

Postmodernism Encounters Women's Writing in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

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Abstract:

For the most part, Literary critics have associated the advent of Women's Writing with the maturing of feminism. In the postmodern era, Women Writers tried to embark on a modish style that will enable them to disentangle themselves from male literature. Thus, this study paper intends to investigate the presence of postmodernism, mainly intertextuality, in the novel *The Golden Notebook* written by Doris Lessing in 1962. As an outset, the study proceeds with the statement of meaning of Women Writers and the diverse stages the discipline encompasses. Then, it shifts to put into words intertextuality as a postmodern technique and its miscellaneous devices extant within *The Golden Notebook*. Subsequently, it will underline the status quo of the woman in this novel by the British writer Doris Lessing.

Keywords:

Women's Writing, Postmodernism, Intertextuality, *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing.

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1. Introduction

Women's fights for their natural and straightforward rights have always been a point of discussion and debate between women and the male-dominated societies. For countless centuries ago, women were oppressed, overwhelmed and deprived of all of their social prerogatives by the patriarchal communities they were living in; women's prime part in the social order was men's contentment. This verity made women more ignorant, frivolous and empty-headed. Nevertheless, decade after decade and century after other, women started to be more aware of the dismal state, especially after those women broke into literature, the field that was restricted only to men. In this phase, women started to have a voice because they gave a pragmatic representation of what they were enduring when they started writing.

Female characters turned to be significant solid characters in the women's writings after being just flat characters that men writers used to complete the picture of their stories or put down all women, the case of Jean Jacques Rousseau, for instance. The discipline, known afterwards as Women's Writing, gave women a strong push at the beginning of their fight since it played the role of awareness that many women required, strikingly those raised on the principle that the primary goal of their existence is serving men. At early stages, women writers were imitating the male writers because there were no women to be taken as models at that time, but subsequently, this fact started to disappear, seeing as that the upcoming generations of women writers had some pioneers to follow.

The Current paper will try to investigate the encounter of postmodernism as a literary movement from one side and women's writing as a literary discipline from the other side. Henceforth, some research questions reflect on:

- What is Women's Writing as a literary discipline?
- What are the postmodern theories present within *The Golden Notebook*?
- What is the position of the woman in *The Golden Notebook*?

2. Women's Writing

In her outstanding essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), the French writer Hélène Cixous employed the expression *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) to define a category of writing done wholly by women, and it is entirely independent of the mannish literature. For Cixous, feminine writing is not just a style of writing done first-hand by women, but instead, it is an utter field through which women share their conjectures, censure the virile societies they were living in and express their elucidations that will help achieve equality. According to Adrienne Rivera, 'Women's literature has often been defined by publishers as a category of writing done by women' (Rivera, 2020, para 4).

Women's writing as a literary discipline appeared lately after that feminism got an enormous outcome on the social side. As a field of study, women's writing is divided into different generations that share the same general concept but are distinct in the timing they appeared in. For Elaine Showalter, Women's writing as a subject matter was the outcome of the fighting of many generations of women writers who remained unknown till nowadays. She added that these women sacrificed all they got to see future generations live and work in prosperity.

According to Wassila Mouro (2014), the term Women's Writing gained fame when the feminist movement emerged. For Mouro, women were kept absent in the literary field throughout history except for a few who belonged to the male literary canon (p.52). Princeton's Professor Emerita Elaine Showalter divided Women's writing into three different generations in which each generation differs from the others in the specific features, but they all share the same general intention,

Women's writing has moved through three phases subordination, protest and autonomy, these phases are connected by recurring images, metaphors, themes and plots that emerge from women's social and literary experience and from reading both male and female precursors (Showalter, 1999, p. 405).

'The feminine' was the name that Showalter coined with the first generation of women writers. One of the main features of this stage of Women's Writing was that the feminine writers were trying to find a voice in society; these women writers sought equal male writers in this domain. Another patent character of this period was that these writers gained fame after they passed away because either their works were published anonymously, the case of Jane Austen, for instance, or they were using male pen names or incognito, George Eliot, for example. At this point, women writers were self-discovering since they did not have any model to chase other than the male one (Showalter, 1977, p. 300).

The second generation for Showalter is 'the feminist'. This generation of women writers gained much power from the social events in their environment; the first and the most important one was the suffragette movement that led women to gain their voting right. In this phase, the women of letters were more self-reliant and confident; this fact was really blatant in their characters' choices and the events of their stories. Unlike the first generation, the second generation of women writers did not adopt male pennames and was not influenced by male writers. Showalter added that it is possible to talk about a pure female literary tradition starting from this generation because if someone is reading a novel or a poem written by a woman writer from this era, he or she will notice the considerable jump women writers made in this period (pp. 301-302).

According to Showalter, the third generation of Women's Writing is called 'the female' and is the most autonomous. The women writers belonging to this generation are more independent, shown in their unique and distinctive writing style. These women proved that the female's literary experience is dissimilar from the male's, which is the principal mark of autonomy and self-determination for Showalter. Some writers like Virginia Woolf went even far by making a variation between the style of words used by men and women. In general, this generation of women writers

made a renaissance in this field of study by establishing the front lines that differentiate mannish literature from the feminine (Showalter, 1999, p. 400).

3. Postmodern Presence Through Intertextuality

Postmodernism is the latest movement to have emerged. In literature, postmodern fiction noticed massive alterations on all levels; it is characterised by the presence of many theories like intertextuality, metafiction and non-linear Narration. Nevertheless, in this paper, the main focus will be on intertextuality since its inception and its different types.

3.1 Definition and Historical Background of Intertextuality

In his book *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (2000), Allen argues that it is hard to define intertextuality. Some theorists, such as Ducrot and Nolk, link intertextuality to Bakhtin's polyphony; they argue that a text incorporates contrasting voices enciphered and encrypted in varied methods (Shaw & Pecorari, 2013, pp. 39-42). Some other theorists claim that the source of intertextuality can be affiliated to the works of both Aristotle and Plato, 'in the theory of imitation' which affirms that imitation is art and art is imitation (Alfaro, 1996, pp. 269-270). In his 1920 well-acclaimed essay *Tradition and Individual Talent*, Eliot obliquely touched intertextuality when he supported the idea that a writer must have used a background in order to be able to produce his new work.

James Joyce also contributed to intertextuality in his own way. In his 1923 novel *Ulysses*, Joyce introduced three characters in the carcass of a modern version. All that Joyce wanted to convey that it was possible to use a myth from the past, but still, the writer is not imitating others; he is just trying to show the split between the past and the present, this is known as the 'Mythical Method', and Joyce was not the only one who used it. Mary Shelley is accredited for being the first writer ever to use the character recognised as the monster of Frankenstein, but this character was employed afterwards in many artistic works such as movies, cartoons and even stories. In 2004, the monster appeared as a modernised version in the movie *Van Helsing*, in which the monster's characteristics are taken from Karlhoff design of the monster. Other critics see that intertextuality is nothing less than a new name given to old techniques like allusion.

According to Mouro (2014), the term intertextuality is also related to Bakhtin when he stated that the novel is a genre in which intertextuality is very patent. Julia Kristeva is credited for being the framer of intertextuality, issued from Freud's '*Dreamwork*' and Bakhtin's *Dialogism*. In her 1966 essay *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, Kristeva presents 'intertextuality as a theory of meaning and meaning production' (Buchanan, 2010), which asserts that there is 'no original texts', but instead all texts are formed of other extant words and texts. According to her, there is no text, more precisely an intertext, since all writers are readers at first hand, so they must all be influenced while reading other pre-existing texts. For her, each and every text (intertext) is a 'mosaic of references' to other already existing texts (Mouro, 2014, p.29).

Roland Barthes also tackled the notion of intertextuality and tried to develop it in his admitted essay "The Death of the Author" (1968). In this essay, Barthes wanted to convey a clear and strong message, "the author dies" when the text is in the hand of the "reader" because, for him, no one has the power to intervene in the understanding of the meaning of any text, except the reader. Barthes expanded in his idea with his "theory of the text" when he explained that for a text to have a meaning, the reader (the critical element for Barthes) needs to set off all the possible intertextual features existing in the text. Riffaterre's 1984 "*Intertextual Representations: On Mimesis as Interpretative Discourse*" came as a confirmation to what Barthes stated in his theories because for Riffaterre too, intertextuality takes place in the mind of the reader. He justified this by the fact that intertextuality takes place in the mind, which creates other works. Harold Bloom has his own word to say when it comes to intertextuality; for him, romantic poetry is also intertextual. He backs up this idea by the fact that intertextuality and poetry are based on imitation since the first thing any poet does is imitate other poets. (Haberer, 2007, p. 49).

3.2 Types of Intertextuality

According to Robert S. Miola, intertextuality has many types that can be regrouped under three general groups. In the chapter he wrote in the book, *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality* (2004), the first category of intertextuality is divided into five general types. The first type in the first category for Miola is revision; it includes the resemblance that both the text and the intertext share. The second type in the first category is translation; for Miola transferring a text from one language to another is also a kind of intertextuality. The third one is quotation. For Miola, in this case, the writer is just inserting an existing text in his new text. The fourth one is the source coincident, proximate and remote. For Miola, the new text could be an answer or a response to the original one. The second category of intertextuality, according to Miola, involves the traditions that T.S Eliot already tackled. Under this category, two different types of intertextualities can be tackled; the first one is the kind of literature that entails ancient myths and popular events, for instance, the monster of *Frankenstein* that was introduced several times in different kinds of stories. While the second type is directly related to the individual talent, for instance, the sequel and the prequel. The third category of intertextuality is not related to the author, but the main focus here is the reader since the reader is the ultimate judge and will deal with the text. The reader can see and relate more than the writer can imagine, which is what Riffaterre argues (Miola, 2004, pp. 13-25).

Gérard Genette replaced the word intertextuality with transtextuality and the intertext with transtext. For Genette, paratextuality can be divided into five types: intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality (Genette, 1992, pp. 81-82). For Achour and Bekkat (2002), there are three different ways or methods to insert the old text within the new one.

The first method is integration and could be of four distinct ways:

- installation and it happens through the use of citations and italics.
- suggestion can be realised by mentioning a name or a reference to an existing text.

- allusion, as its name signifies, the writer here gives just allusions to other pre-existing texts.
- absorption as its name signifies the old text is dissolved in the intertext. (There is a thin line between this method and plagiarism).

The Second method is collage, in which the original text is just pasted into the new one. The third method is citation, where the writer cites another one and refer to him (Mouro, 2014, p. 31).

4. *The Golden Notebook* Summary

The Golden Notebook is Doris Lessing's third and most noted novel, and it first appeared in 1962. The storyline traces the life of two divorcee women, a writer by the name of Anna Wulf (born Freeman) and her friend Molly Jacobs who is a little-known actress, both from London. In the break of the story, Anna did not have any budgeting difficulties since she had published a novel, *Frontiers of War* which became a best-seller afterwards. This first success story was dealing with a fictional process about Anna's juvenile age. The only concern she had, was her incapability of starting her second novel, the thing that made her very eager and keen about both her future as a novelist and her financial status. During the obstruction she was having, Anna decided to stop thinking about her second novel, and instead of that, she decided to write four notebooks in which she would describe her political and social experiences from a fictional point of view. The notebooks were four similar in size but different in their colours. The first one was the black, in which Anna described all of her immature affairs and about her African experience.

The red notebook was the second one; Anna was dealing with all her political contacts and involvements in this one. In the red one, Anna expressed her complete hatred towards communism and Stalin as a leader of communism. The third one was yellow, in which Anna was given a non-existent side to her real life. The fourth and final one is a sort of a personal diary. In this latter, she discussed her love affairs, especially the one that happened with an American communist writer. The Merge of the four makes the golden notebook, according to Anna. Anna considered her notebooks as self-remedy and a healing method for her blockage in writing a new story. Between these notebooks, there is a part called Free Women, in which an unknown narrator is narrating the original storyline; it is divided into five parts. In this section, the reader is getting to know more about Molly's and Anna's daily struggles, who were trying to prosper financially speaking, since both of them chose their freedom over their economic security. Though both Molly and Anna were feminists and independent women, this did not change their interest in men. The whole is a masterpiece that points out, in a neutral perspective, the struggles any woman could face in the 1950s since the story is set to be in that period of time.

5. Intertextuality in *The Golden Notebook*

In her 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing employed intertextuality and parody as being postmodernist techniques.

5.1 Integration

Integration is one of the three types of intertextualities, and it is divided into four sub-types: installation, suggestion, allusion, and absorption.

5.1.1 Integration by Installation

Lessing employed this technique not only inside the text of *The Golden Notebook* but also in the contents since she named her chapters 'Free women' 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in order to convey a strong message, women of the sixties should be free, for her, it is now or never. In this phrase 'Free Women', Lessing uses a sentence used by many women writers before her, one of them was Mary Wollstonecraft. This is integration by installation characterised by the use of quotation marks. Another use of the integration by installation through the employment of 'Sugar Mother' between quotation marks in the following passage and explained it later in the endnote of the novel, "The reservations both had felt about the solemn and painful ritual were expressed by the pet name, 'Mother Sugar'" (Lessing, 1962, p. 9). Mrs Marks, Anna psychiatrist, also known as "Mother Sugar", was a reference to Lessing's actual psychoanalyst.

In the following passage, the writer employed the statement 'twenties marriages' between quotation marks as a parody to Scott' Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and the roaring twenties mode of life in general.

Richard was Molly's husband; instead, he had been her husband; Molly was the product of what she referred to as 'one of those 'twenties marriages.' Her mother and father had both glittered, but briefly, in the intellectual and bohemian circles that had spun around the great central lights of Huxley, Lawrence, Joyce, etc. (Lessing, 1962, p.18).

Lessing went far in her installation usage when she inserted 'Out with the Whites' between quotation marks, which is a prevalent slogan used by white supremacists.

Another use of the integration by installation, but this time through the use of italics, is patent in what Ella lost during those five years was the power to create through naivety. Since the novel is divided into two grounds, the first one the real-life and the second one the notebooks written by the heroine who is simultaneously a novelist in the story; in this installation, Lessing is quoting a statement already said in the beginning by one of the characters. In one of the beginnings of the golden notebook (not the novel, but rather the notebook written by Anna), there is integration by installation characterised by the use of italics in the following statement,

Whomever he is who looks in this

He shall be cursed,

That is my wish.

In the previous quote, Anna, the novel's central character, was quoting her beloved American communist writer Saul Green (also a character in the novel).

5.1.2 Integration by Suggestion

In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing employed many names and characters that made the audience go back to other stories or actual events from history. By the ending of the novel, and more specifically in the golden notebook (the one written by Anna), Anna wrote a short novel called the *Algerian Soldier*. It relates the life of a young Algerian farmer who was captured at the beginning by the French army and was tortured by them; he joined the F.L.N (Front De Liberation National), here Lessing used the acronym F.L.N, and it is a political party in Algeria since the novel was released. Another example about the suggestion is the usage of the name of Hitler on different occasions when talking about the period of the war, like in the following passage,

This war was presented to us as a crusade against the evil doctrines of Hitler, against racialism, yet the whole of that enormous land-mass, about half the total area of Africa, was conducted on precisely Hitler's assumption-that some human beings are better than others because of their race (Lessing, 1962, p. 399).

Furthermore, to attack and censure communism and its followers, Lessing mentioned the leader of communism in the world at that time, Stalin, several times. Here it is integration by suggestion since there is a mention of a historical figure but with neither quotation marks nor italics. Hitler and Stalin were not the only historical characters that Lessing introduced in her novel, the ancient prime minister of Britain, Attlee was also mentioned in the following passage, "Britain's decision to spend £100 millions more on Defense means, as Mr. Attlee has made clear, that hoped-for improvements in living standards and social services must be postponed" (Lessing, 1962, p. 98).

Not only politicians were mentioned in the novel because even writers were referred to in this novel. The fictional character of Dr West was nothing other than a reference to the modernist writer Rebecca West. Alongside, a brief mention of Huxley, Lawrence and Joyce while the narrator is speaking.

5.1.3 Installation by Allusion

The novel's heroine, Anna, has many characteristics that reunite her with the round character of *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Both characters in their stories are having depressions and went on writing their diaries to express their discontentment from the patriarchal surroundings. Both Anna and *The Yellow Wallpaper's* main characters, whose name remains unknown, were not okay with the women who were not strong enough to face the male-dominated societies but in different degrees. The only difference between the two fictional characters is that Anna has more freedom like any 1960's ordinary woman and the other one like a 19th-century woman.

Integration by absorption is non-existent within this novel by Lessing.

5.2 Collage

Like integration, collage is also a way to use intertextuality. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing used this type of intertextuality, mainly in part related to the notebooks when she was discussing and commenting on the political events that were taking place at that time. Firstly, she took a headline from The Express newspaper dated 6th March 1953, which stated 'STALIN DIES'. Another example about the use of collage is in her quoting without quotation marks, the Daily Telegraph, "The modeller calls this the 'H-Bomb Style,' explaining that the 'H' is for hydrogen peroxide, used for colouring. The hair is dressed to rise in waves as from a bomb-burst, at the nape of the neck—Daily Telegraph" (Lessing, 1962, p.189).

She also pasted the following announcement from the British magazine the New Statesman, "Britain's decision to spend £100 million more on Defense means, as Mr Attlee has made clear, that hoped-for improvements in living standards and social services must be postponed" (Lessing, 1962, p. 98).

There are abundant additional cases of this type of intertextuality, in which Lessing was quoting famous newspapers and magazines without the use of quotation marks.

5.3 Citation

Citation is a method used in intertextuality. In this novel, the citations were rare except for one. In this citation, Anna, the main characters quoted between quotation marks two sayings, which the white people of The Republic of Central Africa used to say in the 1950s. The first one is "Well, of course, the blacks will drive us into the sea in fifty years' time." (Lessing, 1962, p. 29). The second one is "We know that what we are doing is wrong." (Lessing, 1962, p.29). The reason behind the use of these sayings is that Anna and Molly were discussing the male-dominated societies. She wanted to give her an example that the rights are to be taken by force because the Republic of Central Africa is far away from the sea. Since the White men did not see any reaction from their slaves (the inhabitants of Central Africa), they started to ask more, the same thing from the women's fights for freedom.

6. The Position of the Woman in *The Golden Notebook*

Throughout the story, which many reviewers see as fictional representations of Doris Lessing's personal and intimate life, the main character Anna Wulf is portrayed as a strong woman writer who was in the middle of a struggle to accomplish a novel which she was unable to finish. The central character in this novel that distinguishes Lessing from all the radical feminist writers is the description she gave to Anna. Even though Anna chose her freedom over marriage, but this never changed the fact that she always had a place for a man in her life. *The Golden Notebook* is also different in terms of techniques since there is fiction within fiction inside the general story, which was almost absent at that period. The novel also discussed many political ideas, anti-communism, for instance.

The Golden Notebook (1962) is considered one of the feminist masterpieces of all time. In this novel written in the early sixties of the past century, women are more powerful than ever. In the story, Lessing went as far as interrogating the sexual kinships that occur between men and women. In it, Lessing gave great power to her major character Anna who is herself a writer. Anna is considered a strong woman from all sides; though she was a divorcee, she knew how to continue her life in a way no one and nothing could stop her. Anna might be considered the endless evolution of all female characters adopted by women writers that came before Doris Lessing; she is so strong that she knows what she wants, plus she is very daring and challenging to the male-dominated society at that time. Anna's sexual life is very independent since she was having an affair with Willi, a German refugee in England during the post-wartime. In writing *Anna Wulf*, Lessing wanted to convey a strong message, maybe the strongest any woman writer could ever transfer, women are not second-class citizens. The writer of this novel, a postmodernist one, belongs to the third generation of woman's writing.

7. Conclusion

Women's writing as a literary discipline appeared in the light of the political, social and economic triumph that the first wave of feminism brought for women. In the early stages of the field of study, women writers were imitating men in the writing style, seeing as writers who belong to the first generation of women's writing did not have any feminine model to follow.

The novel that this research work dealt with is *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing; it was first published in 1962. In this novel, Lessing delves into the life of divorcee women who have to work day and night just to survive. She also tackled the struggles that might confront women who chose their freedom over their financial security. The writer was brilliant in depicting her main character, who is being described as a fiction writer who had a blockage that prevented her from finishing her second novel. Though the female protagonist was an independent woman, this fact never changed the reality that she was attracted to men and had them in her life.

In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), the reader will touch the different tastes of literature Lessing presents; since her use of intertextuality made the novel a masterpiece that captures the reader's immediately since he/she will be asking if he has seen these words before and where. Intertextuality stimulates the curiosity of the reader and pushes him to search and read more.

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