minority-group psychological orientation which compels them to depreciate their femaleness and their friendship and seek approval from and identification with men” (Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 55-56). Anna contemplates:

If I join in now, in a what's-wrong-with-men session ... Molly and I will feel warm and friendly, all barriers gone. And when we part, there'll be a sudden resentment, a rancour -because after all, our real loyalties are always to men, and not to women... She thought: I want to be done with it all, finished with the men vs. women business, all the complaints and the reproaches and the betrayals. Besides it's dishonest. We've chosen to live a certain way, knowing the penalties, or if we didn't we know now, so why wine and complain ... and besides, if I'm not careful, Molly and I will descend into a kind of twin old-maidenhood ... (GN, 48).

In my opinion, to say that “their real loyalties are with men”, has to be considered with a certain nuance. Partly it also has to do with the fact that eventually Anna and Molly will have to build a household with a man, not with each other. “Free” or not, like all women, they too want real love and a stable relationship, “We've chosen to live a certain way” means they are aware of the consequences that came along with their “Free Women” position.

17 In her preface to The Golden Notebook (1972) Lessing states that the label of “Free Women” is used ironically. Also note the irony in Anna's last name before she got married, namely “Freeman”. 
When they engage in a relationship with a man, however, they are prepared to make sacrifices and look past the shortcomings of a man to make it work.

Similarly Seiler-Franklin in *Contemporary Women’s writing* (1974, 131) observes that the pressures on Anna become most clear in her relationships with men and in the apprehension of herself. Anna as well as Ella, do not seem to value themselves as autonomous persons, rather they only define themselves in relation to men. Anna feels a natural bond towards woman yet, for example, withholds from identifying with the older woman at her job, Patricia, because “to identify with her, even in sympathy, meant she might be cutting off some possibility for herself” (GN, 203). “Neither woman considers actually fighting back; there is no visible solidarity among women which would sanction and support such rebellion” (Pratt and Dembo, 1974). Whereas they do face many difficulties, the fact that they are after all “Free Women” could be considered as the very act of their rebellion. However, I cannot ignore the fact that there is a more downside on the other side of this picture. Anna/Ella or Molly/Julia always engage in a relationship with a *married* man, which puts them in the position of mistress and makes them hypocritical towards the women of these married men. As Anna writes about her alter-ego Ella, she entitles the yellow notebook “The Shadow of the Third”, the third referring to Paul's wife Muriel. In the beginning Anna feels triumph for taken Paul away from her. Anna wants to be married herself, yet she knows Michael will never leave his wife for her. She envies Muriel and pictures her as a “serene, calm, unjealous, unenvious, undemanding woman, full of resources of happiness inside herself, self-sufficient, yet always ready to give happiness when it is asked for” (GN, 207). Gradually she comes to realize that these qualities she imagined Muriel has, are actually the traits she aspires to have but has not. She resents Muriel for her security, knowing that Paul will always return to her and has his children; gradually she comes to realize that in turn she has taken up the position of the “third”. (Seiler-Franklin, 1979, 139)

Anna and Molly’s analysis of the situation is completely apolitical. They feel, for example, that women cannot have sex with a man, or obtain sexual pleasure, without getting emotionally involved. Ella angrily admits that “…the truth is they get erections when they're with a woman they don't give a damn about, but we don't have an orgasm unless we love him. What's free about that?” (GN, 458).

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18 I would like to add another suggestion to this assertion. Anna is just afraid that the same lot is waiting for her, she too being a single woman in her thirties, raising a child on her own. She does not want to become cynical and frustrated about men, since she still has hope the right one will eventually come along.
According to Morgan, these women fail to see the real cause; it is not because of certain psychological or biological predisposed differences between the sexes but due to the cultural and social environment they are surrounded with that does not allow for a woman to experience sex freely, as men can, without asking for love in return. Sex is still viewed as a conquest for the man. “Ella and Julia know that the kind of sex offered them is a threat to their dignity and self-respect. They cannot act directly while holding the apolitical view they do of female-male relations, but neither is willing simply to capitulate...”. (Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 57) Subsequently their criticism of men and Anna/Ella's incapability to function sexually unless she is with a man that loves her and vice versa. (“Alienation of the Woman writer in The Golden Notebook” by Morgan; Pratt and Dembo, 1974)

5.2.1 The Lessing Woman

The relationship Ella has with Paul is further proof of the fact that she is incapable of living “an authentic life” since she believes that female-male relationships are inherently unequal and consequently not apt to be transformed. Ella constantly seeks to suppress the rebellious nature inside her, saying to herself she just has to accept. She is presented with a choice between either taking a man on his own terms, which are never likely to be based on a genuine equal basis of friendship and love; or, on the other hand, demand to be accepted on her own terms. Every time she chooses to coincide with the man's needs and thoughts and refrains from claiming her own rights, dismissing them as ridiculous. She does not, for

19 In her essay “Humanbecoming: Form and Focus in the Neo-Feminist novel” Ellen Morgan does indicate the existence of a “an androgynous authentic selfhood” which signals “a political advance for women, a kind of free space transgressing conventional boundaries of gender role, made possible by the recognition that gender difference is socially constructed rather than biologically determined, and therefore amenable to change.” (as quoted from Liberating Literature, 1994, 89) In any case, this cannot be applied to The Golden Notebook.
example, want to confront the fact Paul has a “dark” side in him. Facing Paul's real nature would mean he is not a “real man”.

It was as if he had a personality at these moments not his. She was convinced it was not his. It was on a level that not only had nothing to do with the simplicity and ease of their being together; but betrayed it so completely that she had no alternative but to ignore it. Otherwise she would have to break with him. (GN, 197).

The “Lessing woman” as Morgan defines them, convinces herself that the suppression she suffers is her own fault and that she has no right to complain about it and just has to suffer the consequences. Anna many times makes the observation that “we've chosen to be free women, and this is the price we pay, that's all”. (GN, 458) As a result, there is a discrepancy between what she perceives and what she is able to admit to herself “and therefore of her alienation from her perceptions and distance from personal authenticity”. (Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 59) This pattern of alienation is also apparent in the Anna/Molly section of the book: “Sometimes I dislike women, I dislike us all, because of our capacity for not-thinking when it suits us; we choose not to think when we are reaching out for happiness” (GN, 485). Anna turns the anger she feels at being ill-used against herself and other women and fails to see there is actually a legitimate cause for it.

Likewise, this discrepancy becomes clear in Anna’s five-year affair with Michael for example. She resents the fact that he does not accept her as a writer and that her most important role as a woman is first and for all as a mother to her daughter Janet.; she resents him because as a man, every “petty detail of his life” is being taken care of by a woman, whereas she, as a woman, has to see to other's needs. She further depersonalizes and depoliticizes this, by stating it is just a disease of the women of our time. “The idea is that she must resign herself, rather than act in her own self-interest to change the system”(Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 61).

In general, Anna/Ella is aware of her troublesome relationships and of the dissenting nature of conflicts between men and women, but instead of recognizing this should not be a predicament, she accepts the status quo and turns her anger and frustration, which result from her relationships, to herself. She fails to recognize that she makes rightful claims and therefore come closer to her own authentic identity. Nevertheless “[s]he never really stands up for herself as a woman and never opts out of the self-damaging collusion of tolerating and playing a role in the submission-dominance syndrome which is the leitmotiv of female-male relationships in patriarchal societies.”(Pratt and Dembo, 1974, 62) Anna/Ella is aware
of what we now may call sexual politics but she consistently sees her need to rebel against these perceptions as a flaw within herself. (“Alienation of the Woman writer in The Golden Notebook” by Morgan; Pratt and Dembo, 1974)

5.3 An Unconventional Novel

5.3.1 Theme

Anna represents the independent and sexually experienced woman, living on her own (whether unmarried or divorced) which came to be the new model sought after in the 1960s and 1970s, as a substitute for the happy housewife model. The frankness of the protagonist Anna/Ella in talking about sex and having sex outside marriage reflected the rising idea that sex was not only to be enjoyed in the constitution of marriage or for the sole purpose of procreation. Divorce was still stigmatised in the early 1960s, and the “Free Women” sections indicate that, although both Anna and her sister Molly are without husbands after a “marital breakdown”, it soon becomes clear that they are not really “liberated”. The fact that they do not have any domestic or familial responsibilities towards a husband and children (Only Anna sees to it that Janet gets what she needs) is the only way they are really free in. In the end, Anna even becomes a marriage counsellor and Molly gets married, two acts which definitely counteract their initial rebellious feminist attitude against the institution of marriage.

Anna and Molly are still bound by “the conventions of romantic love”(28) and do not lead the physically independent lives of the men in the novel. After a conversation with Richard where he confesses he has have sexual problems with his wife, Molly says “‘Physical? It’s emotional. You started sleeping around early in your marriage because you had an emotional problem, it’s nothing to do with physical.’ … ‘No, it’s not easy for women. But at least we've got more sense than to use words like physical and emotional as if they didn't connect” (GN, 31).

When Ella falls in love, she becomes completely obsessive, passive and dependent. Ever since Paul has left her a couple of years ago, she is still very much hung up on him, expecting every moment that he'd come back to her; yet deep inside she knows her longing for him is futile. When she is on a trip to Paris by order of the magazine she works for, she has a meeting with Robert Brun, editor of “Femme et Foyer”. He is engaged but Ella notices that he scrutinizes at almost every woman that passes him with a sense of complacency and
sensual appraisal. His future wife notices this about “her captive”, as Anna states, but is "fearfully in love with him" and tries everything in her power to keep him pleased. Anna claims that although she is unhappy she'd still never want to be in that woman's shoes, but on the other hand she also says: “But I don't really care about it- I didn't really care about the other. Suppose Paul had said to me, I'll marry you if you promise never to write another word? My God, I would have done it! I would have been prepared to buy Paul, like an Elise buying Robert Brun” (GN, 314). (Joannou, 2000)

5.3.2 Language Use

Anna Wulf is an active member of the Communist Party. The Party plays a very important role in Anna's life and the time setting of the novel coincides with the crisis the Socialist Left was facing in the 1950s in Britain. When she decides to leave the Party, it is not a coincidence that this is joined by her menstrual period. Lessing dwells upon the physical discomfort Anna experiences to call attention to the reader that for women mind and body sometimes connect in ways that are different for men. The candour with which Lessing wrote about the menstrual period was highly unconventional at the time, and the novel in general “opened up a lot of sexual frankness in the writing of women”. (Second Bachelor literary course “Enlish Literature II: Historical Overview, Prof. Buelens, 37) (Joannou, 2000)

I stuff my vagina with the tampon of cotton wool … I roll tampons into my handbag, concealing them under a handkerchief … The fact that I am having my period is no more than an entrance into an emotional state, recurring regularly, that is of no particular importance … A man said he would be revolted by the description of a woman defecating. I resented this … but he was right … For instance, when Molly said to me … I've got the curse; I have instantly to suppress distaste, even though we are both women; and I begin to be conscious of the possibility of bad smells … and I begin to worry: Am I smelling? It is the only smell that I know of that I dislike. … But the faintly dubious, essentially stale smell of menstrual blood, I hate. And resent. It is a smell that I feel as strange even to me, an imposition from outside. Not from me. Yet for two days I have to deal with this thing from outside—a bad smell, emanating from me. … So I shut the thoughts of my period out of my mind; making, however, a mental note that as soon as I get to the office I must go to the washroom to make sure there is no smell (GN, 339-340).
The description of her menstrual period is also a sign that she is incapable of accepting her body, accordingly not able to accept her femininity. She feels aversion at the thought of another woman having her periods. Notwithstanding her claim that she is just entering “an emotional state”, she makes too much effort to conceal its physical marks. She feels it is something that has been imposed on her, something she did not freely chose. (Seiler-Franklin, 1977, 144-145)

Another good example in this aspect, as stated by Seiler-Franklin (1979, 134), is Ella’s theory about sex when she alleges that “a woman's sexuality flows and ebbs only in response to a loved man’s” (GN, 322). She makes a difference between a clitoral and a vaginal orgasm, the latter being the only real one for her. When Paul starts “manipulating her externally”, it proves to her that Paul will end the affair. “And so, as time went on, the emphasis shifted in their love-making from the real orgasm to the clitoral orgasm; and there came a point when Ella realised (and quickly refused to think about it) that she was no longer having real orgasms. That was just before the end, when Paul left her. In short, she knew emotionally what the truth was when her mind would not admit it” (GN, 216).

Continually, after they break up, she is never to have a vaginal orgasm again, which is proof for her she is still not over Paul yet. Showalter as well as Joannou believe this to be another evidence of their depreciation of the female identity.

Even in The Golden Notebook there are evasive passages in which Anna or Ella absolutely deny the evidence of their own bodies in favor of socially appropriate, fashionable, or mystical explanations of what is happening to them. One of these passages is the notorious celebration of the “real” or vaginal (as distinguished from the “inferior” clitoral) orgasm. ... But Lessing's heroines systematically employ a semimystical, semipolitical theory of thought transference to avoid responsibility for their own sensations, their own feelings (Showalter, 1977, 312).

5.3.3 Conventional Men

The men in this novel are fairly opportunistic and divide their women into the category of wife or mistress. For example, Ella is certain that Paul will eventually leave his wife and marry her. Anyhow, one day Paul talks about the futility of his job, then tries to end the conversation with “‘But Ella, you’re my mistress, not my wife. Why do you want me to share all the serious business of life with you?’” She angrily replies “‘Every night you lie
in my bed and tell me everything. I am your wife.' As she said it, she knew she was signing
the warrant for the end. … He reacted with a small offended laugh, a gesture of withdrawal”
(GN, 212). When he clearly shows no intention of marrying her, she feels deeply hurt and
betrayed. Anthea Zeman in *Presumptious Girls* (1977) elaborates and remarks that Anna
approaches her affair with Michael in a fairly modern way, seeing it as an exchange of
pleasure and maybe even love, not exploitation, because after all he is still a *married* man.
When he *does* leave her, she tries to overcome this by convincing herself that this is the
price she has to pay for her faith in free love. However, when she hears that Michael has
referred to her as “a flighty piece he got mixed up with” she *does* feel betrayed and misused.
Michael saw her way of living as one of “easy virtue”, which devalues her; she is the kind of
woman it is better to leave since women should be sexually purer than men. Paul still
represents the ancient view that women can be reduced to two categories: the saint or the
whore, the wife/mother or mistress. “ ‘Free! What’s the use of us being free if they aren’t? I
swear to God, that every one of them, even the best of them, have the old idea of good
women and bad women.’ ”(GN, 458). “Society has always preferred that women should be
on the whole well behaved and on the whole well balanced. Women have, after all
certain responsibilities; a stake in the present, in the daily running of things, and in the future,
in their care of children” (Zeman, 1977, 93). (Seiler-Franklin, 1979)

When Ella starts an affair with her colleague Jack, however, she is conscious of this
“opposition” ascribed to women; furthermore she is also aware of the fact that it is a
culturally imposed concept. “Yet Ella is fighting down a need to cry. She is familiar with
this sudden depression and combats it thus: It’s not my depression at all; it is guilt, but not
my guilt; it is the guilt from the past, it has to do with the double standards which I
repudiate.” (GN, 454). Yet she still does not act on this knowledge, knowing it will make
her unhappy, denial is much easier.

5.3.4 The Language of Love

In the sexual life chastity and fidelity are not enough; love, passion, orgasm
(the words may change, the thought remains the same) are the basis of a
woman’s integrity. Good sex is a moral good, a safety; bad sex is a moral ill,
a danger. And for good sex the emotional and therefore the social conditions
have to be right (Zeman, 1977, 172).
Zeman (1977) maintains that Lessing makes this point in the scene where Anna goes to see Mrs. Marks and explains that she feels guilty about being frigid to her lover, right after the day that he has made it abundantly clear he is not going to leave his wife. So Anna admits: “It's true my response in bed is in relation to how he accepts me” (GN, 237). Anna does not seem to know that sexual integrity is a completely justified demand. “It seems that twentieth-century woman has to be persuaded to admit what nineteenth-century women regarded as a commonplace: that they can distinguish quite frankly between what suits them and what does not in matters of love, and that to have what suits them is a permissible aim” (Zeman, 1977, 173).20 Women's integrity can be defined according to her sexual choices, unbound by the need for company, social approval or a wish to please others. A woman can remain chaste or be permissive and promiscuous. This, however, proves to be irrelevant compared to her attitude when she is reaching out for love. Men tend to regard this discussion as an irrelevant detail, yet even more so women writers feel the need to emphasise the importance of mutual acceptance and equality in matters of love. Only in this kind of environment of kindness, understanding and selflessness, is a woman comfortable to lead a healthy sexual life. “Only in such a climate, is it possible to enjoy the fact –and it is as well to let Jane Austen have the last word on this– that Eros itself 'from the beginning to the end of the affair' is grounded on selfishness” (Zeman, 177, 1977). (Zeman, 1977)

5.4 The Novel’s Shortcomings

A disappointing aspect of the novel, according to Joannou (2000), is that for many women who support “emancipatory sexual politics” is the lack of interest in “education of desire”21

What this entails is the willingness to understand the ideological character of that which one takes for granted as 'natural' and to move from that position to the difficult but necessary business of learning from experience and changing the way one feels and behaves (Joannou, 2000, 28).

20 With regard to nineteenth-century women, Zeman uses the example of Charlotte in Pride and Prejudice. Elizabeth and Jane Bennet condemn Charlotte for marrying a man she does not love and therefore has put a full stop to sexual and emotional fulfilment. (Zeman, 1977)

21 (This term actually belongs to E.P. Thompson, “William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary”,1961, 806; quoted from Contemporary Women’s Writing, 2000, 28).
As Lessing herself writes in her 1972 introduction to the novel is that *The Golden Notebook* described with surprising accuracy the problems many women were apparently dealing with in their own (sexual) relationships. Notwithstanding, what the book does not offer is a solution regarding the precarious position of the sexual politics between men and women. Despite the fact that Anna is a “free” woman, all she ever cares about is to find a man who will satisfy her romantic interest in love. She does not, however, reflect in any way the nature of this cause or query the nature of masculinity. Instead Anna, although she is consciously aware of it, denies a man's shortcomings, while at the same time nurturing a deep resentment when she learns that there is a huge gap to bridge in the communication and desires between men and women. Instead, the two sexes define each other according to vastly different needs and shape reality imaginatively to fit their desire.” (Joannou, 2000)

What is terrible is that after every one of the phases of my life is finished, I am left with no more than some banal commonplace that everyone knows: in this case that women's emotions are still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists. My deep emotions, my real ones, are to do with my relationship with a man. One man. But I don't live that kind of life, and I know few women who do. ... I ought to be like a man, caring more for my work than for people; I ought to put my work first, and take men as they come home, or find an ordinary comfortable man for bread and butter reasons—but I won't do it, I can't be like that... (GN, 314).

Hite (1989) comments that this point of view coincides with a nostalgia for a sort of sexual golden age, in which traditional feminine dependency is written into the social structure. Past societies have prescribed monogamy for women but not for men, and few women today have relationship with only one man. Contemporary society prescribes women to have one relationship; men on the other hand can have affaires outside their marriage and use their wife to make them a comfortable home.

It seems that Anna is caught up in something bigger than herself. First of all, she needs to accept herself and stop making excuses for men that do not deserve her. For how can she build up a stable relationship with a man, which is something she genuinely strives for, if she rejects herself?
6. Conclusion

Since the last two centuries, the woman writer and women’s writings have gone through some substantial changes. Although burning with a creative energy like some of her male contemporaries, in the nineteenth century she was confined to the sidelines of a patriarchal society, by which she was only valued on account of her marital and domestic obligations - for she was not entitled to many rights. Maybe she wrote a manuscript under a male pseudonym to be accepted; maybe she burnt or buried her manuscript, afraid of the consequences it might have; or maybe she implicitly inscribed a counternarrative by which she did manage to articulate some of her ambitions. To express artistry as a woman often designated an oppositional choice for their fictional heroines, according to their limited options in society: A choice between marriage or death, for there was no compromise
offered to them. Gradually, women gained more rights and subsequently more freedom of choice. During the First and Second Wave of Feminism women fought to be treated on an egalitarian basis compared to men’s privileges. Although many battles have been won, The Golden Notebook proved that women were not liberated completely. As lessing imbedded her protagonist in the bigger social picture of the sixties, she managed to depict the way men and women related to each other in that time in a very accurate manner. Maybe Anna Wulf succeeded in achieving wholeness eventually, she did not, however, succeed in finding a way of living, where she can have a satisfying love life and at the same time deal with society’s, or men’s, prejudice about “Free Women”. Anna has not been able to free herself from determining patterns and stereotypes, yet. It seems that the “battle of the sexes” was still going on in that time, only in a different social context than in the nineteenth century. As the fictional level of The Golden Notebook demonstrates the feminist theme, the line can be drawn further to Doris Lessing’s battle as a woman author, demanding critics to acknowledge her progressive style of writing. Lessing herself claimed that the formal innovations were ignored mainly because she is a woman. As indicated in the very beginning of this thesis, the plotstructure of certain narratives is an indicator to apprehend the ideology of a certain culture. So both Anna and Lessing are fighting to overthrow the role-patterns society imposes on them. Today in the twenty-first century the question of identity still remains, I believe, and one can wonder if a woman will ever be able to break totally free and just become “a woman”, nothing more.

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