

The Deconstructing Tendency in *The Golden Notebook*

Liu Chen

Department of Foreign Languages, Hanshan Normal University

Author Note

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Liu Chen, Department of English, School of Foreign Languages, Hanshan Normal University, Chaozhou, Guangdong, China.

Email: 20220054@hstc.edu.cn

Funding: Hanshan Normal University Doctoral Research Initiation Project (2023): “A Study of the Others in the Novels of Doris Lessing and J. M. Coetzee” (Grant No. QD2023220).

Abstract

This paper seeks to reveal Lessing’s critique of the Western cultural obsession with “certainty” in *The Golden Notebook*. By deconstructing the relationship between Anna and Willi, the novel demonstrates that both Willi’s rigid adherence to bookish dogma and Anna’s radical pursuit of definitive answers stem from a dependence on certainty and a fear of the unknown. Through portraying Anna’s multiple identities and emphasizing plurality, Lessing aims to remind people to embrace contradiction—that is, to accept that the world and the self are inherently fragmented and paradoxical. This entails maintaining an openness to new evidence, diverse perspectives, and complex realities, while never ceasing to question and reflect. It also means living with uncertainty and having the courage to continue leading an authentic and responsible life and taking action even in the absence of ultimate answers.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, postmodernism, deconstructing, *The Golden Notebook*

The postmodern way of thinking is considered as “the thinking of a tramp” (Wang, 2006, p. 8) for the tramps’ inherent tendency of breaking and destroying boundaries. To some extent, Lessing is indeed can be regarded as a “tramp” for several reasons. The most straightforward one is her being exiled from Southern Rhodesia in 1949 because of her campaigning against nuclear arms and South African apartheid.

Thus as a white South African, she cannot really fulfill the integration with the European society; as a woman, she constantly feels the oppression of the male-dominated

culture and cannot feel easy in it; and as an artist, the feeling of being exiled reaches the highest point, she cannot help suspecting almost everything and the pain of conflict often mounts to the altitude of philosophical conception: who is she? What is real? Especially her deep concern for the function of literature: “one begins with the idea of transforming society ... through literature and then, when nothing happens, one feels a sense of failure.” (Ghosh, 2006, p. 215) Considered as the last home for a writer, the sense of futility in writing is to some extent doomed to happen because of the uncertainty of language.

The most valuable part of this novel is that it’s not the vehicle for radical social criticism or trumpets for certain causes or autobiography confession or treaties between parties. From its content to its form, the novel shines with the postmodern light which is characterized by emphasizing on negativity, de-centering, anti-authority, discontinuity and plurality which all contributed to the breaking off from the traditional Western thought. As Lessing said in an interview: “Soon, soon, we will have left behind The Age of Belief and its wars and tortures and hatred of another type of believer, soon we will all be free and, as all the philosophers and sages have recommended, we will all live our lives with minds free of violent and passionate commitment.” (Ridout, 2004, p. 35)

1. Breaking the Obsession for Certainty

Lessing sought to dismantle people’s obsession with certainty—not to advocate for nihilism, but to free the human spirit and intellect from the constraints of any rigid and unscientific narrative framework. She believed that inflexible novelistic conventions hinder our ability to perceive truth. Postmodern lived experience is inherently fragmented, uncertain, and multifaceted—devoid of a unified standard or absolute truth. One should trust their

intuition and the firsthand experience gained from life itself. Lessing argued that people must move beyond reliance on certainty and cultivate the courage and wisdom to face uncertainty. *The Golden Notebook* does not reject integration outright. On the contrary, the novel suggests that only when people truly recognize the reality of divergence and honestly confront difference can genuine wholeness emerge.

Then in order to break the obsession for certainty, Lessing firstly divided the novel into four colored notebooks (black, red, yellow, blue) which were interspersed with sections of “Free Women,” symbolizing the fragmentation of identity and experience. This structure refuses to provide a unified interpretation, forcing readers to confront chaos, contradiction, and uncertainty. The overlapping and the contradictory accounts of the same event in different notebooks reveal the fluidity of memory. Secondly, Anna’s writer’s block stems from her inability and unwillingness to sum up her life through a single narrative. In other words, the complexity of life should not be reduced into a simplified pattern. Through this block, Lessing intends to say that a coherent self is ultimately an illusion. In Lessing’s writing, her characters attempt to discover their true selves through politics, art, psychotherapy, and other means—yet all these efforts end in futility. This brings to mind the historian Xu Zhuoyun’s book named *Look Inward: Settle Your Heart and Mind* (Xu & Feng, 2022) What he meant is that to hold oneself together and avoid breaking down, one ought to understand that it is better to seek within rather than rely on others—a notion deeply aligned with traditional Chinese wisdom. Only by focusing sincerely on one’s own responsibilities, undisturbed by external chaos, can a person truly stand firm.

For western modernists like Virginia Wulf and James Joyce, life is chaotic and the

creative act is the sorting and sublimation of this chaos. Therefore, the deeper understanding and unity of life can be obtained through art. However, Doris Lessing was deeply concerned with by the political situation and psychoanalysis of the mid-20th century in the west. She questioned modernism's "art for art's sake" ideology. Having personally engaged in political movements, she argued that art must not only concern itself with the order of individual consciousness but must also intervene and respond to the chaos of the external world, such as war, class struggle, racism, and women's struggles. Just as Feng pointed out: "today, humanity is facing an endless series of survival crises, such as war, plague, and ecological degradation. ...Doris Lessing often employed a blend of historical reality and fantasy to interpret various historical events of the contemporary world and to prophesy the diverse survival crises that humanity may face in the future." (Feng, 2024, pp. 35-37)

Thirdly, through debates between characters, such as those between Anna and Willi, Lessing exposes the limitations of various ideologies: Willi's conservatism, Marion's nihilism, and even Anna's radicalism is all revealed as variants of the obsession for certainty. Willie clings to bookish theories, applying ready-made ideological frameworks to interpret and explain all complex real-world issues, representing a rigid adherence to dogma. On the other hand, Marion represents another extreme after the collapse of ideals. When she realizes that the world cannot be understood through simple notions or any single theory, she ceases to seek meaning, indulging in alcohol and emotional dependence. Even Anna's yearning for standard answers is itself a form of obsession. Lessing criticizes not any specific ideology, but rather the deep-seated fear of the unknown within people, and the spiritual paralysis and physical inaction resulting from this fear.

2. The Relationship between Anna and Willi

Various socially constructed roles split Anna and also contributed to her postmodern skeptical spirit and this energy prevented her from being in harmony with anything of arbitrariness, for example, her lover Willi, “In every instinct he was for order, correctness and conservation of what existed.” (Lessing, 1994, p. 70) and “Willi was the center because of his absolute certainty that he was right.” (Lessing, 1994, p. 69) This statement exactly explains how the hegemonism is constructed: he who dares to declare he holds the absolute truth gets the kingship. Yet there’s no principle can be valid everywhere and that’s what the postmodernism opposed to. The so-called center, unity and order are all artificial. Anna’s conflict with Willi broke out one day from which we can see the focus of their conflicts:

But Willi had withdrawn himself. For one thing, he did not approve of such bohemianism as collective bedroom breakfasts. “If we were married,” he had complained, “it might be all right.” I laughed at him, and he said: “Yes. Laugh. But there’s sense in the old rules. They kept people out of trouble.” He was annoyed because I laughed, and said that a woman in my position needed extra dignity of behavior. “What position?” —I was suddenly very angry, because of the trapped feeling women get at such moments. “Yes, Anna, but things are different for men and women. They always have been and they very likely always will be.” (Lessing, 1994, p. 113)

Here, we can see that the relationship between Anna and Willi is very much like that between modernism and postmodernism in the way Anna questions Willi’s absolute certainty and postmodernism challenges the authority of modernism. What Willi opposed to was bohemianism, feminism and postmodernism. He rejected bohemianism by sticking up to kinds

of old rules by which he was brought up. Thus, instead of infusing into the hotel life which was free of conventions, he smashed the carefree atmosphere through discriminating against everything of liberal attribute. Willi opposed to feminism by reminding Anna of the eternal difference between man and woman. According to him, it was shameful for a single woman to have breakfast with men in the same room. His criticism cornered Anna into a trap in which she even could not struggle; otherwise, a more embarrassing position would be formed, because perhaps nothing had more oppression on the thoughts of people at that time than did Willi a defender of western morality and justice. Willi rejected postmodernism by denying any chances of emergence of newness. He refused to see any possibilities that one day things would become the same for men and women. But Anna was everything on the contrary.

Anna felt odd when she realized that people continued to depend on Willi even when they knew he was ridiculous because they were afraid to lose the certainty that Willi held. Dread for anarchy, people desperately longed for order even they knew it was nonsense. And that accounts for the workability of long-term ruling of traditional Western thought. Nothing has aroused Anna's uneasiness more than people's willful obsession of order.

Thus, Anna as a woman is averse to Willi's immense male oppression and Anna as a person of challenging energy is resentful to Willi's absolute authority. She has been keeping the lover relationship with Willi but without any affectionate feelings. Willi's forcible possession of Anna intensified her intention to leave. Anna's breaking off from Willi implied her determination to get rid of dependence on false certainty and to face the uncertainty in life bravely, although it would be so hard in the male-dominated and order-directed society.

3. Tommy's Unusual Calmness towards Blindness

Tommy himself was a typical dichotomy, because he couldn't reconcile his father's certainty and his mother's uncertainty. The internal splitting of Tommy was the reflection of the counterwork between order and chaos. Brought up by his bohemian mother Molly, Tommy has been listening to her friends' talking for years and was given a large amount of freedom and even being left alone at home with money when Molly went out for trips. Molly thought it would be good for him because he would not become a traditional English mother-ridden boy.

Yet Tommy later preferred to be brought up by his father Richard because he envied Richard's staying power which he could never get under the influence of Molly's inconsistency. He found out that he was not able to live in a mess although that was how he had been brought up. Yet on the other hand, he could not accept Richard's life style, because he held deep sympathy, as his mother did, for people like Marion who has been treated like dirt by his father. We might say that Tommy's father stood for certainty and order while Tommy's mother represented uncertainty and chaos. Tommy later knew it very well:

People like Anna or Molly and that lot, they're not just one thing, but several things...

You know if something happened in the world, or there was a change of some kind, a resolution or something... they'd be something different if they had to be. But you'll never be different, father. You'll always have to live the way you do now. Well, I don't want that for myself. (Lessing, 1994, p. 35)

Tommy pointed out the uncertainty and changeability of people like Anna and Molly. Although he didn't show any sign of approving of them, yet he did express his resistance to his father's stereotyped life. Tommy's choosing to kill himself after reading over Anna's fragmented diaries showed his inability to mediate the radicalness of his inherent division

brought by his parents. If he dies, all the conflicts in him would have gone forever with that “bang”, yet the dichotomy would still exist: Richard would blame everything on Molly, thus the certainty would still override the uncertainty as it always did. Tommy’s blindness, instead of death, neutralizes the dichotomy certainty and uncertainty and it also reveals that when conflict happens, death, as radical as it is, is not the only way out. Between certainty and uncertainty, there exist the other possibilities, such as the blindness.

Tommy’s acceptance of blindness with unusual calmness broke the dichotomy order and chaos. When he was informed that he would be blind for the rest of his life, his gesture was like a head nod and it seemed that he was pleased about blindness. He even began to make plans for future which he would never do before. In all, he was normal again and “he’s all in one piece for the first time in his life.” (Lessing, 1994, p. 362) That’s to say, he finally reconciled the radical conflicts caused by struggling between order and chaos, although the way he achieved this was unusual. After the blindness, Tommy’s staying long hours with Marion demonstrated his rejection for order and his hostility to his mother’s help illustrated his refusal to chaos. Instead of talking hysterically or brooding all day he began to learn how to face a complex world rather than cornering himself to a dead angle.

The most straightforward and superficial reason for Tommy’s suicide was Anna’s four notebooks which were full of chaos and doubts. Lessing has mentioned that these notebooks were self-healing, then why they became killers in Tommy’s case. This thesis claimed that the real reason for Tommy’s suicide was his inability to view chaos and uncertainties as the essential part of life. Tommy’s world view was radical while Anna saw everything in a dynamic way. Trying to ease Tommy’s hysteria, Anna said:

It seems to me something like this—every so often, perhaps once in a century, there’s a sort of—act of faith. A well of faith fills up, and there’s an enormous heave forward in one country or another, and that’s a forward movement for the whole world. Because it’s an act of imagination—for what is possible for the whole world. ...Then the well runs dry, because, as you say, the cruelty and the ugliness are too fills again. And then there’s another painful lurch forward. (Lessing, 1994, p. 263)

Thus, between a full well and a dry well there must be a process of inflowing and outgoing. Anna was able to see both and rather than the subjective elimination of the ugliness she had the patience to wait for the new possibilities. Yet, Tommy only saw the “cruelty and ugliness” of a dry well and denied the process of inflowing. In a similar vein, he refused to admit that between life and death there exist many different phases and demanded a goal which actually wouldn’t come if growing pains haven’t been suffered. He was even sick of being offered with a great deal of opportunities by his parents and on the contrary was envious of the milkman’s lack of chances and holding firm belief in social system. In a word, he was tired of uncertainties yet at the same time unable to obtain certainty. The distinctive differences in his parents had created a dichotomy in his deep mind: absolutism and nihilism. He could not get out of this dichotomy to see the other possibilities of life and suffered the paralysis of will. His late blindness rescued him from this dead dichotomy and gave him new awareness of life.

In a word, Tommy himself has been shaped into a dichotomy under the polarized influence of his divorced parents: his father Richard for order and his mother Molly for chaos. Tommy’s attempt to kill himself proved his inability to reconcile the order and chaos and his intention to draw a close to the conflict. If his attempt succeeded, the dichotomy would still

exist, as radical as it was, yet, instead of death, he got blindness which undermined the significance of the dichotomy life and death. After the blindness, his staying long hours with his father's wife Marion and his hostility towards his mother's help demonstrated his rejection to both order and chaos, yet his becoming normal again and his willingness to think about his future have greatly reduced the importance of the dichotomy order and chaos, since both of them could no longer influence him as before. And his calm acceptance of blindness implied that he has found out new strength out of the chaos of life.

In all, both of Tommy's blindness and Anna's uncertainty broke up with the authority of certainty. And things may become different when you are willing to hold a dynamic perspective, rather than obsessed with the dead certainty.

4. Anna's Emphasis on Divergences

The thinking mode of preference for accordance is also one of the foes of postmodernism. *The Golden Notebook* questions accordance by laying stress on divergence. In the novella *Free Women*, Anna made a comparison between Molly and herself:

Anna: "for a lot of people you and I are practically interchangeable".

Molly: "'When we're so different in every way,' said Molly, 'it's odd. I suppose because we both live the same kind of life—not getting married and so on. That's all they see.'"

(Lessing, 1994, p. 4)

The premise of showing due respect to things is the identification with their inherent differences. Thus, seeking accordance among divergences is to force things into your own cognitive frame and to deny the existence of difference. Out of collective contempt towards divorced women, people forcibly press Anna and Molly into the same category. Yet, they in

fact own so many differences: Anna couldn't speak foreign languages while Molly was competent in several of them; Anna has a superiority of talent in writing while Molly was worldly wise.

Colonization was also a criminal shelter for forcible accordance: "Jimmy's father was 'an unsatisfactory retired Indian Colonel' just because his father 'likes Indian people and goes in for humanity and Buddhism.'" (Lessing, 1994, p. 75) The colonization of one country is actually to assimilate its culture and to replace its divergences with sameness. The reason for Jimmy's father's being considered as unsatisfactory was that he was attracted by the Indian culture, rather than contributing to obliterate it. However, as we are told today, the globalization was not equivalent to homogenizing all the cultures. Otherwise, the rich civilization of our world would be turned into a desert.

Janet, daughter of Anna, demanded to go to an "ordinary" boarding school in which order was of supreme dominance and old rules measured everything. Anna was surprised by her daughter's decision and said to her: "There's nothing ordinary about a conventional English girl's boarding-school, they are unique in the world". (Lessing, 1994, p. 519) What seems ordinary in England is actually unique in other countries in the world; what you can be sure of in this country is no longer certain in another one. Thus, Anna thought about sending Janet to some progressive school in which real world experiences would be taught through activities. Yet she finally decided to respect Janet's choice because she realized that boarding school was also one of the divergences and she shouldn't assimilate Janet. So did the school uniforms. Anna didn't prevent Janet from wearing them although she thought the school uniforms destroyed everything that could make girls like Janet beautiful.

Anna furthered her emphasis on divergences by questioning words of general meaning: “I have thought about that often since. I mean, about the word nice. Perhaps I mean good. Of course, they mean nothing, when you start to think about them...I’d be careful not to use them.” (Lessing, 1994, p. 104) People have been getting used to use these general words very often in daily life and this unconscious habit revealed the collective tendency of generalization fostered under the ruling of traditional Western thought.

People have been getting used to seek sameness among different individuals for the sake of cognition convenience and the absoluteness of this thinking mode has ignored many rich details which differentiate one thing from another. “A hundred yards off, they were recognizably of the same human tribe, hardly to be distinguished. But close to, their resemblances emphasized their total difference of fiber.” (Lessing, 1994, p. 76) That is to say, it’s the resemblances that result in difference, because resemblances are not equivalent to being identical, thus resemblances are the premise of the existence of difference and vice versa. It’s arbitrary and artificial to emphasize each of them or to polarize them into a pair opposition.

5. Anna’s Leaving the Political Community

Anna’s leaving the political community is to break the dichotomy: wholeness and split. Wholeness is the other form of unity. Anna joined the party for two reasons: the political community stood for wholeness and people of the political community tended to connect things together, instead of compartmentalizing things. Yet the attempt to build world ethic itself speeded the division; the killing each other in the community and publishing books that telling lies made Anna even more disappointed. Anna’s expressed her idea that unification was nothing but an illusion in the description of one of her dreams:

The colors are melting and flowing into each other, indescribably beautiful so that the world becomes whole ... This is a moment of almost unbearable happiness, the happiness seems to swell up, so that everything suddenly bursts, explodes—I was suddenly standing in space, in silence. Beneath me was silence. (Lessing, 1994, p. 256)

Her original intention of joining the community was to get rid of a real world full of divergences and to grasp a kind of blind wholeness which doesn't exist at all, although she then realized that joining the community has actually "intensified the split". (Lessing, 1994, p. 154)

Her leaving the community is neither for wholeness nor for split but for a broader conscious open for the other possibilities. Leaving the community also presented the braveness for the embracement of chaos. A community of wholeness only existed in people's mind. People created these artificial unities out of the fear of disorder. Thus, for Anna, the most unbearable thing was not "order" or "wholeness" themselves, but people's stubborn yearning for them. Lessing tried very hard to ease the stubbornness by making people face their own illusions of belonging to glorious unities of order, rather than direct tenuous attack on these notions themselves.

In a word, Ann's leaving the community greatly undermined the significance of order and chaos, since joining community stood for yearning for wholeness and order and yet staying in the community only speeded the split and chaos. Thus, leaving the community suggested that she was evading the artificial radicalness of the dichotomy. And since she has realized that order in community life was only an illusion, staying in the community could only made her hold a radical and critical judgment to the community which was also untrue because she was thankful to the practical things that she has learnt from the community. Thus, leaving the

community was for a more objective attitude towards the community and a way to avoid being radical.

6. Anna's Irreconcilable Selves

According to Bai Aixian, "In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing not only discusses some modern themes but also adopts some modern narrative techniques." (Bai, 2003, p. iv) This thesis argues that to analyze *The Golden Notebook* in the frame of modernity will reduce the strength of fragmentation, because fragmentations of modernity would reunite together while the fragmentations of postmodernism would not, but rather generate a kind of new strength, in another word, something new would happen after the fragmentation. Yet "the modernist's alienation and internal fragmentation is a direct result of the multiplicity of available perspectives rather than of some schism in 'Being' itself—which would be postmodern." (Michael, 1990, p. 73) That is to say, the modernist's fragmented selves still bear a chance of being put together as unified consciousness while the postmodernist's fragmented selves are irreconcilable and they have accepted plurality as the nature of life.

According to traditional Western thought, subject is the whole unitary integrated self, however, in *The Golden Notebook*, Anna is not just an essential character but "a composite of various of roles, functions, and representations" (Michael, 1990, p. 72) The novel presents many versions of Anna on several narrative levels: Anna is both the author and the central character of a conventional novella called "Free Women"; Anna is the keeper and protagonist of four notebooks at the same time; Anna is the editor of all these texts contained in *The Golden Notebook*. To highlight anyone of these Annas is to deny the importance of the others and that would run counter to the inclusiveness of the postmodernism. Meanwhile, these Annas may

coexist peacefully as they are but will be incompatible when forced into a unitary one for a hexahedron is no longer a hexahedron when it's dragged into a plane.

The better way to eliminate the dominance of binary oppositions is not to deny them but to blur the boundary and to admit the possibilities between them. To deconstruct one dichotomy is to counteract the privileges of the subject since it can be treated as the object. On the basis of anthropocentrism, all sorts of humanism highly develop the humanity of human beings which celebrated as the Ultimate Supremacy. Protagoras of Abdera comes to his famous conclusion that man is the measure of all things while Kant brings forward in his apriorism that human beings create laws of nature and Sartre declares that man is the existence of his own design.

To these humanists, man is the center, and man is omnipotent and man is master of his own will. But to the postmodernists, these thoughts are nothing but a showing of arrogance and ignorance. Men are always monsters of megalomaniacs and too self-centered to see the others, yet actually, nothing can be the center while everything is the center in a dynamic process. The stable or everlasting center doesn't exist except in illusion or as a production of the wishful belief. Men only exist in the non-unity and plural form. It takes more effort to face a plural world than a unitary one.

The subject in *The Golden Notebook* bears postmodern characteristics. In traditional fictions, subject is usually a living human being who behaves in a rational way as a whole. And critics may make analysis on his or her analyzable characters and draw some conclusions while readers may learn something useful from his or her traceable life career. However, in the postmodern works, things are quite different that nearly all the elements of fiction are dispersed

into fragments, including the subject. People have learnt to observe life from diverse angles, yet they haven't realized that the subject also needs to be spread out into different parts in order to cope with the complex life. People just cannot hold themselves. The multiple identities of Anna in *The Golden Notebook* illustrate that the integrated subject has been fragmented into several culturally and socially constructed subjects. That is to say, the subject can no longer dominate life but must go with the stream and adapt to social conditions.

The influential deconstructivist Jacques Derrida stresses that the "subject is indispensable" but "is a function, not a being" (Michael, 1990, p. 42). Human beings have been through the process of codification since they were born. Although they do exist as biological, material and historical human beings, they are actually not unified because they have been fragmented into several culturally constructed selves. Derrida's perspective serves as a profound warning: when using concepts such as "I," "self," or "the subject," we must remain constantly aware that they are not natural or stable foundations, but rather complex, fluid, and constructed products. He invites us to persistently and critically examine the subject without abandoning its use, revealing the construction processes and power relations behind it. This is not to destroy agency, but to deepen our understanding of the conditions that make agency possible and those that limit it. Anna's shifting among various roles was to fulfil her different social responsibilities and, in this process, she was no longer a unified person with stable subject-hood but the one who was coping with complexity of life with multi-functions.

7. Conclusions

This article explored the postmodern sense of the novel through unearthing the breakings in it, including the breaking of the obsession for certainty and the breaking of the

think mode of preference for unification. Anna's breaking up with Willi symbolised Anna's challenge towards both male certainty and the Western system's long-standing rule. Tommy's becoming normal again after the blindness improved, and he had gotten rid of the affliction of conflict caused by struggling between certainty and uncertainty.

The Golden Notebook broke the thinking mode of preference for unity by stressing on divergences. Anna refused to categorize people into artificial groups and claimed that it was the resemblances that distinguish. Anna as a writer tried carefully not to use words of general meaning because these words would destroy divergences. Anna as a parent worried about that Janet would lose her uniqueness in the autocratic boarding school. In order to obtain unbiased opinions about the community, Anna determined to leave the community which is the symbolization of artificial unification and to bravely accept the divergences and complexities of life. And finally, even the self was full of divergences in the way they could not be reconciled, but existed as separate, socially constructed selves. Bazin pointed out that:

A critical consensus has emerged regarding Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: one which describes the novel's ground-breaking formal innovations in terms of postmodern dislocation, "breakdown" and fragmentation. The refusal to represent a stable "reality" is seen as evidence that the novel has rejected the conventions of realism and the resistance to aesthetic unity and coherence as indicating a break with modernism. (Bazin, 2008, pp. 117-131)

By this statement, we can see that traditional realist novels presuppose an objective and knowable reality, attempting to reflect it through stable narrative. *The Golden Notebook*, however, questions the true nature of reality itself. By presenting events from multiple

perspectives—political, artistic, personal, and subconscious—through distinct, intersecting, and often contradictory notebooks, the novel demonstrates that reality is plural, subjective, and constructed rather than singular and objective. In other words, reality is far more complex, fluid, and difficult to represent than realism tends to portray. Therefore, this novel can be said to challenge the tradition of realist fiction both in content and form.

Lessing's fragmented form deliberately rejects traditional linear narrative and a holistic worldview, suggesting the disintegration of postmodern experience and the absence of a single, coherent "reality" available to be represented. *The Golden Notebook* is an experiment that not only challenges realism but also significantly differs from the fragmented stream of consciousness represented by writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. While Woolf and Joyce sought to use stream of consciousness and mythological allusions to transcend external chaos and achieve a higher internal unity, order, and meaning, Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* makes no such attempt. Instead, it presents the fragments of reality through four distinct notebooks as irreconcilable and coexisting. In this sense, the postmodern spirit of the novel clearly distinguishes itself from the elitist consciousness of modernism—which aimed to pursue ultimate order through art.

References

- Bai, A. X. (2003). The modernity of *The golden notebook* [Master's thesis], Shanxi University.
- Bazin, V. (2008). Commodifying the past: Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* as nostalgic narrative. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43(2), 117-131.
- Feng, C. (2024). The concept of a community with a shared future for humanity in Doris Lessing's science fiction. *Masterpieces Review*, 15, 35-37.

- Ghosh, T. K. (Ed.). (2006). *The golden notebook: A critical study*. Prestige Books.
- Lessing, D. (1994). *The Golden Notebook*. Harper Perennial.
- Michael, M. C. (1990). *Feminism and the postmodernist impulse: Doris Lessing, Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood, and Angela Carter* [Doctoral dissertation], Emory University. ProQuest.
- Ridout, A. R. (2004). *“To Be and Not to Be”: The politics of parody in Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Doris Lessing*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. University of Toronto TS Space. <http://hdl.handle.net/1807/122585>
- Wang, Z. H. (2006). 后现代哲学思潮研究(增补本) [*A Study of Postmodern Philosophical Thought (Expanded edition)*] (p. 8). 北京大学出版社 [Peking University Press].
- Xu, Z. Y., & Feng, J. W. (2022). 往里走，安顿自己 [*Look Inward: Settle Your Heart and Mind*]. 北京日报出版社 [Beijing Daily Publishing House].