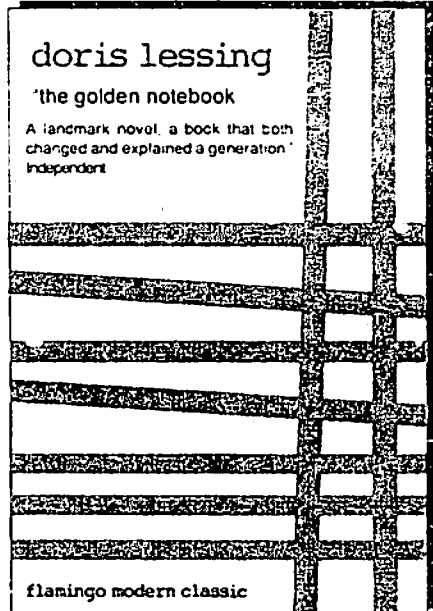


# THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

By  
Doris Lessing

Great Britain: Flamingo  
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Reviewed by  
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I keep four notebooks, a black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook, in which I make stories out of my experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary.<sup>2</sup>

The quote above seems to untangle the complexity of the novel, which is to say that the structure of the novel is the most perplexing part. Although Doris Lessing in the *Preface* has stated that “the essence of the book, the organization of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalize”<sup>3</sup> thus, it is still not an easy task to find and follow the stream of consciousness framed in such a structure.

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<sup>2</sup> Lessing, Doris. *The Golden Notebook*, London: Flamingo Harper Collins Publisher Ltd. 2002, p.418

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.10

What becomes the following question is why Doris Lessing writes a novel in such a way. A possible answer is that since "self-division and separateness"<sup>4</sup> are some of the thematic issues of the novel, she has to present those issues in a form that reflects them.

This review intends to pinpoint some important incidents in each section, where the plots of the novel are set in the stories of the four notebooks. In 'Free Women 1', the reader is presented by the fact that Anna Wulf is the main character and the protagonist of the story. The reader is also introduced to some other prominent characters such as Molly, Richard, Tommy, and Marion. In 'Free Women 2', the idea of Anna's fear of a chaotic world is firstly conveyed in a conversation between Tommy and Anna.<sup>5</sup> In 'Free Women 3', Anna's fear of the chaotic world is transfigured into a need for a permanent spouse for the sake of Janet (her daughter) and herself. 'Free Women 4' tells the reader more about how Anna becomes an intermediary of the conflict and incidents concerning Tommy-Molly and Marion-Richard. In 'Free Women 5', the plot is ended by Anna's political 'conversion' and her becoming a teacher.

The 'Black Notebook' primarily focuses on Anna as a writer of 'Frontiers of War'. Here in the first part the reader is presented by the historical background of Anna; how initially she gets interested in communism and her reason<sup>6</sup>, as well as her moving to Africa. There she is engaged by a group of mostly socialist people such as Willie, Jimmy, Ted, Maryrose, Stanley, Johnny and George. In this part is also described the kind of relationship she has with Willie.<sup>7</sup> Mashopi Hotel becomes the very setting of this section. In 'Black Notebook 2', the setting moves to England where 'Frontiers of War' attracts some filmmakers, and is about to be filmed. It fails however as they know that Anna is a communist. In part three of the 'Black Notebook' there are two parts. Part one tells the reader of the story in Africa where all those socialist circles gather for pigeon hunting. Part two shows some reviews of the 'Frontiers of War'. The 'Black Notebook 4' tells the reader how finally the 'Frontiers of War' is filmed but it leaves some unanswered questions as to Anna. What is filmed is different from the details of the novel, which means that it loses much of its originality.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* 2002:7,12

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* 2002:247

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* 2002:82

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* 2002:129

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* 2002:462

The 'Red Notebook' is about Anna's involvement in politics. The first part of the 'Red Notebook' tells the reader how Anna joins the British Communist Party (CP).<sup>9</sup> It also brings about her idea of searching for wholeness when she assumes that world is split; reality is divided and causes unsatisfactory lives. 'Red Notebook 2' conveys Anna's intention to leave the CP as she and Molly find out that the CP lies: a reality that is contradictory to their own principles.<sup>10</sup> Here Anna's fear of the chaotic world is represented through her dream in which colour red is dissolved by other colours.<sup>11</sup> In the Red Notebook 3, the reader is presented by what Anna does after leaving the CP. Anna gets involved in attending some serial meetings of ex-CP's members, and in discussing the reformation of the CP.<sup>12</sup> The end of the 'Red Notebook' is about Anna who is told by Jimmy the story of Harry Matthew, an ex-CP's member obsessed in writing the history of the Russian Communist Party.

The 'Yellow Notebook' contains a story written by Anna out of her own experience. It presents Ella as the central character. The first part of the notebook mainly tells the reader about an affair between Ella and Paul. In the second part, the story goes on presenting how the relationship psychologically affected Ella very much as can be indicated by this excerpt "The truth is that my happiness with Paul was more important to me than anything..."<sup>13</sup> There are two important moments in the third part of the notebook. Firstly, it is about the fact that Ella gives up thinking about men and sex, and she wants to write again.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, it is about the conversation between Ella and her father describing their attitudes and opinions of each other and on the idea of separation and togetherness.<sup>15</sup> The last part of the 'Yellow Notebook' contains the highlights of a series of short stories based on various experiences of Anna.

The 'Blue Notebook' as noted earlier is meant to be Anna's diary. In the first part, the diary tells the reader more about her emptiness of being a mother and a writer at the same time. Anna goes to a psychotherapist, Mrs. Mark (Mother Sugar) for a treatment. Yet, what she gets is a more fragmented

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* 2002:151

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* 2002:270

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 2002:271

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 2002:395-396

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* 2002:283

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* 2002:404

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* 2002:409

understanding of the world.<sup>16</sup> The second part is mainly concerned with the chronological events that make Anna leave the CP. She finds out that there is lots of violence as well as lies and manipulations in both the British CP as in the Soviet Union. It is also triggered by some disagreements with John Butte, Jack, and Rose who are all members of British CP. On the third part in which the setting mostly takes place in Mrs. Mark's therapy room, three important events are described: firstly, when Anna reveals the reason why she has four notebooks<sup>17</sup>; secondly, when she decides to use the blue notebook and leaves the others<sup>18</sup>; and thirdly, when Anna conveys her state quoted as follows:

Yes, that's what I was. I was a woman terribly vulnerable, critical, using femaleness as a sort of standard or yardstick to measure and discard men ... I was Anna who invited defeat from men without even being conscious of it ... I was stuck fast in an emotion common to women of our time, that can turn them bitter, or Lesbian, or solitary.<sup>19</sup>

Part four of the 'Blue Notebook' focuses on two moments. Firstly, it is about the relationship between Anna and Saul Green, a wandering American communist. Secondly, it is about Anna finding a book that attracts her, which later becomes the 'Golden Notebook'.<sup>20</sup>

*The Golden Notebook* contains the revelation of what Anna has undergone. There is an excerpt that describes this:

That was about courage, but not the sort of courage I have ever understood. It's a small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life, because injustice and cruelty is at the root of life. And the reason why I have only given my attention to the heroic or the beautiful or the intelligent is because I won't accept the injustice and the cruelty, and so won't accept the small endurance that is bigger than anything.<sup>21</sup>

To some degree this can be seen as her turning point that becomes the basis of all her decisions depicted in 'Free Women 5'.

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* 2002: 229-230

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* 2002:418

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* 2002:418

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* 2002:421

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* 2002:527-528

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* 2002:551

*The Golden Book* eventually offers not only as an odyssey in our spare times, but also serves as a teaching medium to thematically unravel the intriguing paradox world we inhabit as well as to technically examine the work. These are what make the book worth enjoying and analysing. With the vivid, colloquial, and sarcastic language intertwined in progressive theme, tone and structure, the book gains its own laurels.