Title: Fragmentation vs Integration

---- A Study on Lessing’s The Golden Notebook

Synopsis

Doris Lessing (1919-), English novelist, short story writer, essayist, dramatist, poet, and travel writer, has been ranked among the most powerful contemporary literary figures. Lessing was born in Persia of English parents and moved to Rhodesia when she was very young. She emigrated to England in 1949, and has lived in London ever since. She started her literary career in early 1950s, writing fiction in the realistic mode that focused on the theme of African injustice. These works reveal Lessing’s early commitment to communism, which she later renounced. All through her life, Lessing underwent a winding intellectual development from Marxism to Sufism. She is very active in the intellectual movement of the 20th century. As a result, her works display a broad range of subjects, such as racism, Communism, women’s issues, mysticism, psychology, etc. As a prolific writer, she has published totally 12 novels, beside a lot of short stories, poems, and essays from 1950s to 1990s. Artistically, her novels trace a circular path that begins and ends with realism, taking a detour through the terrain of psychoanalytic fiction, apocalypse and space fantasy.

The Golden Notebook (hereinafter The Notebook for short) is Lessing’s masterpiece, a landmark in her career. This book projects Lessing’s self-examination of her previous understanding of the relationship between life and art. Thematically, in The Notebook, Lessing’s attempt to evoke contemporary society panoramically in a totaling, unifying vision—the typical historical realistic literary belief—has been given the way to the honest record of fragmentation, psychological breakdown and cultural collapse of the time. Consequently, her faith in realism began to unravel in The Notebook. This novel is Lessing’s first step out of the realistic confines to create a kind of unique novel form, which has enabled her to express an enlarged theme—a
psychological adventure from fragmentation to integration of the protagonist. Hence, theme and narrative structure and their interrelationship are Lessing’s major interests in *The Notebook*.

This thesis is an attempt to give a relatively whole picture of Lessing’s masterpiece *The Notebook*, with emphasis on the depth and scope of its themes and the uniqueness of its structure. The whole thesis consists of six parts, including introduction, four chapters and conclusion.

In Chapter One, the author gives a brief account of Lessing’s life from her parents, childhood education to her career in London, and her main works. Lessing’s ideological and artistic developments are briefly summarized alongside the introduction of her major works.

Chapter Two is The Synopsis of *Notebook*. Set in London just after World War II, *The Notebook* tells the story of a woman writer Anna Freeman Wulf’s mental breakdown, fragmentation and healing into unity. Anna is suffering from a writing block, which is caused by her mental problem. Through out the novel, her struggle to overcome the writer’s block serves as the main plot, as well as a her way to achieve the mental integration. Two parts are included: Anna’s notebooks, which record her split vision about her self and her life; and *Free Women*, another novel set in *The Notebook*. It is an autobiographic novel written by Anna Wulf on the basis of accounts in her notebooks. Notebooks are the raw material, while *Free Women* is the finished product. These two parts make the book—*The Notebook*.

Chapter Three is devoted to the thematic study of *The Notebook*. It is divided into three parts: Anna as a Communist; Anna as a “Free Woman”; Anna as a Neurotic. These are the three dimensions of Anna’s intellectual evolvement, through which Lessing develops the overall theme of the novel: fragmentation to integration.

Chapter Four is the study of the form of *The Notebook*, consisting of two parts: Form, the Demonstration of the theme; Form, the Critique of Realism. In *The Notebook*, form has become Lessing’s major concern. She experimentally interweaves the finished traditional realistic novel (*Free Women*) with the raw material for making it (the notebooks) in the forming of *The Notebook*, in order to achieve an effect that the form of *The Notebook* itself is meaningful. Form is a wordless statement about the theme and about Lessing’s dissatisfaction with the conventional realistic novel.
The thesis finally concludes that the significance of the novel lies in the fact of its thematic extensiveness, its narrative accuracy and its artistic uniqueness.
Doris Lessing (1919-) is highly acclaimed as one of the greatest novelists of the 20th century. Her books have been translated into more than twenty languages and are read the world over, and she is recognized internationally as a committed novelist dealing with serious issues. She received the French Prix Medici for foreign literature in 1976, and both the German Shakespeare Prize and the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1982. The Modern Language Association of America has devoted an annual seminar to Lessing since 1971. Critics handed laurels to her on the grounds of the immensity of her conception, extensiveness of her concerns, and the historical accuracy of her narrative.

Doris Lessing’s literary career spans nearly 40 years from 1950s to 1990s. As a prolific writer, Lessing has altogether published 12 novels, and a lot of short stories, drama scripts, poems and other non-fictional works, including her famous essay collection *A Small Personal Voice* (1974).

Born in Africa, immigrated to England at the age of 30 after two marriages, Lessing was for a time a member of British Communist Party. But a decade later, she transformed from an active Leftist to a serious and enthusiastic follower of Sufi mysticism. Her subtle shifting of loyalty to communism was caused by many profound social and personal reasons, which have been best illustrated in her masterpiece *The Notebook* through the protagonist Anna Wulf. This is not only because of the later date of composition of the novel, but also because of the fuller character portrayal we have of Anna than of earlier characters.

As a woman, an artist, an ex-colonial, ex-communist and a present admirer of Sufism, Lessing’s broad life experience is always the inexhaustible source for her literary creativity. Her works have explored many of the most important ideas, ideologies and social issues of the 20th century, including such topics as racism, communism, feminism and mysticism. This is the natural result of her life-long involvement with all the important intellectual and political movements of the 20th century. Although critics always attempt to pin her down and label her as “Marxist”,...
“feminist” or more recently a “mystic”, Lessing herself resists all these attempts to categorize what she has written. She prefers that her works be viewed as a whole and asserts that her themes have remained unchanged since she wrote *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) at the very beginning of her career. Actually, despite the broad range of interests displayed in her works, the varied narrative forms and the evolution of her ideas from Marxism to Sufism, there is always a unifying concern that strings all her works together. And this concern is Lessing’s belief in the social responsibility of writers.

Once a writer has a feeling of responsibility, as a human being, for the other human beings he influences, it seems to me he must become a humanist, and must feel himself as an instrument of change for good or for bad. That image of the pretty singer in the ivory tower has always seemed to me a dishonest one. Logically he should be content to sing to his image in the mirror. The act of getting a story or a novel published is an act of communication, an attempt to impose one’s personality and beliefs on other people. If a writer accepts this responsibility, he must see himself as an architect of the soul. But if one is going to be an architect, one must have a vision to build towards, and that vision must spring from the nature of the world we live in.

Lessing has been following this artistic motto all through her life. She strives to write honestly about life, particularly about women’s life, and to write for her humanistic belief in “the warmth and humanity and love of people”. This is no small task for any writer, and Mrs. Lessing has generally succeeded in doing it in all her major works. Her masterpiece, *The Notebook*, is a particularly representative statement of Lessing’s literary belief. The second chapter of the thesis is a systematic introduction of Lessing’s literary career and her major works.

*The Notebook* is regarded as the “most considerable single work by an English author in the 1960s”. Doris Lessing’s aim in *The Notebook* is to give readers an idea of the intellectual and moral climate of Britain after World War II, where, Lessing believes, the society has become so chaotic that there is no sustainable values or beliefs any more.

Set in London in the 1950s, with long recollections of Rhodesia during World War II, *The Notebook* tells the story of a woman writer’s breakdown, fragmentation and healing into unity. However, it is not her story alone, for the chaos Anna Wulf
slides into is both the result and image of a general breakdown in Western society. Hence, the social chaos and individual fragmentation became the major concerns of this book. Like Lessing herself, Anna Wulf, the protagonist of the book, suffers from the fragmented post-war world. “My life has always been crude, unfinished, raw, tentative, and so have the people I have known.” But she has never taken patterns of fragmentation for granted. Instead, she strives to derive some enlightening order from chaos through her persistent search for her own personal and political identity. The whole book is the detailed accounts of the process of her ideological search. In the preface of The Notebook, Lessing summarized two overall themes of the book—breakdown and triumph of unity. Three major subjects of Lessing—politics, the role of women and madness have been included with in the overall themes of breakdown and re-unity. The third chapter of the thesis is devoted to the detailed and systematic study of the themes of The Notebook.

Published in the middle of her career, with its depth and extensive scope, The Notebook tells the story of Anna Wulf’s transformation of personal and political consciousness, and it marks as well a transformation in Lessing’s artistic identity.

The Notebook was a radical examination of novel form, and Mrs. Lessing’s subsequent novels incorporate the lessons she learnt from it, namely the inadequacy of realism to convey non-rational non-logical modes of thought and experience.

Artistically, The Notebook is regarded as the crucial turning point in Lessing career. In the earlier stage of her career—before 1960s—as Communist writer, Lessing considered politics and aesthetics to be inextricable: literature is a way to fight against social evils. she “described the nineteenth-century realists as her literary masters but situated herself in the socialist tradition, emphasizing her faith in class analysis and political art. Realism was indispensable to this committed conception of literature.” Despite their political differences, she used to share the same artistic outlook with the 19th century realistic novelists, “to see society as a whole and to portray its diverse features in totalizing works of art.” In her early manifesto, The Small Personal Voice, Lessing showed the greatest esteem for realist novels, and had proudly identified her writing with the novels of the 19th century.

For me the highest point of literature was the novel of the nineteenth century, the work of Tolstoy, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Turgenev,
Cheknov; the work of the great realists. I define realism as art, which springs so vigorously and naturally from a strongly held, though not necessarily intellectually defined, view of life that it absorbs symbolism. I hold the view that the realist novel, the realist story, is the highest form of prose writing; higher than and out of the reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, naturalism, or any other ism.viii

Her novels written in the first stage, like *The Grass is Singing* and the first three volumes of *Children of Violence Series*, are marked with realistic conventionalities, including omniscient narrators, chronological narrative and representational portrait of characters.

But the post-war British literature was confronted with “a time which is so dangerous, violent, explosive, and precarious that it is in question whether soon there will be people left alive to write books and to read them.”.ix Realism with its prescribed and neat patterns in narrative and characterization, seemed inadequate to portray the intellectual and moral climate of Britain in the mid-century.

With her political disillusionment with Communism and her gradually involved belief in Laingism and Sufism, Lessing’s writing concerned more and more about the individual psychic evolution as a way to the spiritual wholeness and freedom. She found the conventional realistic novel is no longer able to encompass all her concerns, especially, her concern for the human beings’ unconsciousness. Lessing needed a new method to project her multivalent vision of both “the reality of everyday life and with the complementary aspects of the unconscious mind.”.x Her search for a more malleable and three-dimensional form to convey her observation of both outside and inner world led Lessing to the innovation of the form of *The Notebook*.

*The Notebook* is Lessing’s first attempt to enlarge “her technical range to cope with her expanded consciousness of what constitutes reality.”xi Hence, in *The Notebook*, Lessing developed a kind of experimental realism she felt was needed to convey experiences beyond the range of everyday life. However, Lessing’s artistic innovations in *The Notebook* are mainly about the narrative structure, rather than the language or characterization. In the fourth chapter of the thesis, the innovative structure is discussed.
However, it would be a mistake to infer from the above statement that Lessing rejected realism altogether since *The Notebook*. Actually, at the same time with the publication of *The Notebook* (1962), Lessing continued to write conventional novels or short stories. The innovative novels such as *A Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), and *Canopus in Argos* (1979-1983) should be set alongside the realistic works as *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1983) and *The Good Terrorist* (1985).

Lessing never deliberately or provocatively departed from the old style in order to create the new. To Lessing, form is not her aim. In fact, Lessing is not obsessed with form but with content, and she does not care whether the form she finds is new or old, fashionable or unfashionable, as long as it serves her purpose. So her artistic experiment in 1960s and 70s didn’t bring her closer to Modernism or Postmodernism. “Instead of the preciosity of much modernist or postmodernist writing, Lessing believes in simplicity and directness, which she associates with accuracy and truth” \(^{xii}\)

Her discontent with the traditional novels, as expressed in *The Notebook* is not with its nature of being honest with the reality of life, but rather with its conventional ingredients. She is dissatisfied with it because she can’t get enough into it. It is too simple for the enormous number of things that she has to say. Lessing once explain herself that if she used a conventional style, which she never thinks dead by any means, she would not have been able to play with time, memory and people as she had done in *The Notebook*.

Thematic richness and artistic uniqueness ensure *The Notebook* to be one of the greatest works of the 20\(^{th}\) century. The significance and strength of the novel are summarized in the last chapter of the thesis.

**Key Words: Doris Lessing, The Notebook, breakdown, unity.**
Chapter One: Family Background, Life Experience and Career

I, Family Background

Doris Lessing was born on 22 Oct. 1919 in Kermanshah, Persia (now Iran), the first child of British Parents then living in Iran. Her father, Alfred Tayler, had fought in World War I, which brought him both physical and psychological traumas. One of his legs was wounded in combat and subsequently amputated. He was nursed in the Royal Free Hospital by Sister Emily Maude McVeagh, of Irish and Scottish descent, whom he married in 1919. After the war, unable to face the restrictions of a bank clerk’s life in England, he went to work for the Imperial Bank of Persia in Tehran, where Maude Tayler savored the social life of British Embassy circles. But Tayler himself was unhappy in Persia. His freedom was not substantially greater than it had been in England. During a vacation in London in 1924, he was attracted by British propaganda promising instant wealth to prospective immigrants to Southern Rhodesia, where maize seemed equal to gold. On impulse he went to Africa the same year, taking his wife and two young children, and bought three thousand acres of land with a government loan.

The Taylers settled near the small town of Banket, an isolated area 100 miles west of the Mozambique border. The region had never been farmed before by the white people, whose number was accordingly small. The Taylers were quickly victimized by the lack of experience and bad luck. Far from the fortunes promised by the Empire Exhibition in London, he was to scrape from one poor harvest to another. Having found his dreams finally shattered, this extremely sensitive man gradually lost his health as well as his will to overcome seemingly insurmountable circumstance. He retreated into fantasy, superstition, and diversions such as gold prospecting (described later by his daughter in *Eldorado*)

Lessing’s mother, more resilient than her husband, but uprooted and lonely, met considerable difficulties trying to keep the farm going. During the miserable twenty years she spent on the farm, she had been waiting for the opportunity to return to England. She became bitter and querulous and was most often at odds with her children.

During World War II, the health of Lessing’s father became so poor that the Taylers finally gave up the farm and moved to Salisbury, Rhodesia’s capital, in 1945.
Three years later, he died at the age of 61.

Doris Lessing’s parents have been a powerful influence on her fiction.

Her parents have made their mark on her works, not only in her characterization of them in her novels, but also in that the clash of their personalities seems to have been a motivating force behind her compulsion to become a writer in the first place. It is as if their poverty, their unconventionality, their resigned irritation with their lot, acted as an abrasive stimulus for their daughter to continue the struggle to make sense of, or vindicate, her father’s unworldliness, to ratify the worth of his dreams.

Lessing herself once described her parents in *A Small Personal Voice*, “We use our parents like recurring dreams, to be entered into when needed; they are always there for love or for hate.”

She considers her father as not living in the real world and her mother as brave and resourceful, but her sympathies clearly go with her father. Lessing’s relationship with her father is much closer and on an equal basis. Alfred Tayler’s wild ideas blazed recurrently throughout Doris’ youth. Doris absorbed her father’s idealism, his gift for fantasy and his sense of justice. She had at the same time to witness his painful loss of contact with reality. Nevertheless she sympathized with his turn of mind, and her work has from the start combined practicality and sense with dreams and imaginations, and ultimately it is the non-rational, which is seen as a source of hope and salvation.

II. Formative Age in Africa (1919-1949)

Rhodesia, the last frontier for Maude and Michael Tayler, turned out to be the decisive first frontier for their daughter. Despite chronic conflicts with her mother, certain aspects of Doris’ childhood appeared almost Utopian. She spent a good part of her adolescent years roving the primeval veld, observing the clash between nature and incipient civilization firsthand. Even the enforced isolation of farm life so often spawns exceptional gifts of imagination in children. As Lessing herself comments once, “it was sometimes hellishly lonely, but now I realize how extraordinary it was, and how very lucky I was.” This early freedom from the confinements of the female role in the compressive civilization gave her lifelong independence of mind.
Within her family, Doris was a “rebellion”. Her mother drew up great plans for her children’s education, trying to save them for the “real life” in England to which she hoped to return herself. But formal education soon became Lessing’s enemy. She was sent to school at the Roman Catholic Convent in Salisbury when she was seven, an experience she remembers as damaging. At 13, she transferred to the Girls’ High School in the same city. There she remained for only one year during which, as she claims, she not only learned nothing important but was also plagued by psychosomatic illnesses. She left school at 14, ostensibly because of an eye infection.

During the following three years after she left school, she pursued an autodidactric education by reading extensively, particularly the great 19th century European novelists such as Balzac, Tolstoi, Dostoevski, as well as books of contemporary political or social interest such as Hitler’s Mein Kampf and the sex studies of Havelock Ellis. Moreover, rigid school education was replaced by her own observations of life and society. In fact, her observation of highly charged racial, political, and social situation led not only to her compassion for the black Rhodesians, but also to her incisive analysis of white colonialist mentality in her later writing.

Due to the chronic discord with her mother, Doris Tayler left the farm in 1938 to work as a telephone operator in Salisbury. The next year she married Frank Wisdom, a civil servant. They have two children. Three years later she joined a Marxist group, and finding herself unsuited to suburban married life, divorced Wisdom in 1943, the year she published her first poems and short fiction in local journals. She later worked as a dictation typist for a lawyer and then for a law firm.

Between 1942 and 1948, Lessing was active in a Marxist group, through which she met Gorfrid Lessing, a refugee from Hitler’s Germany, whom she married in 1945. A son, Peter, her third child, was born in 1947. The Lessings served as a focal point for the activities of the local political group, but Doris Lessing realized quickly that the marriage, like the attempt at political enlightenment in racist Africa, was a mistake. So she divorced for the second time in 1949, which preceded her departure to England, where she has been living ever since as a professional writer. Comparing with the stifling Africa in apartheid, England after World War II, marked by breathtaking productivity in all literary genres, appeared as a heaven for serious writing. Lessing regards London as her second hometown, where she has obtained the fame as one of the most prolific and greatest writers in the 20th century.
III, Literary Career in London (1949–)

Although as the title suggested, Lessing’s literary career started in England since the publishing of her first novel *The Grass Is Singing* in 1950, Lessing actually began writing at the age of nine. At 17, Lessing had written and destroyed two entire novels and many other fragments. In 1943, for the first time, she published some poems and short stories in the local journals in Rhodesia’s capital city Salisbury. But Lessing disclaims any literary worth of her writings prior to her first successful novel *The Grass Is Singing*. While still in Africa, she had submitted this novel without success to half dozen English publishing houses. After her arrival in London, she was then advised to submit it to Michael Joseph Publishers. They accepted the manuscript at once. This novel was an immediate success—seven printings within five months—which enabled Lessing to become a professional writer after that.

Her first novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), which is set in Rhodesia, was praised as one of the first books to confront the issue of apartheid. This novel established two of Lessing’s early major concerns: racism, or “the color bar”, and the fate of women in a world of men. In the 1950s, *The Grass Is Singing* is the first extraordinary novel in its treatment of an unusual subject: a white woman’s desire for a black servant. In writing it, Lessing questions the entire values of Rhodesian white colonial society. The more praiseworthy point about it is that Lessing is not didactic in this novel. All the messages are sufficiently conveyed by its plot and characterization. This novel, rooted in colonialism, lays the foundation for much of Doris Lessing’s later works.

In the early stage of her career, Lessing also established a strong reputation as a short story writer. Among her most acclaimed volumes of short stories are *Five: Short Novels* (1954), *The Habit of Loving* (1957), and *African Stories* (1964), all of which deal with racial concerns in African settings and with the emancipation of modern women. All these early works reveals Lessing’s early commitment to communism, which she later renounced.

Lessing’s growing reputation was secured with her highly acclaimed *Children of Violence Series*, which she published at intervals from 1952 to 1969. Five novels are included in this series: *Martha Quest* (1952), *A Proper Marriage* (1954), *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), *Landlocked* (1965), and *The Four Gated City* (1969). In these
series, Lessing traces the intellectual development of the heroine —Martha Quest, who resembles Lessing in several ways. Martha, like Lessing, is born at the end of World War I, raised in a bleak postwar era of social struggle, and faced with the great shocks of World War II. *Martha Quest* (1952) is a *bildungsroman* in which Martha attempts to escape her restricted upbringing and her domineering mother. *A proper Marriage* (1954) and *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958) recount Martha’s two unsuccessful marriages to politically oriented men and her involvement in left-wing, anti-apartheid, and communist activities. The earlier three volumes of *Children of Violence Series* stress Martha’s spiritual growth through separation from constricting collectives such as the family, motherhood, political parties, group minds of all kinds, which demand the loss of identity to meet the roles, leading to what the Sufis call the false self. *Landlocked* (1965) marks Martha’s change in direction from an outward to an inward search for her true self. Written chronologically after Lessing’s masterpiece *The Notebook*, *Landlocked* reflects the same strong influence of Sufism as in *The Notebook*. *The Four Gated City* (1969) demonstrates Lessing’s apocalyptic vision of political and social mood of the 50s and 60s in Britain, which is characterized by the Cold War and the shortage of consumer goods after World War II, and a popular concern on drugs.

Although the first three volumes of *Series* were well received, it was the publication of *The Notebook* (1962) that really brought Lessing’s international prominence. *The Notebook* is widely considered as Lessing’s masterpiece. On one hand, it is because of its intricacy, the exclusiveness of its concerns, and its historical accuracy. On the other hand, it is because this novel chronologically marks a milestone in Lessing’s career. Her works from *The Notebook* onwards are considered by many critics to be a crucial departure from the realistic concerns of her works written before it, and reflect Lessing’s increasing interest in the extrasensory perception and Sufism. In *The Notebook*, Lessing’s interest in social reform has been transmuted into a concern for integration of the individual personality.

This conversion in style started from *The Notebook*, and continued in her next two novels *Landlocked* and *The Four-Gated City*.

After *The Notebook*, which is a watershed, Mrs. Lessing felt free to abandon realism as and when she needed to. Subsequent novels encompass both the world that can be described realistically, and the other world that defies realistic description, that is, those areas of experience which are spiritual or transcendental.
Lessing furthered this artistic experiment in 1970s by writing what she called “inner space” fiction: *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), in which the exploration of the human potential of entering into an immense world of non-rationalism became central.

All of Lessing’s works from *The Notebook* (1962) to *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) reveal the overwhelming influence of Carl Jung and particularly R.D. Laing, the two well-known radical psychologists, and later of Sufism, an offshoot of Islam. Laing proposes that insanity is merely a convenient label imposed by society on those who do not conform to its standards of behavior. And according to Sufism, mystical intuition—non-rationalism should replace rationalism as a means of alleviating world problems.

In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, Lessing describes the mental voyage into the non-rational world of a man called Charles Watkins, who is labeled mad and put into a mental hospital. His mental voyage has parallels with that described by Laing in *The Politics of Experience*. In that book he records a real psychotic episode of ten days in the life of a man called Jesse Watkins. However, in this novel, Charles’ mental journey is not a purely individual experience. Lessing uses it as an allegory of the evolution of the human condition in order to make people beware of approaching disaster. In this novel, dreams, madness and irrationality are increasingly considered by Lessing as carrying messages that must be attended to. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is a novel which sums up Lessing’s fictional concerns since she wrote *The Notebook*—the growing attention to “inner space” and the human potential for spiritual growth, and the consequent alienation from the material world. Artistically, realism and symbolism mesh together in this novel. It seems as if Lessing by this time has become so used to moving between the outer and inner worlds in her own life that her fiction reflects the ease of it in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*.

In the late 1970s, Lessing began a “space fiction” series—*Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979-1983). At that time, it is a new phenomenon for a “respectable” novelist to turn to space fiction, and some of Lessing’s critics have experienced difficulty with this change of direction in her work. In stead of focusing on one person in a small town or on several people in one country, Lessing’s imagination takes off into space and she is exhilarated by the freedom brought by this change. Lessing has moved into a genre where all the prescriptions of realistic fiction disappeared. The sky is limitless, so the divergence of points of view, time-scale, location and
characterization can have full play. However, this doesn’t mean that Lessing has given up her original literary intention. The novel series is still a detailed examination of the earth and of the history of human beings not directly but symbolically.

In the 80s, after Canopus, Lessing moved back to realism. “This freedom of movement between genres is unparalleled by any of her contemporaries.”\textsuperscript{xvii} She published two novels, The Diary of A Good Neighbor (1983) and If the Old Could... (1984), under the pseudonym of Jane Somers in order to receive unbiased critical appraisal. The major concerns of the Sombers books are similar to those of Lessing’s feminist works — love, loneliness and the problems of women. Later, both works were collected under Lessing’s name and published as The Diary of Jane Somers (1980). The book received mixed reviews.

In 1990s, already in her seventies, Lessing still remains active in the literary world. In 1995, she published her first autobiography Under my Skin. The following year, she published a long novel Love Again, eight years after the previous one, which immediately becomes the focus of critics’ attention because of its description of the love affairs of a 60-year-old actress with three young actors.
Chapter Two: The Synopsis of The Notebook.

The Notebook was published in 1962, at the middle point of Lessing’s career. As Lessing’s masterpiece, it is famous for its thematic richness and consequently its complexity. The Notebook is a very complicated and very carefully worked-out book. It contains a short, realistic novel called Free Women, which “could stand by itself” \( ^{xviii} \) and serves as a skeleton or frame of the whole book. Free Women is divided into five sections and separated by stages of the four notebooks, black, red, yellow and blue. These notebooks belong to Anna Freeman Wulf, a writer and the central character of Free Woman, who is suffering from a writer’s block after her first successful novel Frontiers of War. The reason why Anna “keeps four (notebooks), and not one because, as she recognizes, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness—of breakdown.” \( ^{xix} \)

As The Notebook opens, Anna Wulf is living as a divorcee in London, supporting herself and her daughter by the residual royalties from the best-selling novel, Frontiers of War, which is in turn based on Anna’s earlier life in colonial Africa. As Anna attempts to make sense of her life, she puts down in four notebooks her memories and feelings.

For the purpose of clarity, the primary notebooks and Free Women will be introduced separately, starting with notebooks because Anna wrote them first.

I, Anna’s Four Notebooks

The four notebooks, with each dealing with one aspect of Anna, are mostly written in the first person, and cover roughly the years from 1950 to 1957. The fifth, the golden notebook describes only events during 1957, the year of the composition of the book.

In the black notebook, Anna wrote her own account of her time in Central Africa during World War II, and the events leading up to the writing of Frontiers of War. A kind of equivocal feeling about this book is expressed in this notebook too: she simultaneously depends upon the book’s earnings, and knows it to be a failure, because Anna believes that this book is “poisoned” by some false artistic attitudes,
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