Chapter-4

This is an ambitious novel. According to some critics it is the most important work of Lessing and some give this honour to *Children of Violence*. That series however, is a series and not just one novel. Moreover, it was written over nearly twenty years and doubtless grew in maturity as Lessing herself grew. *The Golden Notebook* however, is a single novel. It was written between the third and fourth novel of *Children of Violence*. The whole concept of it, as it were, sprang fully formed from her mind. She had a definite idea of the form of the novel. In the Preface to the later edition, which was published after she got the Nobel Prize for literature in 2007, she has many things to say about the form, the theme, etc. of the novel. It is quite clear that she considered the structure to be of paramount importance because she starts the *Preface* like this:

The shape of this Novel is as follows:

There is a skeleton, or frame, called *Free Women*, which is a conventional short novel, about 60,000 words long, and which could stand by itself. But it is divided into five sections and separated by stages of the four Notebooks, Black, Red, Yellow and Blue. (TGNB 7)

Then she goes on to elaborate and elucidate further the significance of this structure in relation to the theme etc. The protagonist of the book is a far more sophisticated version of Martha Quest. It is she who keeps the four Notebooks and in the interval between the Notebooks it is her story that is
told in the third person. The Notebooks, since they are like diaries kept by Anna, are in the first person. So the book is a mixture of alternating first and third person narration. Only, the first person narration part is introspection, not necessarily a record of events, Lessing thus has followed a technique used for the first time by one of her favorite novelist, Dickens, in *Bleak House*, the mixture of the first-and-third person narrative technique. There are four notebooks, each of a different colour and quite big in size:

The four Notebooks were identical about eighteen inches square, with shiny covers. . . But the colour distinguished them – black, red, yellow and blue. (TGNB 71)

Why Anna keeps not one, but four notebooks, is puzzling to the reader, but the mystery is solved by Lessing herself, in the *Preface*:

She keeps four, and not one, because, as she recognizes, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness, of breakdown. Pressures, inner and outer end the Notebooks. (TGNB 7)

The last part of the passage quoted above is indicative of the nature of the Notebook-writer. The word “formlessness” implies that she is careful about the form her writing take. This in turn, makes us wonder whether she is an artist or a critic and the first guess turns out to be the right one, for she is a
writer. In this context, too, Lessing herself her own valuable comments in the *Preface*:

Another thought I had played with for a long time was that a main character should be some sort of an artist, but with a “block” (TGNB 11)

The passage quoted earlier also uses the word “breakdown” and this makes the reader to think of mental breakdown. This supposition is also not wrong. For Anna is, thought not mad, definitely a mentally unstable person. For example, though she is supposed to be a writer, she has not published anything for many years and as afflicted with a stammer. All this becomes clear gradually. But as R.M. Badode makes clear, she “suffers serious inner fragmentation” (80)

That is why she cannot put all the thoughts down in one notebook. These four books of different colours cover a period of seven years, from 1950-57. She is essentially a deeply honest woman who thinks it to be more important to be “morally better” than to be “clinically healthy. Along with this goes her views on art. Though she has not produced anything worth publishing in the last few years, she has thought deeply and repeatedly about such problems as the relationship of art to the artist, the relevance of art to society, the relationship between art and morality etc. These ideas and views are scattered throughout the novel. One such passage occurs quite early, in the first of the Notebooks, the black notebook, in 1954. She
realizes now that in describing her friend Willi she has been using certain terms as well as their very opposites, She has used “ruthless” as well as “kind” “cold” as well as “warm,” “sentimental” as well as realistic” and now she realizes that all these terms are useless. At once, in self-analysis, she writes:

I am accepting amorality. . . . And after twenty years of living in and around the Left, which means twenty years of preoccupation with this question of morality in art, that is all I am left with. So what I am saying is, in fact, that the human personality, that unique flame, is so sacred to me, that everything else becomes unimportant. Is that what I am saying? And if so, what does it mean? (TGNB 84)

It is this self-questioning which will, ultimately, help her to unify herself. The reader also realizes by this that it is this continual self-searching, these continual doubts, that are holding up her creative activity. One cannot create art if one is continually asking why and wherefore.

She feels, paradoxically, that anything which is whole and well-finished has the quality of deadness, of sterility. It is better, according to her, to live a life of pain and of tensions. It is better to refuse a unified wholeness, even in one’s own personality, for then there will be possibilities of something new developing out of it. In the first Free Women section (there are four of them) she is living in a flat in London with her friend Molly and both of them have regular sitting with a Mrs. Marks, who is a psychotherapist, whom they have nicknamed Mrs. Sugar because of her
extremely soothing manners. Anna says to this lady, explaining her preference for a disorganized person:

. . . sometimes I meet people, and it seems to me the fact they are cracked across, they’re split, means they are keeping themselves open for something. (. TGNB 416)

She finally achieves the unity that is not sterile at the end, but she achieves it after a lot of trouble. These troubles are clarified at the end of the book, but in the very beginning also there is trouble in her own mind as well as in her relationship with Molly, they had been bosom friends earlier, had been heart-to-heart friends. But they had to be separated for about a year, and now after a year’s separated they have come together again. Much has happened in the lives of both Molly and Anna to change them, and when they start to live in the same apartment they gradually discover the differences that have accumulated between them and within their relationship. Molly had been a worldly-wise woman whereas Anna had been talented. Now they discuss it:

“I suppose because we both live the same kind of life-not getting married and so on. . .

“Free women,” said Anna, wryly. She added, with an anger new to Molly. . . “They still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them” “Well, we do, don’t we?” said Molly, rather tart, “well, it’s awfully hard not to”. There was a short pause, during which the women did not look at each other but reflected that a year apart was a long time even for an old friendship.(TGNB 26)
All such glimpses of self-recognition add up gradually to the final integration of Anna’s personality. As has been pointed out, she achieves this integration after a long struggle.

Before she achieves it, she has to travel a long way, and, as Lessing’s feminist proclivities dictate, she travels it more or less alone. Of course she has the help of Mrs. Marks, or Mother Sugar to help her along. It should be noted, in this place, that this psychotherapist, contrary to custom and to ordinary expectations, is a woman and not a man. Lessing the feminist could not bring herself to give Anna and Molly a male doctor to help in their journey to self-realization. But in this journey the very first of the dualities she has to resolve is the conflict of the traditional and the modern woman. As the first of the notebooks start in 1950, so we have Anna as a woman of the 1950s who is trying in a thoroughly feminist way, to lead an independent life, who has rejected all the conventional notions of womanhood. This is not the only duality—there are others. There is the duality between “creative naïveté” and cynicism as an artist. Then there is also the dualism, as a person, between an idealistic view of life and a sense of unavoidable mortality. There are also many other dualisms as an individual, like that between an isolated individual and a social being and a singular, uncommon duality between what Lessing, or rather Anna, calls “joy-in-destruction” as well as “Joy-in-spite” and generosity and helpfulness. These several dualities, as a human being, as an individual,
make for a highly complex personality and the various conflicts engendered by them seem to be tearing her apart, so much so that she has to consult Mrs. Marks, the psychiatrist, regularly.

She succeeds in resolving these dualities or conflicts by adopting various means, not just one. There is first of all, her regular sessions with the psychiatrists; secondly there are confessional notebooks that are highly revealing and a fit of madness which, according to the author, is nothing less than a journey into her psyche. In the last part of the blue notebook, and the golden notebooks which is separate from all the four others, these conflicts are brought together in a mixture of imaginary and real-life events, of dreams and hallucinations. But, however confusing this might be, it still is a verifying experience, and after it is over, she is finally able to sit down and write or, if not write, at least think up a plot, however bizarre, and think of writing it down:

The idea for this story intrigued me and I began thinking how it should be written. How, for instance, would it change if I used Ella instead of myself? (TGNB 552)

Even this is not quite integrated and normal, because the plot as she thinks of it is anything but realistic. A brief account of this extraordinary work should be given here, though it will be discussed a little bit more in detail, in a different context. For the present, it will be the best to give it in Lessing’s own words: A woman, appalled by her capacity for surrendering
herself to a man, determines to free herself. She determinedly takes two lovers, sleeping with them on alternate night—the moment of freedom being when she would be able to say to herself that she had enjoyed them both equally. The two men become instinctively aware of each other’s existence; one, jealous, falls in love with her seriously; the other becomes cool and guarded. In spite of all her determination she cannot prevent herself loving the man who has fallen in love with her; freezing up with the man who guarded. Nevertheless, although she is in despair that she is as “unfree” as ever, she announces to both men that she has now become thoroughly emancipated, she has at last achieved the ideal of full sexual and emotional pleasure with two men at once. The cool remarks about female emancipation. The man she is in fact in love with “the man she does not love and who does not love her, exchanging intelligent psychological conversation”. (TGNB 552)

This sounds like a caricature of modern “free” life as is dreamed up by a rabid feminist schizophrenia, which is exactly what Anna is. But the fact that she can call it “comic and ironic” points towards the fact that she has travelled a long way towards integration. She can think of such a plot and can laugh at it because she realizes how very unrealistic it is.

The final decision she comes to, however, proves that at last she has achieved a fully integrated, normal personality. She decides that she will take a job as marriage counselor with a doctor and also educational work:
And I’m going to join the Labour party and teach a night class twice a week for delinquent kids. So we are both going to be integrated with British life at its roots. (TGNB 576)

This is the conversation she has with Molly with whom she has been sharing a flat from the beginning of the book. The life she has planned out for herself is a fully normal, eminently sensible one, and it has taken Lessing nearly six hundred pages to bring her to this point. It is not surprising that the book has been considered to be her most important work.

The very first of the conflicts mentioned above is the one between the mentality of a modern woman and the traditions reactions of a woman. This seen the best in the first of the Yellow Notebooks. It is written like a novel and has even given a name, *The Shadow of the Third*, of which the main character is a woman named Ella who is having an affair with a married man Paul. Ella is the feminists’ idea of a modern woman, free of all conventional emotions, yet deep within herself, her basic reactions are those of a traditional woman. This becomes clear in a conversation with Paul. He says:

“My dear Ella, don’t you know what the great revolution of our time is? The real revolution is, women against men”

“But, Paul, that doesn’t mean anything to me.”

“I saw a film last week. I went by myself, I didn’t take you, that was a film for a man by himself.”
“what film?”

“Did you know that a woman can now have children without a man?” “But what on earth for?” . . . .

Paul laughs too. “For all that, Ella, and joking apart, it’s a sign of the times.”

At which Ella cries out: “My God, Paul, if at any time during the last five years you’d asked me to have a baby, “I’d have been so happy. (TGNB 198)

Thus we have the feminist’s ideal modern woman, living with a married man, flouting society. Yet when the question of child bearing comes up, even in a very indirect manner, she reacts in a thoroughly traditional manner. Ella is presented as a woman who is free from jealousy, calm and undemanding. But as the narrative goes on these traits of Ella’s character change. She becomes jealous and demanding and finally Paul leaves her. Anna shows how, as these traits develop, Ell’s personality starts to disintegrate. From the feminist point of view, this presents a new dimension of Ella’s character, since she is perfectly conscious of these changes within herself and is determined to accept them. She becomes cynical about men and the reader becomes aware that there is not much to choose between Ella and Anna. Ella says:

But I can twist it into victory. A man and a woman. . . . Both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits, And out of chaos, a new kind of strength. (TGNB 411)
This is exactly what happens in Anna’s own life. She and Saul manage finally to find strength in each other which as has been stressed again, is the true feminist ideal. In the blue notebooks, which record Anna’s own thoughts, dreams and meditations, she is shown as achieving Perfect rapport with a man who does not dominate her, nor does he curb her independence or try to influence her in any way. Anna has outgrown mere sexual desire or the desire to assert herself or the desire to dominate. She has achieved true equality with her male partner:

I felt towards him as if he were my brother, as if, like a brother, it wouldn’t matter how far we strayed from each other, how far apart we were, we would always be flesh of one flesh, and think each other’s thoughts. (TGNB 556)

This is the way in which Anna resolves the conflict between her traditional emotional dependence and modern intellectual detachment to achieve true union with Saul.

Idealism is a very important theme of the book. It can be seen in the Free Women section as well as in the notebooks. As it is, Anna is a rather pessimistic person. She believes in the inevitability of fate and the working of fate, to her mind, are always productive of misery. This goes for her own personal life as well as for human life in general. Her view of the world and of life is disillusioned and pessimistic. The blue notebook is the highly personal and introspective one. Let alone when she is analyzing herself in
them, even her thoughts during ordinary occasions are pessimistic ones. For example in the second of these blue notebooks there is the description of an ordinary scene where she and Jack are having tea. She has by then decided to leave the Party and is completely disillusioned about it. She talks about this decision with Jack and thinks:

And I think what a good man he is, and the men like him; and how they have been betrayed by history – and when I use that melodramatic phrase, it is not melodramatic, it is accurate. (TGNB 314)

This pessimistic thought about Jack and others like him is completely unprovoked. There is nothing that could have caused it. It is just natural to her. It is the way she thinks such passages occur again and again in the novel. This pessimism, this habitually gloomy outlook, is something she has to struggle against something that she has to convert to a more hopeful outlook but it is an uphill journey. The all-pervasive quality of her pessimism becomes clear when she generalizes about the human condition, not about just one individual:

People know they are in a society dead or dying. They are refusing because at the end of every emotion are property, money, power. They work and despise their work, and so freeze themselves. They love, but know that it’s a half-love or a twisted love, and so they freeze themselves. (TGNB 478)

This is totally a dark picture of the world. It has been paralleled, among other less-known works, by Keats’s immortal stanza in *Ode to a Nightingale*. This third stanza of this incomparable poem is known as the
pessimistic stanza and gives a picture of life and the world from which every glimmer of hope has been taken away. Keats, less than 26 years old, is talking of:

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan. Where palsy shakes a few, sad last grey hairs. Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies; where but to think is to be full of sorrow And leaden-eyed despairs, Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow.(16)

Anna has the same dark vision of the world. She knows that, in order to achieve a well-integrated personality, she will have to conquer it. She does partially achieve it at the end, in the Golden Notebook section. Here she is talking to Saul and she says something very significant. She says it in a metaphorical way, using the image of a hill and a boulder:

“No, I’m not for sainthood; I’m going to be a boulder-pusher” “what’s that?”

“There’s a great black mountain. It’s human stupidity. There are a group of people who push a boulder up the mountain. When they have got a few feet up, there’s a war, or the wrong sort of revolution, and the boulder rolls down – not to the bottom, it always manages to end a few inches higher than when it started. So the group of people put their shoulders to the boulder and start pushing again.” (TGNB 544)

Anna wants to be one among this group of people. This is the decision of a well-integrated personality. It is the decision of a man, or, as in this case, a woman, who knows the world for what it is, but is also
hopeful of changing it for the better. It is the decision of an idealist who is not just a dreamer, but an active, realistic, member of society—the best possible person. It is such persons who are needed in the world. Anna has now left the personality of the blue notebook behind her and has become one who can write the golden notebook, which is a synthesis, a hopeful one, of all her fragments of personalities.

Incidentally, this gives one an opportunity for making some observations on Lessing’s technique. This myth of a boulder having to be pushed up a hill is nothing new, either in Anna or in Lessing. It is the age-old myth of Sisyphus that has been adapted here. But nowhere has it been mentioned, yet the allusion is very clear. In fact it is impossible for the reader not to recall the myth when reading this interpretation of it. In this Greek myth Sisyphus had committed a certain crime. The nature of the crime is irrelevant here. What is relevant is the punishment he got for it. The punishment was that he had to push bolder up a hill, but just as he would be reaching the top of the hill the stone would roll down to the bottom and he would have to start all over again. This myth is a very well-known one. It is a myth of continual trying and failing continually, a story of unfulfilled achievement being continually renewed. But it is also a story of punishment. It was because Sisyphus had committed a crime that he was punished thus. Albert Camus had taken this myth and had re-interpreted it in a characteristically existentialist manner in his book *Myth of Sisyphus.*
Doris Lessing has taken it and has re-interpreted it in her own manner. Though the allusion is quite clear yet she has not mentioned the original myth anywhere. Why she has not done so is not clear.

What is clear, however, is that though the story deals with punishment for wrong done, and is of necessity negative by nature, Lessing has given the myth a positive interpretation. She has clarified that the mountain stands for human stupidity, but what the boulder itself stands for is not told us. It might symbolize hope, or progress or knowledge. In any case it is something positive. The fact that people are pushing it up is also hopeful. Then also, she tells us that every time the boulder rolls down, it stops a few inches short of its starting-point. This means that it is gradually going upwards, however slow this upward movement may be. So Anna means to work for common good in society, however slow might be. There is gradual but steady progress if one persists in continually pushing the boulder up. So Anna, was a pessimist, has now gained the mental integration, the idealism, to strive for the good of ordinary men in society, having firm belief in steady progress and faith in continuous endeavour. This is a very fine achievement on the part of Doris Lessing, to have taken an ancient classical myth with negative implication and to have given it a positive meaning.

Next, Anna has to achieve a balance between the dualities of the individual and the collective. In this a strong and significant role was
played by the communist party group she had joined. Here in this group everything was done collectively, there was an easy camaraderie, an easy brotherhood in which all men and women went to make up a collective whole, unitedly working for a common cause. She goes out canvassing:

Everyone knew each other, the atmosphere I find wonderful-of people working together for a common end. Bill, a brilliant organizer, everything worked out to the last detail. Cups of tea and discussion about how things were going before we went out to canvas. This is a working-class area. “Strong support for the party around here,” said one woman, with pride.

(TGNB 159)

So it goes on, page after page, describing a communal life, a collective endeavour undertaken willingly by a whole group. This, however, does not last. She leaves the party.

They had, most of them, realized by this time that the Communist Party was breaking up. There is a revealing conversation between Molly and Richard and Anna in the Free Women 1 section when Anna has met Molly in 1957. Richard refers to their former zeal in party work:

“Two years ago you and Anna were rushing out to meetings and organizing everything in sight” . . . . . . . . . . . .

... “And now what? Russia’s in the doghouse and what price the comrades now? Most of them having nervous breakdowns or making a lot of money. “The point is” Said Anna, “that socialism is in the boldrums in this country” “And everywhere else.” (TGNB 40)
This realization had brought nervous breakdown in Anna as well and she needed intensive psychiatric treatment in order to gain her sanity and mental balance back. Lessing has made her a very strong minded woman to be able to overcome the inevitable depression of her disillusionment with the party. This is to be expected. The feminist leanings of Lessing’s mind will naturally make her endow her heroine with a character strong enough to be able to overcome all obstacles. But Lessing is realistic enough not to make it too easy for her heroine. But it cannot be denied that she had these misgivings about the party for quite a long time. Lessing emphasizes this again and again and it is not that it is only when she is discussing it with friends that these doubts and misgivings rise. They come when she is all alone, thinking over things by herself as well. In a certain part of the blue notebook there is a long entry, no less than fifty-three pages long, covering, as can be surmised, many days. In the middle part of it she is sitting alone in the kitchen and musing. She is, at this time, deeply involved in the communist party. She thinks:

But in all of us brought up in a Western democracy there is this belief built in that freedom and liberty will strengthen, will survive pressures. . . This belief is probably in itself a danger. Sitting there I had a vision of the world with nations, systems, economic blocks, hardening and consolidating; a world where it would become increasingly ludicrous even to talk about freedom, or the individual conscience I said: “Every line of thought I pursue these days turns out to be bleak and depressing.” (TGNB 496)
It can be easily seen how this kind of thought, if continued, can lead to a nervous breakdown. It can also be easily seen how true was this vision of Anna, or, more truly, of Lessing, was going to be. It is already on the way to being fulfilled partially these days, a bare five decades after being written. Anna’s vision of the communistic world is no mere intellectual nightmare. It is from this conviction that she had to emerge. It is no wonder that the stress of this conflict brought about a nervous disorder in her so that she had to struggle against it.

It is in the final episodes of the book, when her personality has become disintegrated into madness that Anna has a singular experience. She feels, on one hand, as though her personality has disintegrated, but gains, all the same, a glimpse of an underlying solidarity, in which the individual merges with the collective. In the third of the blue notebook sequences there is a record of the dreams she has. She has series of dreams, over many months. It is a dream of a certain person, always different, yet always the same. She recognizes it every time as being the same. She tells the psychiatrist about the dream, that she feels very frightened and the analyst tells her the dream needs more thought. So Anna thinks and then asks:

If this figure is an elemental and creative force, for good as well as for evil, then why should I fear it so terribly? (TGNB 420)
Then sometime later she has the same dream, and on getting awake, thinks about it:

Once really awake, and looking back at the dream from the condition of being awake, I was frightened because if the element is now outside of myth, and inside another human being, then it can only mean it is loose in me also, or can too easily be evoked. (TGNB 421)

Here Anna is able to externalize her dream, see it embodied in another person and established kinship with it. This is no mean achievement for a schizophrenic personality.

Later she and Saul have experiences of being one with many different personalities. It is not quite clear whether these are psychic, extra-sensory perceptions or merely hallucinations born out of psychological disorders. Lessing does not make clear which it is. They think it is, and Lessing seems to think too, that it is their experience of the Jungian collective consciousness and the integration of their individual psyches with it. In this extraordinary condition the individual both recognizes his own individual position as related to it and also is able to differentiate himself from it.

At all times Anna is conscious of injustice and cruelty at the very base of life. She calls this factor “joy-in-life” or “joy-in-destruction” and this is balanced against generosity on one hand, and the human being’s creative impulse on the other. She will have to recognize its existence
within herself, and this is what she does analyzes the dream that usually terrifies her. As quoted above, in that instance she can externalize her dream and can identify herself with it but she has still not been able to recognize the co-existence of good and evil within her own self. She has another dream in which this whole complicated matter resolves itself. It is a very long dream, she takes six closely written pages to describe it. In the middle section of it she dreams of Paul and Michael at first separately and then together merges into one. It is a changing, flickering dream, illogically merging into each other:

One was Paul Tanner, the man from the working class. . . . The other was Michael, the refugee from Europe. When these two figures finally merged, a new person was created. . . . This new person was larger in build, with the heroic quality of a statue, but, above all, I could feel his strength. Then he spoke. . . . “But, my dear Anna we are not the failures we think we are.”

(TGNB 536)

This is a positive dream, a dream of integration. But as yet it is only a dream. It has to be achieved in real life.

What matters in this very long dream is the alliance between two opposites, creativity and destruction. Anna has her own ideas of creativity as she is a writer herself. In fact, thought out the book, we have her own views of art and form and the act of creation itself. First of all, she believes that genuine art is the product, basically, of genuine emotion, of sincerity.
She deplores the lack of deep and sincere feeling in the literary compositions she reads:

I’ve been forced to acknowledge that the flashes of genuine art are all out of deep, suddenly stark, undisguisable private emotion. . .And so this is the paradox: I, Anna, reject my own “unhealthy” art; but reject “healthy” art when I see it. (TGNB 311)

This is what the Romantic poets and critics had advocated and by putting the words “unhealthy” and “healthy” within quotation marks Anna here questions the validity of the modern point of view according to which a balanced detached art is “healthy” art which, since here is emotional, is not. According to her, therefore, she is rejecting both her own art because it is “unhealthy” from the modern critical standpoint thought it is healthy according to her, and she is also rejecting other people’s production because according to her it is unhealthy. In the last analysis, therefore, she is left with nothing: neither her own product, nor that of other writers. Both, from one point of view or another, are “unhealthy”. It is a paradoxical situation, and of this fact she is perfectly aware, though there is nothing that she can do about it.

This merging of creativity with destruction that she has to achieve within her personality is done by her by plunging through the depths of schizophrenia. In the last novel of the Children of Violence series, The Four-Gated City Lessing expresses the idea, originally taken from R.D.
Laing and partly from Sufism, that the disease, but a gateway to a kind of mental evolution or development. That volume of the series was published after *The Golden Notebook*, so here she has not yet reached that hypothesis. But she is on the way to it. Here in this book Anna believes that beneath all the schizophrenic disorder “something has to be played out, some pattern has to be worked thro”. She goes through a state of great mental turmoil, has series of dreams, has many sessions with her psychiatrists so that when she comes to consciousness, it is with a sense of peace. She is at last ready to give up scribbling and doodling and scoring out lines in her blue notebook. She is at last ready to start writing in her Golden Notebook to record her integration, to start a new life of usefulness as a Free Woman. This has pointed out very efficiently by R.M. Badoda: “Finally Anna is once again able to create form, even with-or perhaps because of-her full knowledge of the chaos that lies beneath.” (88)

This happens in the golden notebook section. Here she has realized that she had been leading the life of a madwoman, a schizophrenic, during the last few months. Realizing this means that the battle is won:

During the last weeks of craziness and timelessness I’ve had these moments of “knowing” one after the other, yet there is no way of putting this sort of knowledge into words. . . . I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want. (TGNB 549)
It is in this section that she has the ideally feministic notion of “a short novel” comic and ironic”. The fact that is thinking of it as a comic and ironic work is again a pointer to her complete recovery from schizophrenia. It is an ideally feministic plot, as has been pointed out in the first chapter of the present work. It is a story of a woman’s struggle to free herself, not only of male domination, but what is more difficult, of her innermost desire to submit to male domination. She is aware of this desire in herself and despises herself for it and wants to conquer it. This is a thoroughly feministic ideal. So this hypothetical women:

appalled by her capacity for surrendering herself to a man, determines to free herself. She determinedly takes two lovers, sleeping with them on alternate nights the moment of freedom being when she would be able to say to herself that she had enjoyed them both equally. (TGNB 552)

The serpent enters in this thoroughly immoral Garden of Eden when the two men guess at what has been going on behind each other’s back. But in the fictional world of a feminist, a woman is never punished. So, after knowing the truth, one of the two lovers falls in love with the woman whereas the other becomes aloof. The woman herself, who had been playing with the two men with equal indifference, falls in love with the man who has himself fallen in love with her and becomes aloof towards the man who has drawn away from her. So she discovers that after all this experimentation, she has not got freedom after all:
. . although she is in despair that she is as “unfree” as ever, she announces to both men that she has now become thoroughly emancipated, she has at last achieved the ideal of full sexual and emotional pleasure with two men at once. (TGNB 552)

At this revelation the one who was cool and aloof becomes interested and goes on discussing the situation. The man, however, who had fallen in love with her and whom she herself loves, is appalled and very hurt and he leaves her. So Anna ends up with a singular conclusion; “She is left with the mean she does not love and who does not love her, exchanging intelligent psychological conversation.” (TGNB 552)

It says much for Anna’s own self-integration as well as for Lessing’s own artistic sensitivity, that all this is not meant to be taken seriously, for it is to be a comic novel. Whatever happens, or supposed to happen, earlier, this last quoted sentence stresses the comic aspect. In the earlier chapter, it is the feminist aspect of the plot that had been stressed but now time has come to stress the technical aspect of it, or at least as much of it as Anna talks about, But she does not talk so much about the form that she is going to give it as about the process of writing it, the act of creation itself and we find that she finds that act to be impossible. The relevant matter evers three pages. In short it runs thus: “The idea for this story intrigued me, and I began thinking how it should be written.” (TGNB 552)
Then Saul comes in and she tells him the plot. He urges her to write it down. But the says:

“I can’t write that short story or any other, because at that moment I sit down to write, someone comes into the room, looks over my shoulder, and stops me”. (TGNB 553)

This “someone” however, is not someone in actual life, but someone metaphorical. But her stopping is real. Saul asks:

“who? Do you know?”

“of course I know. It could be a Chinese peasant. Or one of Castro’s guerrilla fighters. Or an Algerian lighting in the FLN. Or Mr. Mathlong. They stand here in the room and they say, “why aren’t you doing something about us, instead of wasting your time scribbling?” (TGNB 554)

It is clear here that it is not the form or the technique that is bothering her. Instead she is suffering pangs of conscience for not taking action about the injustice, the striving for peace, that is taking place all over the world, from china to Algeria.

This is a better evidence of an integrated personality than thinking out the plot of a story, or even writing it down.

The intensely feministic aspect of the novel can hardly be exaggerated. Whether in her protagonist or other main characters, Lessing, first of all, has chosen female characters. This is nothing extraordinary, for so have Richardson, Austen and George Eliot, to name but a few. Their
partners, sometimes male, sometimes, or other side characters, exist only to bring out their personalities. Above all, the events that take place and the main character’s attitude to them, whether it is Anna or Ella, we see the feminist attitude, particularly that of the second wave feminist, is stamped all over, clearly. Lessing was very concerned over the theme as well as the form of this novel. She makes the twin themes of the novel quite clear in the Preface. The first Theme is that of “breakdown” and the second, that of unity. This is to be found, as she herself says, in the golden notebook, which is the last of the notebooks kept by Anna. But before this theme of unity can be found, the first theme of breakdown or fragmentation dominates the book. Lessing puts it thus:

Throughout the Notebooks people have discussed, theorized, dogmatized, labeled, compartmented. . . But they have also reflected each other, been aspects of each other. . . In the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation – the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity. (TGNB 7)

This fragmentation, or breakdown, as she clarifies in the next page, has a psychological denotation, for means the breakdown of individual personalities. But then, as has been pointed out above, this kind of psychological breakdown, or schizophrenia, according to her, is significant because it points, not of insanity, but at further development of the human psyche-topic she develops further in The Four-Gated City. She says:
Anna, and Saul Green, the American “breakdown”. They are crazy, lunatic, mad-what you will. They “breakdown” into each other, into other people, break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts. (TGNB 7)

After writing a bit more about this, how they break down, what is signifies, and how they integrate themselves, she finally makes it clear that this nervous breakdown, for in scientific, psychiatrists’ language, it is just that, has highly positive meaning for her:

This theme of “breakdown,” that sometimes when people “crack up” it is a way of self-healing, of the inner self’s dismissing of false dichotomies and divisions. (TGNB 8)

This invites a long discussion, but the present work is not fit for such a discussion since it is the feministic aspect that we are studying. What is relevant for the discussion The Golden Notebook is the fact that Lessing, whether before or after writing it, had consciously, deliberately, pointed out its form and twin theme.

This thematic aspect of the novel, as has already been pointed out, is highly feministic, since it takes Anna through her journey into disintegration, onwards to unification and also takes in her helping others in self-realization of themselves. The manner in which she integrates herself along with her male partner, her alter ego Ella and her flat mate Molly is truly admirable and highly indicative of Lessing’s feminist proclivities. Now let us have a look at what she has to say about the form.
Here she is very conscious and explains in detail the significance of the form:

There is a skeleton, or frame, called *Free Women*, which is a conventional short novel, about 60,000 words long, and which could stand by itself. But it is divided into five sections and separated by stages of the four Notebooks, Black, Red, Yellow and Blue. The Notebooks are kept by Anna wulf, a central charter of *Free Women*. (TGNB 7)

These four Notebooks are kept simultaneously, but each records experience of a different kind. The black notebook tells of her experiences in black Africa, the Red one records her experience when she joins the communist party, the Yellow is like a novel, recording the experiences of her alter ego Ella and the Blue one is a personal diary. It is in the blue one that the most intimate account of her thoughts, dreams, interpretations of events are recorded. In it can be traced her break-down. Finally she succeeds in re-integrating her fragmented selves in the Golden Notebook, thus furnishing the book with its title and its all-important second theme. Thus it is a carefully formed book. Yet, in its form also, as it reflects the fragmentation and the re-integration of a female protagonist and in the process her helping of others, it is truly feminist.

What is more important is that she is truly free, independent not only of men, of her male partners (of whom there is a bewildering succession – one can hardly keep count of the men Anna has affairs with) but of her
female friends also. This is the truly feminist ideal – not that she is equal with men, but that she is free of them altogether, they do not matter. She can take them or leave them as she wants.

From a feminist point of view took the form of the novel is important because of the manner in which Lessing integrates it with her feminist consciousness, not just with that of her protagonist Anna. She had said that its “meaning is in the shape”. Indeed, of no novel is this so true as of this one. That is why one finds oneself again and again talking about the theme when discussing the form and vice versa, and of both when talking about the theory of Feminism. In fact all three are so inextricably mingled that it is very difficult, may, impossible, to separate one from the others, nor is it desirable that this should be done or at all attempted. This is what takes us into the region of meta-fiction, at least Lessing points in this direction. She says that she:

Wanted to write a short formal novel which would enclose the rest in order to suggest what I think a great many writers feel about the formal novel, namely, that it’s not doing its job any more. So I thought that the only way to do this would be to write the short formal novel and put in the experience it came out of, showing how ridiculous the formal novel is when it can’t say a damned thing. . . So I put in the short formal novel and all this. (Quoted bySchlueter Paul 31)

She was so anxious to separate the short novel (Free Women taken in all its five sections) that she had wanted it to be printed in a different way: in a
rather old-fashioned print, with rather flowery chapter headings, to suggest that this kind of novel is old-fashioned. (Bloom, Harlood 38)

Moreover, she had wanted the form itself to suggest a split personality, so she had split up the rest into four parts, i.e. the notebooks. What is more, the notebooks are not just one but are themselves four, so that more than enough indications are given of a split personality. In the first of the black notebooks Anna shows herself as acutely conscious of this aspect of the human personality:

The novel has become a function of the fragmented society, the fragmented consciousness. Human beings are so divided, are becoming more and more divided, and more subdivided in themselves, reflecting the world, that they reach out desperately. . . It is a blind groping for their wholeness.

(TGNB 75)

Also Lessing says that the different parts of the personality should express themselves in different styles. This aspect of the literary style however, is not very apart in the book. It is true that sometimes, in Anna’s diary, there are cryptic entries under different dated, contrasted to which are, for example, long passages describing Anna’s dreams. Perhaps this is what Lessing means by different styles, For example, here are some entries in the Blue Notebook:
13 Jan, 51.

Truman yesterday set vast targets for the US Defence effort involving sacrifices for all Americas. Express. 12 Mar. 51.

A-Bombs by Eisenhower, I would use them at once if I thought it would bring sufficient destruction to the Enemy. Express. April 6, 51.

Woman atom spy to die. Husband too sent to Electric chair. Judge: You caused Korea. (TGNB 220)

This is in the style of a diarist – short factual entries under creation dated. There are many entries in the notebooks of this type. There are longer entries also, concerning the sitting Anna has with her psychiatrists. In contrast there is the novel-type narrative method in the yellow notebooks. Then opposed to all these, there are the long passages, after without much punctuation, describing Anna’s dreams, specially in the golden notebook section:

As I lay on the surface of the dream-water, and began very slowly to submerge, this person said, . . I lay rocking under the water, and the voice was silent, and then I knew the depths of the water under me had become dangerous, full of monsters and crocodiles and things I could scarcely imagine, they were so old and so tyrannous. (TGNB 534)

This passage is one single paragraph, more than five pages long, in the tradition of Molly Bloom’s monologue at the end of *Ulysses*, though, unlike Joyce, Lessing writes in separate sentences, as is apparent from the passage quoted. These are definitely different styles of writing, and,
according to Lessing, they highlight the different personalities involved in the novel.

After having thus clarified her point about the characters and the as well as the form, Lessing observes: “This novel, then, is as attempt to break a form, to break certain form of consciousness and go beyond them.” (Bloom, Harlod 32)

It is not surprising, then, that *The Golden Notebook* is taken to be one of the most influential novels of the second half of the twentieth century. From whichever point of view it is judged, in style, in form, in characterization, it is definitely a masterpiece and the best of the single novels of Lessing. As for the point of view adopted by the present work, feminism, it has already been pointed out that it embodies, in the person of Anna Wulf, the highest ideal of feminism, that is, independence of spirit in full integration with society.
Works Cited


