

# The Quest for Integration in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

Suzuko Mamoto\*

## Introduction

In her fifth novel, *The Golden Notebook*,<sup>1</sup> which appeared in 1962, Doris Lessing discarded the realist form that she had used for her previous novels and started using a new style of narrative form. In *Women in the House of Fiction*, Lorna Sage comments:

Lessing had started her career with *The Grass is Singing* . . . and had written three volumes of her *Children of Violence* sequence in traditional style. She had discovered as she went on that the realist formula (the heroine whose process of growing up also symbolises and synthesises the wider conflicts of her culture) would not answer.<sup>2</sup>

The 1960s was a time when not only Lessing but also many other writers started exploring a new style of novel, as the realist novel was thought to have gone out with “the hansom cab”.<sup>3</sup>

In 1971, in her Preface of *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing, disappointed

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\* Foreign Language Instructor, Fukuoka University

by feminists' overreactions and anti-feminists' criticism, declares that "this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation" (15). In addition to this, Lessing informs us that the novel is the compilation of many "thoughts and themes [she] had been holding in [her] mind for years" (10). However, despite her desire to explore many thoughts and themes in this novel, we cannot deny the fact that the main theme of breakdown, which she herself declares to be the "central theme" (8), is mostly associated with the gender issue.

The central protagonists, Anna Wulf and Ella Freeman (who appears in the novel inside the novel), are experiencing life crises as failed feminists, in terms of their inability to liberate themselves from the control of men by being "Free Women". The crises of these incomplete "Free Women" are clearly mirrored in the fragmentation of the novel's narrative form. Until the middle of the novel, readers naturally believe that if Anna is able to write one coherent linear novel, her identity would also be integrated. However, towards the end of the novel, skilful readers come to realize that in the world into which *The Golden Notebook* is born, it is impossible to write a coherent realist novel because the world is itself a fragmented world. Therefore, using a disintegrated narrative form is the best way to describe the fragmentation of the protagonist in this fragmented world. Acceptance of the fragmentation both of society and of one's separate identities is the best way to survive one's crises. Sage elucidates thus :

Gradually, we realise, this filing system undermines its own purpose — each notebook spells out the same message, that putting yourself in order is the problem, not the solution. Joining

the Party, or finding a genial Jungian analyst, or making up stories to live inside are all strategies for denying the underlying incoherence of things. Or rather, their common ground in violence and diversity. You represent the world best by letting yourself fall apart, crack up, break down.<sup>4</sup>

In *Doris Lessing: Contemporary Writers*, Sage also writes that *The Golden Notebook* is a “novel that is made whole by the acceptance of disintegration.”<sup>5</sup> Anna cannot write her book in *The Golden Notebook*. In contrast to Anna’s inability to write a novel, Doris Lessing is able to complete her novel, *The Golden Notebook*, and, moreover, her readers are able to create meaning from it.

In this essay, I would like to examine the ways in which the protagonist’s disintegration accords with the form of the narrative. In the first section, I will look at the limitations of realist fiction in terms of describing Anna Wulf as a failed “Free Woman” in a fragmented society. In so doing, I will especially focus on Lessing’s main narrative devices, i. e., the four notebooks which represent the disintegration. In the next section, by looking at the interaction between Anna (the heroine in *The Golden Notebook*) and Ella (the heroine in the novel inside *The Golden Notebook*), I will show the process of the protagonist, Anna, metamorphosing towards integration. Parallel to examining the function of a metafictional narrative, I will also explore Lessing’s challenge to realism with her repudiation of the conventional narrator and narrative process.

## Towards Breakdown

In 1963, Nathalie Sarraute's *L'ère du Soupçon* was translated from the original French into English.<sup>6</sup> In *The Age of Suspicion*, Sarraute announces, "We have now entered upon an age of suspicion."<sup>7</sup> This suspicion occurs among both readers and writers. Moreover, she says "as has already been demonstrated, the characters as conceived of in the old-style novel (along with the entire old-style mechanism that was used to make him stand out) do not succeed in containing the psychological reality of today."<sup>8</sup>

Between 1953 and 1963, Alain Robbe-Grillet wrote several essays on the nature and future of the novel and his ideas were gathered in his essay *Pour Un Nouveau Roman*. In short, by the mid twentieth century, realism was profoundly disturbed. Although Raymond Williams tried to re-construct realism in his essay in *The Long Revolution* in 1961, realism was unable to be preserved as he wished. This is because one of the main assumptions of realist fiction is the fit between the individual and society. Williams believes the realist tradition in fiction is represented by "the kind of novel which creates and judges the quality of a whole way of life in terms of the qualities of persons."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, he says, "we are people and people within a society: that whole view was at the centre of the realist novel."<sup>10</sup>

However, in the 1960s, because of immigration and women's increasing consciousness of their gender inspired by Women's Liberation, British society was not as simple as before. Williams' effort to re-construct realism was not successful and ended up being a form of nostalgia for it. In the 1960s, it was no longer possible to present one uniform variety of British society because it had become too diverse. In Sage's term, it was not "homogenous" any more.<sup>11</sup> In comparison to Lessing's earlier novels, Sage

points out, “It was at this point that Lessing turned away from *Children of Violence* to write *The Golden Notebook*, and to explore the very premises of realism, the time-honoured assumption that — as Nicole Ward Jouve puts it — ‘the world of an individual could be put into correspondence with, *represent*, the world.’”<sup>12</sup>

Despite Lessing’s disavowal of writing a feminist novel, I think the Women’s Liberation movement in the 1960s made the female author more conscious about the quest for a society where women were not treated as second-class citizens. In an interview with Margaret Drabble, who is a good friend of Lessing’s, Drabble told me, “when she [Lessing] wrote *The Golden Notebook*, she was very aggressive on men.”<sup>13</sup> Largely dominated by men’s power and control in most societies, women were in effect marginalized. In such a situation, writing a realist novel could not accommodate the gender issue in its modern form. Therefore, Lessing had to explore beyond the realist formula.

In contrast to the realist novel, in which for individuals society is assumed to be inherited, in *The Golden Notebook* Lessing shows how individuals can choose the society they want to live in. In this novel, before the first notebook starts, there are the descriptions of the four notebooks in square brackets:

[The four notebooks were identical, about eighteen inches square . . . . But the colours distinguished them — black, red yellow and blue. . . . Then a title appeared, as if Anna had, almost automatically, divided herself into four, and then, from the nature of what she had written, named these divisions. . . . ] (71)

Later, Anna explains to her therapist, Mother Suger, her four notebooks as follows:

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 (418).

As seen in her notebooks, Anna's identity is divided into the writer, the communist, and the lover of Michael. In conversation with Tommy on the topic of her four notebooks, Anna says she keeps four notebooks instead of one "because it would be such a — scramble. Such a mess" (240).

[Tommy] 'Why the four notebooks? What would happen if you had one big book without all those divisions and brackets and special writing?'

[Anna] 'I've told you, chaos' (247).

Williams defines society as "the system of common life."<sup>14</sup> However, as I stated before, the world in which the characters live is not so simple. It is comprised of many societies that the characters have to choose to live in. Williams is influenced by the Marxist idea that society is comprised of just two binary groups determined by economic status: the exploiting class and the working class. For Lessing, however, society is much more complicated. Let alone its multicultural dimensions, British society consists not only of capitalists and the working class, but also of men and women. The working class women are put on the lowest level of this hierarchy: they are repressed

by the exploiting class men, exploiting class women, and working class men. Considering the fact that Lessing had left the communist party in 1954, in one sense we can say Lessing had gone beyond communism and stepped into feminism. Furthermore, as a novelist, at this stage Lessing had gone beyond realism. Catherine Belsey highlights the inherent weakness of the realist novel thus: “the *form* of the ‘realist’ novel contains implicit validation of the existing social structure, because realism, by its very nature, leaves conventional ways of seeing intact, and hence tends to discourage critical scrutiny of reality.”<sup>15</sup> Roberta Rubenstein concurs and goes further:

Thus madness and self-division are (as Anna’s fictitious Paul Tanner implies) metaphors for a chaotic, fragmented reality, and to be adjusted to it is to acquiesce in madness of an even more insidious variety.<sup>16</sup>

Through the breakdown of Anna Wulf as a communist, an author and especially as a “Free Woman,” and through the disintegration of the narrative form, Lessing succeeds in reflecting the real world, which is comprised of fragmented societies. The real world can be only integrated in the story by this kind of disintegrated narrative form.

After talking with Anna, Tommy is convinced “If things are a chaos, then that’s what they are” (247); later he tries to kill himself. In *The Golden Notebook*, being unable to live in such a complicated society, men either kill themselves like Tommy or live superficially in the pursuit of young women and money like Michael, whereas women suffer from self-division. Gayle

Greene says, “Lessing demonstrates that both male and female behavior represent crippling adjustments to a destructive society, but that men are more crippled because they are locked into postures that prohibit change.”<sup>17</sup>

In the Red notebook, Anna confesses that the reason for her joining the communist party is “a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live” (157). However, by facing the communist party’s hypocrisy and incapability, Anna gives up the pursuit of wholeness in communism. The discomfort of facing the hypocrisy and arrogance of communism is well described by the image of shooting pigeons and the process of the pigeon’s death in the Black notebook. Considering Lessing’s personal disappointment in communism, this novel’s disintegrated style and the theme of disintegration seems to be a form of her rejection of the collectiveness and wholeness that the communist cause believes to exist.

In *The Golden Notebook*, the gender issue is treated more seriously than politics in terms of personal breakdown. The Blue notebook is narrated in a diary style and deals with Anna’s relationship with her lover Michael partly through her talks with her therapist. The greater importance of gender (in terms of the relationship with men) than other issues is clearly shown when Anna admits that among the four notebooks the Blue notebook is the one which she “had expected to be the most truthful” (412). Anna, whose lover Michael has already left at this stage, struggles with her identity crisis. On her way home from Richard’s office, almost losing herself in the bustle of the city, Anna tries to reconstruct her identity:

Anna, Anna, I am Anna, she kept repeating; and anyway, I can’t



be ill or give way, because of Janet; I could vanish from the world tomorrow, and it wouldn't matter to anyone except to Janet. What then am I, Anna? . . . Who am I, Anna? Now she did not think of Janet, but shut her out. Instead she saw her room, long, white, subdued, with the coloured notebooks on the trestle table. She saw herself, Anna, seated on the music-stool, writing, writing; making an entry in one book, then ruling it off, or crossing it out; she saw the pages patterned with different kinds of writing; divided, bracketed, broken — she felt a swaying nausea . . . (344)

Unable to be simply Michael's lover or a communist, Anna can at this stage only identify herself as the mother of Janet and a blocked writer. The "nausea" that Anna feels here is, in a sense, similar the discomfort of facing the absurdity of the existence of oneself experienced by Antoine Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea*.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, when Anna was still with Michael, she could fulfill her happiness as Michael's lover:

But this morning when Michael woke in my arms he opened his eyes and smiled at me. The warm blue of his eyes as he smiled into my face. I thought: so much of my life has been twisted and painful that now when happiness floods right through me like being flooded over with warm glittering blue water, I can't believe it. I say to myself: I am Anna Wulf, this is me, Anna, and I'm happy (271).

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter comments:

The novels of the 1960s, particularly Doris Lessing's *The Golden*

*Notebook*, began to point out, in a variety of notes of disillusionment and betrayal, that the “free women” were not so free after all. Lessing’s free women are Marxists who think they understand how the oppression of women is connected to the class struggle, who have professions and children, and who lead independent lives: but they are fragmented and helpless creatures, still locked into dependency upon men.<sup>19</sup>

Showalter’s reading is true. On spending the night with Michael, Anna awakes from a dream and realizes: “The truth is I don’t care a damn about politics or philosophy or anything else, all I care about is that Michael should turn in the dark and put his face against my breasts” (271). Sage (1987) also says, “The most damaging and demoralizing split is the sexual one.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Rubenstein notes:

The most profound dimension of Anna Wulf’s psychic split is generated, however, not at the political but at the emotional level, by the dissolution of a five-year relationship with her lover, Michael, the dynamics of which form the central subject of the Yellow notebook.<sup>21</sup>

Ella Freeman is the heroine inside the story which Anna writes. According to Rubenstein, Ella is a fictional projection of Anna’s alter ego. Ella also confesses that “women’s emotions are all still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists. My [Ella’s] deep emotions, my real ones, are to do with my relationship with a man” (283).

Anna’s identity breaks down mostly because it depended on the

relationship with a man who would eventually abandon her. Although Anna and her best friend Molly think themselves as “Free Women,” their definition of a “Free Woman” is quite weak. Their “Free Woman” is a woman who is a professional and a single mother, who is free from the marriage obsession and therefore able to have physical relations with any men (even married men) whenever she wants. However, this definition paradoxically puts a limitation on their behaviour: Anna’s sexual liberation has to accept her lover’s unfaithfulness to her and sometimes she even has to sleep with other men in order to prove her liberty. Moreover, it is ironic that freeing herself from the marriage obsession makes it impossible for her to claim marriage or even monogamy. In addition to the pressure that the protagonists put on themselves as “Free Women”, there is also the pressure from outside their society. For example, being a “Free Woman” is itself accompanied with negative social expectations: married men automatically expect “Free Women” to be promiscuous, whereas their wives are cautious of “Free Women” as they believe that these single free women might steal their husbands. Later, Anna learns that Michael has called her “a pretty flighty piece” (294). Furthermore, as a sexual spokeswoman for Anna, Ella’s idea of orgasm and impregnation are dependent on men. As for orgasm, she thinks vaginal orgasm is superior to clitoral orgasm and “there is only one real female orgasm and that is when a man, from the whole of his need and desire takes a woman and wants all her response” (200). It is interesting to consider that in a recent interview, Lessing still shows her dependency on men in sexual terms. She says, “I know women who have vibrators and it doesn’t cut out men at all. How did we get on to vibrators?”<sup>22</sup> As for impregnation, both Anna and Ella think the identity of

the biological father of the baby is important and wish to have a baby with their lovers.

## **Towards Integration**

So far, we have only considered the negative aspects of the protagonists' being "Free Women". Greene says, "That Anna is no model of feminist rectitude and independence she would be the first to admit."<sup>23</sup> By admitting failure and the fact that there is no integration, one can temporarily survive in the hope of future integration in *The Golden Notebook*. Therefore, admitting failure is an important first step.

Anna's acceptance of her failure occurs when she is in conversation with her female friend Molly or her female therapist, as well as when she meditates alone. Having a female friend or female therapist is considered important in terms of postfeminism. Lynne Segal says, "Before feminism, women were told that they had to be wary of other women because they would steal your man."<sup>24</sup> Susan Faludi also points out the importance of the female therapist because they "dispense the opposite advice of traditional male clinicians: take action and speak up, they urge."<sup>25</sup>

In the conversation with Molly, after admitting to her dependency on men and love, and the mistake of her joining the communist party, Anna declares that it is important to confront one's shortcomings:

Why do our lot never admit failure? Never. It might be better for us if we did. And it's not only love and men. Why can't we say something like this — we are people, because of the accident of how we were situated in history, who were so powerfully part — but

only in our imaginations, and that's the point — of the great dream, that now we have to admit that the great dream has faded and the truth is something else — that we'll never be any use (66).

This “great dream” remains obscure. However, I think it indicates a broader dream, such as being a perfect “Free Woman” rather than just achieving, for instance, the communist dream. Exploring illusory dreams and the persistence of the dreamer's self-deception is one of Lessing's recurring concerns. In her 2001 novel *The Sweetest Dream*,<sup>26</sup> Lessing focuses on the elusive communist dream and one's determination to persevere in its pursuit.

Anna tells Tommy of the importance of being honest about the facts that one does not want to admit: “What's terrible is to pretend that the second-rate is first-rate. To pretend that you don't need love when you do; or you like your work when you know quite well you're capable of better” (242). After talking with Anna, Tommy attempts suicide and Sage analyses this event as “a measure of how far Anna's wretchedness is displaced to make a public plot about the failure of idealism.”<sup>27</sup> Tommy's attempted suicide indicates the severity of facing “the failure of idealism”. The pain could drive one to kill oneself; Anna, by contrast, survives by admitting failure.

Accepting “the failure of idealism” occurs not only in Anna's conversations but in her subconscious. We can see this in the novel *The Shadow of the Third* which Anna is struggling to write. Rubenstein's Jungian reading stresses self-consciousness in the metafictional aspect of *The Golden*

*Notebook:*

In her sixth novel Lessing provides her protagonist, Anna Wulf, with a vocation as a writer, thus enabling the author to increase the degree of self-consciousness concerning both the experiences of her central character and their narrative expression. Instead of Lessing narrating and commenting upon her protagonist's experiences, the writer Anna Wulf — the invention of the writer Doris Lessing — narrates and examines her experiences directly.<sup>28</sup>

As Rubenstein says, by the use of metafiction, Lessing enables Anna to “increase the degree of self-consciousness” by the revision of her own experience. In the Blue notebook, Anna admits her fear of writing down the actual events in her diary. Then she admits that “Obviously, my changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself” (211).

As a spokeswoman for Anna, Ella is able to express her real experiences and feelings in terms of love and sexuality even more freely than Anna herself. Therefore, Ella always precedes Anna in realizing the truth. For example, Ella realizes that being able to be free and independent is only possible when her man loves her:

She [Ella] thought: What did it mean, my saying I loved Paul — when his going has left me like a snail that has had her shell pecked off by a bird? I should have said that my being with Paul essentially meant I remained myself, remained independent and free. . . . In fact I was sheltering under him. I was no better than

that frightened woman, his wife (282).

Much later, Anna realizes the same thing about herself:

And when had this new frightened vulnerable Anna been born? She knew: it was when Michael had abandoned her.

Anna, frightened and sick, nevertheless grinned at herself, smiled at the knowledge that she, the independent woman, was independent and immune to the ugliness of perverse sex, violent sex, just so long as she was loved by a man (358 - 59).

The characters that appear in *The Shadow of the Third* are mostly identical to the characters in *The Golden Notebook*: Anna is Ella in terms of their both being heroines and blocked writers; Michael is Paul in terms of their both being unfaithful lovers of the heroines; Molly is Julia in terms of their both being the heroines' female friends; Janet is Michael in terms of their both being the heroines' young children; and Max is Willi in terms of their both being the heroines' children's biological fathers. However, towards the end of the novel, Ella becomes someone else, as if she integrates herself by becoming a real "Free Woman". Ella's integration is shown by her potential ability to write a book "which is already written inside her" (404). Ella is a "Free Woman" because her becoming "completely sexless" (404) enables her to be free from men's control. Anna sees Ella detaching herself from her as follows:

I see Ella, walking slowly about a big empty room, thinking,

waiting. I, Anna, see Ella. Who is of course, Anna. But that is the point, for she is not. The moment I, Anna, write: Ella rings up Julia to announce, etc., then Ella floats away from me and becomes someone else (404).

In 'The Golden Notebook' which appears just before the last section, 'Free Woman 5', Anna sees Ella as even more distanced from her:

I was watching Ella moving about my room; . . . After a while I realized I was doing what I had done before, creating 'the third' — the woman altogether better than I was. For I could positively mark the point where Ella left reality, left how she would, in fact, behave because of her nature; and move into a large generosity of personality impossible to her. But I didn't dislike this new person I was creating; I was thinking that quite possibly these marvelous, generous things we walk side by side with in our imaginations could come into existence, simply because we need them, because we imagine them. Then I began to laugh because of the distance between what I was imagining and what in fact I was, let alone what Ella was (552).

Anna, still in her life crises, realizes the distance between her reality, her optimistic imagination, and Ella who is the incarnation of her illusional optimism. Although the realization of this situation is unpleasant, Anna is able to accept the situation with a laugh. Although Anna is still suffering from the loss of her lover and still unable to write a book, the tone of this section ('The Golden Notebook') seems rather bright and optimistic.



The last section starts with the headline in italics: *Molly Gets Married and Anna Has an Affair* (561). In this section, Anna actually has a light affair with her American lodger. Molly is getting married to a rich Jewish man, coolly convinced that “There’s nothing like knowing the exact dimensions of the bed you’re going to fit yourself into” (576). Although they still need men as lovers or husbands, their emotional selves are not deeply involved with these men. In *The Golden Notebook*, women can be only “Free Women” by being ‘sexless’ like Ella, being an extreme political activist like Marion, or engaging in superficial relationships with men like Anna and Molly. There is no notion of the postfeminist ‘have it all’ (having a successful career and a happy family life at the same time). Because contemporary British women are given more freedom in their societies than at the time when Lessing wrote *The Golden Notebook*, they have the choice to decide what to ‘have’; they can choose freely what kind of individuals they want to be. On the other hand, for the protagonists in *The Golden Notebook*, there is no society where freedom is given to women. Therefore, the women who attempt to find such a society have to be fragmented or to crack up like Anna.

[Saul] ‘ . . . I’ve always been a hypocrite, and in fact I enjoy a society where women are second-class citizens, I enjoy being boss and being flattered.’

[Anna] ‘Good,’ I said. ‘Because in a society where not one man in ten thousand begins to understand the ways in which women are second-class citizens, we have to rely for company on the men who are at least not hypocrites’ (526).

Anna's self-division has occurred because in every society women are "second-class citizens" and most of the men she meets are "hypocrites" in *The Golden Notebook*. As I have discussed earlier, each notebook represents Anna's separate identity in the world. Each identity is a choice of belonging to a particular society. However, as there is no society where women are not being treated as second-class citizens, the women's identities are forced to break down.

Reiterating Sage, the only way to survive such crises is to accept one's failures, and try not to "[put] yourself in order." Ella's newly conceived idea for the book she intends to write is seen thus:

I've got to accept the patterns of self-knowledge which mean unhappiness or at least a dryness. But I can twist it into victory. A man and a woman — yes. Both at the end of their tether. Both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits. And out of the chaos, a new kind of strength (411).

This transformation of "unhappiness" and "dryness" into "victory" applies to *The Golden Notebook's* central themes of breakdown associated with gender. "It is to be the story of an ironic defeat. But underground the notebooks, merging one into another, are — in Ella's phrase — twisting it into victory."<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have discussed the ways in which the disintegration of the narrative form accords with the protagonists' fragmented identities,

how the form mirrors contemporary British society, and how integration is pursued through the acceptance of disintegration. In *The Golden Notebook*, integration is possible by three means: the protagonist's survival, textual narrative form, and the novel's readers. Although the protagonist's survival of her crises may only last temporarily, accepting the breakdown and leaving the identity fragmented is one possible way to advance toward integration. As for the textual narrative form, although the heroine, Anna, is unable to write her story, the author, Lessing, is able to complete her novel. *The Golden Notebook* forms a circular narrative style. In this novel, with flashback and pastiche, the overall story progresses towards the ending chronologically, and when the ending comes, it foreshadows the beginning: "The two women were alone in the London flat" (25). In *The Golden Notebook*, totally different types and genres of text — the individual fragments of the four notebooks, five inserted sections 'Free Women', and one section 'The Golden Notebook' — comprises one whole novel. Each section is different from each other in terms of narrative characteristics, time and space. Sage points out:

As Lessing says in her Preface, *The Golden Notebook*, with its babble of voices, is 'written by both of them': 'you can no longer distinguish between what is Saul and what is Anna'. When they part, they act out this nearly 'anonymous' creativity by giving each other opening sentences for new novels. Saul's offering (for Anna) is the first sentence of *The Golden Notebook*, the novel that is made whole by the acceptance of disintegration.<sup>30</sup>

Although the story does not have the conventional closed ending seen in a realist novel such as *Pride and Prejudice*, Lessing leaves it to the readers' minds to integrate the strands of the novel. In this sense, *The Golden Notebook* is what Roland Barthes calls "writing text".<sup>31</sup> In *Towards A New Novel*, Alain Robbe-Grillet appeals to the reader's active participation in terms of the creation of the work:

For, far from neglecting him [the reader], the contemporary author proclaims his absolute need of his cooperation, an active conscious, *creative* co-operation. What he is being asked to do is no longer to accept a ready made, completed world, a solid world, shut in on itself, but on the contrary, to participate in an act of creation, in the invention of the work — and the world — and in this way to learn to invent his own life.<sup>32</sup>

With the reader's participation, Lessing is able to reconstruct the readers, too; by relating their personal experience to each notebook, the readers are reconstructed. Moreover, this reconstruction of the readers is only possible by dispensing with the conventional realist narrative form. With the use of a fragmented structure in the form of four notebooks and a metafictional narrative, Lessing has succeeded in dismantling herself as an author, exemplifying Barthes' axiom, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."<sup>33</sup> In the Preface of *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing comments:

. . . the book is alive and potent and fructifying and able to promote thought and discussion only when its plan and shape and

intention are not understood, because that moment of seeing the shape and plan and intention is also the moment when there isn't anything more to be got out of it.

And when a book's pattern and the shape of its inner life is as plain to the reader as it is to the author — then perhaps it is time to throw the book aside, as having had its day, and start again on something new (21).

According to Barthes, the author must dismantle him/herself ('the death of the author') in order to urge the reader to integrate the text using his/her own creative capacity ('the birth of the reader'). In addition to this, Lessing here believes that the birth of the author — the understanding of the author's plan and intention — must be treated as the death of the novel (text). From this, it can be concluded that the text, author and reader could not co-exist. Therefore, as Lessing says, when the reader understands the narrative pattern as clearly as the author, the reader has to begin another book in the quest for integration again.

## Notes

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 58th Conference of the Nihon Eibun Gakkai Kyusyu-shibu, 29 October 2005.

1. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962; London: Flamingo, 1993). Hereafter, all quotations from the text are indicated parenthetically after the cited passage.
2. Lorna Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 1992) 13.
3. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961) 277.
4. Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, 15.
5. Lorna Sage, *Doris Lessing: Contemporary Writers* (London: Methuen, 1987) 55.
6. Nathalie Sarraute, *L'ère du Soupçon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936).

7. Nathalie Sarraute, *The Age of Suspicion* (London: John Calder, 1963) 85.
8. *Ibid.*, 91-92.
9. Williams, 278.
10. *Ibid.*, 283.
11. Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, 14.
12. *Ibid.*, 14.
13. Personal interview with Margaret Drabble at her house in London, 7th September 2004.
14. Williams, 76.
15. Catherine Belsey in Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory — An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2002) 158-59.
16. Roberta Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1979) 80.
17. Gayle Greene, *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994) 101.
18. cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (1938; London: Penguin, 2000).
19. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 301.
20. Sage, *Doris Lessing Contemporary Writers*, 51.
21. Rubenstein, 79.
22. 'More is Lessing', *The Daily Telegraph* (25 September 2004). Online 6 October. Available at <http://www.thestandard.com.hk>
23. Greene, 97.
24. Lynne Segal, 'Women: A fond farewell', *The Guardian* (29 January 2004) 8.
25. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1999) 154.
26. Doris Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).
27. Sage, *Doris Lessing Contemporary Writers*, 52-53.
28. Rubenstein, 72.

29. Sage, *Doris Lessing Contemporary Writers*, 54.
30. *Ibid.*, 55.
31. Roland Barthes, *Image — Music — Text* (London: Fontana / Collins, 1977).
32. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965) 152.
33. Barthes, 148.

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