Lessing and the New Woman

Doris Lessing is one of the most prolific writers today and also one of the most read. She has always been very vocal and has tried to free herself of the label of being a feminist. Once when questioned whether her writing is specifically related to women she replied, “Not at all. I just write from the viewpoint of women because I am one. I write...[rather] about the map of the human mind” and goes on to add that “Sex war is not the most important war going on, nor is it the most vital problems in our lives.” Time and again she has been accused of abandoning feminist concerns. This irks her, as she avers, she never consciously wrote from a feminist point of view.

Doris Lessing is more widely known for her novels, but she also wrote two plays that were highly acclaimed on the stage. These plays however escaped the critics' notice. The first one *Each His Own Wilderness* was written in 1959 and the other *Play with a Tiger* in 1962. *Each His Own Wilderness* is the story of Myra who dedicates her life for her social ideals, but in the end comes to term with the bitter realization that her own son is indifferent to her politics. This play is therefore a sensitive portrayal of a woman's suffering, her agony and her loneliness. In the author's note to the play she wrote that the play “came out of
watching the conflicts, listening to the arguments between a political mother and her apolitical son".2

As the play opens, we see Tony, a young man of twenty-two, back home after finishing his National Service. This play deals with the powerful, and volatile mother-son relationship, that is on the brink of a conflict. Myra, the mother, like Sarah Kahn, is a political activist, working for the ideals and values that she holds dear. She is whole-heartedly involved in seeking the banning of the H-Bomb and works energetically towards that end. Tony the son, on the other hand demands total allegiance from her and this becomes the basic cause of conflict.

Though twenty-two, Tony hardly behaves like a mature grown-up male. In the stage-directions, he is described as sexually ambiguous resembling "... an adolescent girl who makes herself attractive as a form of self-assertion but is afraid when the attention she draws is more than gently chivalrous"(p.88). Michelene Wandor believes, "this suggests that Tony's bearing carries ambiguous implications for appropriately gendered behaviour". His actions prove the fact. Almost like a child his favourite pastime is making a gun with his hands and sounding gun sounds with his mouth. He would like his mother to close his eyes and shout 'Pekaboo'.
In certain ways Tony resembles Jimmy Porter. Like Jimmy it seems he is without a cause. It appears a mammoth job appeasing him, because one can never figure out what he exactly wants. He is a mixture of contradictions, "fluctuating between the good manners of those who use manners as a defense, the abrupt rudeness of the very young and a plaintive, almost querulous appeal' (p.87). Like Jimmy, he too shuttles between sexual longing and loathing. He hates women and yet adores them and longs to be with them. Like him again, he believes that he is born out of his times, though he would not even lift his little finger to alter the times. However, whereas Jimmy grumbled because there was no action, Tony resents as there is too much of it. For him women become "utterly intolerable" because of their "utterly appalling vitality. They exhaust me."(p.107)

As soon as he reaches home, he looks around and the disorder is enough to irritate him. He exclaims, "What a mess. God, what a mess!"(p.87). The very first sentence, is indicative of the fact that there is going to be a conflict. Quite early in the play, Tony makes it clear that he would not like to budge an inch from his stance and that no compromises are to be expected from his side. Myra the mother, on the other hand, too wants to live in her own way. In answer to Tony's "Why is everything in such a mess, Mother?" she is quick to answer, "Oh, I haven't time. I get bored with all these things. They just accumulate and pile up..."(p.112).
Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* showed how the chief institution of patriarchy is the family and says:

"this is a patriarchal unit within a patriarchy that serves as the agent of a larger society and controls and ensures conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient. The Patriarchal state rules its citizens through heads/males who represent authority."

She further elaborates how female heads of household tend to be regarded as undesirable and have little or no relation to the state. Here though the father is absent, yet the son has taken over. Millett declares that family-society-state are interrelated; otherwise, they would fall apart and that the main contribution of the family in patriarchy is the socialization of the young into patriarchal ideology's prescribed attitudes toward the categories of role, temperament, and status. The position of the masculine figure within the family is extremely strong. Another aspect of patriarchy with which Millett demonstrates the arbitrariness of gender roles, temperament, and status is class. She points out that in a society where status depends upon the economic, social, and educational circumstances of class, certain females can appear to stand higher than some males; however, not when one looks more closely at the situation:

A black doctor or lawyer has higher social status than a poor white sharecropper. But race itself is a caste system which subsumes class, persuades the latter citizen that he belongs to a higher order of life, just as it oppresses the black
professional in spirit, whatever his material success may be. In much the same manner, a truck driver or butcher has always his "manhood" to fall back upon [...] Incidents from life (bullying, obscene, or hostile remarks) are probably another sort of psychological gesture of ascendancy [...] The existence of sexual hierarchy has been reaffirmed and mobilized to "punish" the female quite efficiently. The function of class or mobilized ethnic mores in patriarchy is largely a matter of how overtly displayed or how loudly enunciated the general ethic of masculine supremacy allows itself to become "

Tony's refusal to accept the disorder is his refusal to accept things as they are. And though he himself would do nothing to clear the mess, he expects his mother to do so. He would like things to change to suit his convenience. It is also an unwillingness to accept reality, which becomes obvious by his refusal to let in the glare of sunlight, preferring to lie in the dark. Again he is disgusted and vehemently protests when Myra wants him to hear the tape that she has prepared to convey the horrors and agony of war through various screaming sounds. He is a child who would like to see things as he would like them to be and not as they are, and cries when things don't comply.
When Myra comes back after a demonstration, Tony's greetings are not those of an enthusiastic son eager to see his mother. Rather a feeble "how are you?" emanates from him, that is soaked out of all its vitality. The first scene itself sets the tone that is cynical meant to hurt, "But of course, if my coming is in any way inconvenient to you I'll go away" (p.88), he specifies.

Not one of Myra's beliefs and not one of her gestures are acceptable to Tony as none of her friends are. He talks ironically of all the male friends Myra has or had in the past and refers to them as his 'uncles'. "I've had so many uncles. Well Uncle Sandy?" (p.99), he comments sardonically to Sandy, who is Myra's secretary to drive home the point. The conflict becomes so engrained as time passes that both of them "stare at each other as enemies"(p.91), and so profound that Myra at times even has to suppress her "maternal instincts"(p.89). He sneers at "the glorious battle for socialism inside the Labour party' commenting: "We need a new form of - inner emigration. Drugs, drink, anything. I want to opt out. I don't want any part of it" (p.89). Every motive of the mother is at once looked at with suspicion. "Who is it upstairs," he questions and when Myra off handily replies "Sandy", he stares at her as if she is a culprit:

TONY: But he is my age.

MYRA: What of it?

TONY: He's my age, He's 22.
MYRA: I didn't ask to see his birth certificate when I engaged him.  
(I.i, p.90)

Tony is a pessimist. He sees humanity as stupid and prefers to see the horrors of the bomb as inescapable. He can not even appreciate his mother's efforts, who is at least trying to achieve something. On the contrary, he demands that she should give up the fight since he sees it as futile. He would like to shut his doors to the outside world and remain cloistered in the house, which is a false solace that he has built around himself. His childish thinking cannot comprehend why anybody should be tortured by "something happening thousands of miles away"(p.104). This naturally clashes with Myra's total commitment to her work, and her wider concern for the victims of the bomb that impels her to seek its banning. As any individual eager to preserve her identity and total commitment to work, Myra is certainly not willing to make compromises as far her work is concerned. She asserts herself on this count:

MYRA: I am not going to become a sort of monument to your desire for -- whatever it is.

TONY: Dignity.

MYRA: If you call it dignity sitting with your hands folded waiting to be blown up. Well, I'm not going to be blackmailed into inertia.  
(II,ii,p.160)

Tony does not approve of Myra and her work because being a firm believer of patriarchy he believes that it is the male of the species who are
supposed to have qualifications like aggression, intelligence and efficiency whereas women are supposed to be passive, ignorant, docile and virtuous. As Myra does not fit the bill, she is unacceptable.

The language used by Tony for Myra is foul and full of contempt. Milly, a friend of Myra is shocked that anyone could use such language for one's mother. He labels the 'box' in which Myra and her other co-workers are in as "the dilettante daughters of the revolution" and then adds with a scorn "Oh they're women who haven't succeeded in getting or staying married" (p.101), thus indirectly hinting that a woman's rightful place is her home. At times his language becomes obscene and is meant to hurt:

It's going to be such a jolly night. Imagine it- Rosemary and Uncle Philips in one bed ... Then there's mother. Will it be Sandy or Uncle Mike, do you suppose? Why not both?...Or they might have a little change in the middle of the night. Mother and Uncle Philip- for old times sake...

(II, I, p.147)

As soon as Tony is back Myra becomes aware that she shall no longer be able to live life her way. She knows that many sacrifices would be demanded of her if she has to fit in her son's agenda of things. When questioned by her son if it is necessary to swear, she replies, "Well now that you're home, I suppose I'll have to stop" (p.71).
In *Each His Own Wilderness* the husband is absent, but however patriarchy is not. Myra craves of the son's approval in the absence of the husband. She tries her best to make him understand the indispensability of her work so that he might appreciate what she's doing and working for. Whenever Tony's voice softens a little, she enthusiastically "responds like a little girl who has been praised" (p. 92). She tries to tell Tony that efforts are important because otherwise things could have been worse. Tony refuses to believe that Myra's work could do any good "how could they possibly be worse? How could they?" (p.92). Her efforts are outright rejected as 'childish' "They talk as if they really believe what they do changes things. You know, five thousand people listen to a speech and everything will be changed" (P.140).

The predicament that Myra faces is that she wants to keep her individuality intact and that is hard to do, if you are a woman. In 1935 Margaret Mead voiced the same concern. She had shown how difficult it is for a woman to be an individual at the same time. One either proclaims oneself a woman and therefore less an achieving individual or an achieving individual and therefore less a woman. "If she chooses the first option, she enhances her opportunity of being a loved object, the kind of girl, whom men will woo, boast of, toast and marry. If she selects the second however, she is lost as a woman her chance for the kind of love she wants" 


Myra has opted for the second option and therefore in spite of being surrounded by various people she is lonely. She does not even qualify for her son's approval. All her well-meaning gestures are interpreted wrongly by him. All she asks of him is to grow up, to stop behaving like a child of five and to live independently since he is twenty-two, complete his education and see life for himself. But this is clearly not acceptable to Tony. She sells the house so that he might have sufficient money to pursue whatever he wants to. Instead she is persecuted by him and he raises quite a hue and a cry saying she has given away the only thing he found solace from. Sometimes it becomes so unbearable for Myra that she literally begs from her own son to have some pity on her:

MYRA: (breaking down and crying for a few seconds before pulling herself together) : Tony, have some pity on me sometimes. (I,ii,p.116).

No wonder she finds him 'impossible'. She can do nothing much but helplessly cry out her heart, failing to decipher what he really wants.

Apparently Myra and Milly look to be free women as they do not have husbands to cater to. Myra is a widow and Milly a divorcée. Hence they do not have to mould their lifestyles to suit their husbands' convenience. But in reality they are still quite caged. In patriarchy when there is no husband to boss over the wife then the son becomes the substitute master. One is reminded of Manu's advice which stands equally
adopted by the western Society which says: "In childhood let her remain under the control of the father, under the control of the husband in youth; and under the control of the son after the demise of her lord in old age. A woman must not assume independence under any circumstances whatever". Tony plays the role of the substitute husband quite effectively. He bubbles with sarcasm and ironical bitterness. What he demands is a total surrender. He wants the mother's individuality surrendered to the point where the woman remains no more than a possession. And in the play as in a patriarchal setup all sacrifices come in the woman's share:

MYRA: ... I was going to go with those people to the testing area for the bomb. You know. Well Tony was terribly upset. I was so happy. I was under the impression that he would mind if I got killed. Then he said, "Mother, for God's sake have a sense of proportion." Then I understood. It wouldn't have been respectable. That was what he minded. It wouldn't have been respectable. *(laughs. Almost breaks down)*(II, I, p.134)

Tony has an almost obsessive desire always to see his mother with a made-up face. Like a proper patriarch he echoes man's wider desire to see women as 'painted dolls'. This aspect relates to the theme of the female body-image and the dominance on it of the male gaze. Coward refers to this dominance when he avers:
"In this society, looking has become a crucial aspect of sexual relations, not because of any natural impulse, but because it is one of the ways in which domination and subordination are expressed. The relations involved in looking enmesh with coercive beliefs about appropriate sexual behaviour for men and women." (Rosalind Coward, Female Desire: women's sexuality today, Pladin, 1984, p. 76)

This male gaze wields a power and it is apparent also in other areas besides personal relationships, for example in the images of women produced by the media. The proliferation of visual representations of femininity, makes the woman anxious. Tony's insistence points to this obsession. "Why don't you at least make up your face?" (p. 115), "I can't stand it, seeing you stop around the house half the day looking like that" (p. 154) and "... for heaven's sake put some lipstick on at least" (p. 154) are the protests lodged on and off. And Myra's plea "When I'm cleaning the stairs, I expect to be loved for being myself" (p. 115) highlights a woman's carving for acceptance for what she really is, sans the make-up.

Another aspect that the play ponders on is how much sexual freedom a woman can possibly enjoy. Both Myra and Milly are single, but they do not have any satisfying love experience. Myra has been thrown out by Philip, and worse he wants Myra to put up Rosemary, the girl he says he is to marry, with her for a few days. Ironically as this news is conveyed by the son it hits where it hurts the most. Myra is furious with
Philip, jealous of Rosemary and sorry for herself, yet she hides all these emotions. "Do you imagine after putting such a good show with Philip all this time I'm going to behave like a jilted 16-year old?" (p.173) she asks. Hiding one's emotions and feelings becomes a necessity, when mutual understanding is lacking.

Myra has come to realize that men are 'dishonest'. This dishonesty is inherent in Philip as he does not even want to marry Rosemary and is looking for ways to dump her. But he lacks the basic honesty and courage to tell her this himself. He uses none other but Myra to get rid of Rosemary. "He never did have any guts. I was maneuvered into a position where I had to break it off or lose self-respect. And that's what he's doing with her." (p.114) Philip brings Rosemary to Myra so that she is thoroughly "lost and humiliated" (p.115) that reveals how "hypocritical" men can be to get their own ends. Philip is one of those skilled at the art. One woman is made use of to get of the other.

Communication between the two sexes again is conspicuous by its absence. This is hardly surprising, as communication and sharing comes with understanding, and it is this understanding that is conspicuously lacking in Each His Own Wilderness. The son never approves of anything that the mother does, therefore she cannot communicate easily with him. It is from Sandy that Tony learns that his mother wants him to complete his studies. He is irked by this second hand
communication and just then Mike walks in to again inform him just that, so that the communication gap is made to look all the more wider and obvious. Myra has to seek Milly's help to communicate to her son that the house has been sold. When asked why she doesn't tell him herself, she answers "because I can't talk to him" (p.138) Again it is an outsider Mike, who informs Tony that his mother is unwell. So self-centered, self-absorbed and occupied is he with his own inconsequential talk, that he cannot even observe this much.

Myra is a woman who has seen suffering. Her husband was killed in an air raid and she was left alone to fend for herself and her son. Dedicated to her work and her beliefs, she works wholeheartedly for them. But she like Milly, has reached a stage where she finds it difficult to continue the fight and the loneliness of it all engulfs her. As the plays draws to an end, she is like Sarah Kahn, the only one who still clings to the old faith when almost everyone around her has given up. "Half the people I knew," she laments in front of Philip, "people who have spent all their lives fighting and trying to change things, they've gone inside their homes and shut their doors and gone domestic and comfortable and safe." (pp.109-10). And then she is questioned. Philip is the first one to do that "Why don't you recognize the fact that we've had it? We've served our purpose." (p.121) and then she is taken to task by none other but her own son who labels his mother as "corrupt".
"You set my teeth on edge. You're corrupt. You're sloppy and corrupt. I'm waiting for that moment when you put your foot down about something and say you've had enough." (p.114)

Like Ronnie Kahn and Jimmy Porter, Tony believes it is his moral right to constantly accuse Myra:

Dreams, dreams, dreams ... what are the words - don't say I've forgotten them, they've been stuffed down my throat all my life - liberty, democracy, brotherhood - and what's the other one? Ah, yes, comradeship, that's it. A world full of happy brothers and comrades. (I, ii, p.124)

As if this is not enough the invectives go on. He levels accusations at her for being destructive, that reminds one of Jimmy Porter:

"You're destructive, destructive, destructive. There's isn't anything you touch which doesn't go to pieces. You just go on from mess to mess... You live in a mess like a pig, mother... you're all over everything like a great crawling spider..." (p.164).

One wonders at the authenticity of the statement because all her life it is destruction that Myra had been fighting against.

Eventually so sick does Myra become of the whole affair that she is ready to make any amount of sacrifices just to bargain for peace. She gives up all her male friends and a prospective husband. Her personal social life is compromised to a large extent but the son is still not
appeased. When Mike's proposal is rejected the very next day of its acceptance, the son ironically asks his mother why she had done that. He is not even ready to acknowledge that the sacrifice was made because of him. And it turns out it is Tony rather than Myra who is the destructive one. He is responsible for Myra breaking up with all her past acquaintances and the one who actually splits Myra's personality.

A woman's need for sharing is realised only by another woman. Myra finds it impossible to interact with Tony, hence pines for Milly to be back when the latter is away. It is the feminist idea of sisterhood that believes that only a woman is able to understand another woman. The idea of sisterhood involves a clear sense of solidarity and collective consciousness. Myra expresses this wish:

MYRA: I do wish Milly would come back.
TONY: Why?
MYRA: She's so kind.
TONY: Kind, kind! You've got Sandy, haven't you? Isn't Sandy kind?
MYRA: You're a lot of savages. (I, ii, p.117)

When Milly does turn up, Myra is elated at the news. That her need for sharing would now be fulfilled is evident by the exuberance that she shows. She avers enthusiastically, "Tell me about everything. Come and sit down and talk." (p.126) Both Myra and Milly are finally able to
have a heart to heart talk. They can easily sympathize with each other and they can readily identify with each other's problems. This comes from a mutual understanding that is inherent in their relationship, but lacking in their relationships with men. In front of others and also with her own son, Myra had to hide her tears always fearful of showing her real feelings and emotions, but she is not scared of doing so in front of Milly. The embarrassment leaves her and her feelings pour out in tears that she finds no need to hide. The two women can easily approach, understand and sympathize with each other as they are leaving their made-up selves behind and it is certainly better and easier to approach the other without any masks on.

The idea of sisterhood fell under the purview of the women's liberation movement of the 1960's and 70's. Originally it signified a sense of solidarity, but in reality what is shared is a sense of grievance and anger at the oppression and analysis of being a woman in a society dominated by men. Within this category of behaviour, 'sisterhood' becomes a bond of self conscious unity that results from the experience of being exploited and the will of sharing a conscious commitment to change. Sisterhood is generally regarded by feminists as providing both a refuge from and a challenge to the oppressive facets of a patriarchal society. These ideas formed the very foundation of the radical feminist movement of the early 1970s. Women here strove to achieve political solidarity by focusing on
the common aspects of female experience. Consciousness-raising in the small group, as Eisentein explains, was instrumental in achieving this goal:

Through consciousness-raising women sought to identify and develop the qualities that united them, across the boundaries set by social categories: mothers with nonmothers; heterosexual women with lesbians; white women with women of colour; and privileged women with poor women. Ultimately, it was thought, the condition and experience of being female would prove to be more important in defining women than the specifics of our differences from one another."

And when the two women sit and share a rather sad realization dawns upon them and it is when they discover that "one can't walk on one's sons".

Tragically therefore motherhood that apparently looks to be self-satisfying and a prerogative of women is actually a hindrance to her realizations as an individual. Women's reproductive capacities make them vulnerable to male control and raising a child is often a painful and burdensome experience. The mother-child relationship as in such cases no longer remains an affectionate bond, but rather a rope that limits the radius of movement and hence the mother's freedom. Motherhood is another handicap in the path of women's liberation. In patriarchy every woman is a mother by definition. A mother is seen as the source of reproduction the
biological children of patriarchy and the material goods of patriarchal culture. Through motherhood, patriarchy continuous the structure in which female is kept in the service of male. Therefore, motherhood is oppressive. As Chodorow asserts:

Women's maternal role has profound effects on women's lives, on ideology about women, on the reproduction of masculinity and sexual inequality, and on the reproduction of particular forms of labor power...Women's mothering determines women's primary location in the domestic sphere and creates a basis for the structural differentiation of domestic and public spheres. But these spheres operate hierarchically. Kinship rules organize claims of men on domestic units, and men dominate kinship. Culturally and politically, the public sphere dominates the domestic, and hence men dominate women...Both, sexual division of labor and heterosexual marriages, reproduce gender as an unequal social relation.

The next realization is even worse. It is the realization that a woman might not even want to break the chain of motherhood that binds her. In most cases it becomes her weakness because of the motherly emotions in her and men can at any time cash on those emotions. Doris Lessing in fact was the predecessor of the feminist attitude towards
motherhood that found its voice around 1970. In that period to quote Eisenstein, “that feminism and motherhood were in diametrical opposition had seemed almost axiomatic”. Theorists presented the bearing and rearing of children as a form of drudgery. They held them culpable for keeping women tied to the home, thus preventing them from participating in the public sphere of paid employment. Socialist feminists thought of ways and means to liberate women from the practice and ideology of motherhood. Mitchell recommended collective childcare and abortion on demand.

Another point that the play focuses on is that a man’s need for getting not staying married is totally different from that of a woman’s. Love and care certainly have no place in his agenda of things. A man’s idea of his wife is totally utilitarian, coupled with the idea of seeing the woman as a reproductive agent. Philip married, as Myra recollects, twenty-three years ago and had gone to his wife only when he needed a ‘nice rest’. His wife is referred to as the "good woman"(p.114). This is a result because down the centuries women have been cast in a set image and this image has always been embedded deep down in the male subconscious.

"She lived like a nun on a mountain peak, forgiving him his sins..."(p.114).

The woman was acceptable as long as she catered to the image. As soon as this dawns upon Myra, she rejects Philips and rightfully tells him,
"You cast me in the role long enough. You want me to be the quiet woman waiting to welcome you home. But I wouldn't forgive you." (p.143). But as she does not fit in the role prescribed for her, neither is she acceptable to him. He wanted Myra to be a nun and a 'quiet woman', and he couldn't stand the way Myra gives herself away to everybody and everything. Then he experiments with Rosemary to see if she would fit in. However she too is rejected. The spider-fly analogy for Philip and Myra is apt and striking. Like a spider, Philip is always on the look out for a new fly that he can trap, suck its fluids out and then reject.

Like Myra, Milly too, has had her share of sad experiences leading to the realization that she had all along been seen just as a possession. She has walked out of the relationship with Jack the man to whom she was betrothed. They were supposed to get married on Monday and she had spent the whole Friday cleaning the cottage, Saturday cooking dinner for ten, and Sunday organizing the vegetable garden. On Sunday Jack was off playing golf and Milly was left behind as she had work to do, a situation reminiscent of Look Back in Anger where there is no rest for the woman even on Sundays, when the men are relaxing. After all the hard work that she puts up all that she gets at the end of the day is a lollipop:

"He came back from his golf and gave me a nice kiss. Reward for hard work as it were" (p.133).

Jack didn't mind Milly working so hard for three days but he is suddenly in a tizzy, when Mr. Stent, the assistant manager comes in. He then asks
Milly to quickly put on some make up so as to look presentable. When she tries to drive home the fact that she had been working she is precisely told:

"But darling it will make such a bad impression."

Milly sadly realizes that all through she has been nothing but a beautiful body for Jack. She has always been a possession and never been viewed as an individual by him. As soon as she becomes aware of the fact, she leaves him and to make him realize, she leaves him a bill charging him for all the services rendered to him.

All men (except Mike) one comes across in the play are cold and calculated. Sandy too belongs to the same group as he can use his own mother to further his petty ends. Milly knows her son so well "My Sandy'll always fall in love where it does him good" (p.132). Tony's attitude towards Milly is no less disgusting. In Act II, sc.ii, after the sexual encounter Milly appears detestable to him. He wants her to wear some clothes and closes his eyes as he is not able to bear the sight of her. His need is that of a 'sleeping beauty', not breathing, living individual "You lay in my arms all night. You were perfectly sweet. And now..."(p.150). And then as if he has made some compromise or a sacrifice, Tony acts heroic, "Oh, don't worry about my reputation please"(p.159). Milly is amazed at this false chivalry, "Why do you consider yourself compromised?" She questions. When he questions at the word 'love', she is hurt and realizes she is just been made 'use of'. Women are made use of because of their emotions. It is usually because of these emotions that they become so
vulnerable and prone to exploitation. And these very emotions are then mocked at by men. "Therapy for soul trouble, a man's arms." (p.125).

The constant recurrent rejections have Myra a totally disintegrated personality. Philip says he cannot stand her. Tony too tells her the same thing, so that she grows so unsure of herself that she even asks Mike, "Can you stand me Mike? Can you stand me?"(p.145). She is finally reduced to a total mental wreck laughing and crying at the same time..

Myra is alone and alienated at the end of the play. In her endeavour to appease her son, she finds that she has lost all her friends, but the son still remains unappeased. She asks Tony to help her with the tape, "Will you or won't you? If not I'll ring up ..." (p.160). She stops at this point as she realizes there is no one she can call up, "It seems at the moment that there's no one I can ring up. At least not with dignity" (p.161). And the realisation is so appalling that she cannot but "burst into tears"(p.161).

In spite of the freedom granted to the woman, Myra nevertheless remains alone and friendless. She sees the fact that all along she had hardly been living life her own way and that it had been dictated by the demands of the son. The son becomes a surrogate husband in the absence of the latter. By the end of the play Myra has had enough. She
makes it clear to Tony: "It occurs to me that for the last twenty-two years my life has been governed by yours—by your needs... And what for... (contemptuously) what for—a little monster of egotism—that's what you are. A petty envious, spiteful egotist, concerned with nothing but yourself" (II,ii.p.165). Finally Myra swallows in the hard fact that it is impossible to get along with Tony. Hence she decides to leave him for good, with the brave assertion, "I'm free", though one doubts the degree of freedom the woman would be able to enjoy in this patriarchal set up. And the freedom has come after paying a heavy price. She has to leave her own home to be free. Realization of a woman's individuality is not possible while staying within the present family setup.

The other play that Lessing wrote *Play with a Tiger*(1962) provided a model for feminist drama in the sixties, and it was in the words of Helene Keyssar "a singular and treasured gift" its protagonist Anna bears a close resemblance to the protagonist of her novel *The Golden Notebook*. It is a direct exploration of an "adult woman's tensions between her images of herself as just a little ordinary girl who wants to be married and a woman who refuses to manacle herself to a man has a poignant appeal for any contemporary woman struggling with her own ambivalence".

In the introduction to the play Lessing specified that the play is about "rootless de-classed people who live in sitting rooms or small
flats or the cheaper hotel rooms and such people are usually presented on the stage in a detailed squalor of realism, which to my mind distracts attention from what is interesting about them”.

Both the protagonists of the play, Anna and Tom are in their mid thirties. Tom is a middle class Englishman who is on the point of taking a job as business manager of a woman’s magazine. As the play opens, it is apparent that they are in the middle of an argument and as a result both are “tense, irritated and miserable.”(p. 6) Anna is upset as she is not very happy by the turn their relationship is taking. She laments that she has hardly been able to see Tom during the last two weeks and has repeatedly been told by his assistant that he is out whenever she has tried contacting him. The very beginning sets the tone of things to come. Anna has chosen to live alone and she is aware of the loneliness that accompanies it. She admits to herself her desire for and pleasure in men but she has decided to forego all that because of the kind of complicated woman that she is. *Play with a Tiger* transcends other plays because it is not just the “strength and vulnerability” of the main character that is traced out but as Lessing herself said her intent was not only to lead the audience to “acknowledge a kind of woman who rarely appears on stage but to assault the stage itself and the greatest enemy of theatre… realism”.

Anna Freeman is a free and an independent woman and the name is quite suggestive. Tom wants Anna to accompany him to the
Jeffries whose job offer he is about to accept. Anna doesn’t have a very high opinion of the Jeffries as she finds them boring, phony and stupid, an opinion also agreed upon by Tom till the time that he had eventually made up his mind to take up the job offer. Anna doesn’t want him to accept it as she feels once he takes up the offer, he’d be in the rat race stuck in the rut and bound hand and foot to the grindstone. Tom accuses Anna of his own disabilities and wants that she too should have a regular job now that he has one. Not relenting however Anna sticks to her guns and reaffirms that she’s “free to live as she likes.” Tom then wastes no time in reminding her that she has a duty towards her son. Woman thus is reminded of her femininity and motherhood is thrust upon her to bind her to domesticity. Realizing this Anna laments, “Always stick the knife in as hard as you can into a person’s weakest spot.” (P.9) Motherhood is again talked about when Janet Stevens arrives. She is an American and has been having an affair with Dave. In contrast to Anna, Janet holds conventionally feminine views. For her a marriage is no less than a career and she doesn’t mind Dave making fun of her because she took domestic science homecare and childcare as subjects in college. She says, “I believe marriage and family are the most rewarding career a woman can have”(p.22). After the philosophical talk centering around importance of family and marriage Janet quickly admits to the real reason for her arrival and it is because she is pregnant with Dave’s child. Janet epitomizes the plight of a woman. She is pregnant, but feels guilty of the fact and is in a dilemma whether she should let Dave know. She is also apprehensive that Dave might view the
whole thing as a trap. Janet has come searching for Dave as he has simply disappeared and she thinks Anna would know of his whereabouts. Looking at Anna one is reminded of Alison and how she found it so difficult to convey to her husband the fact that she was pregnant.

In *Play with a Tiger* both male and female characters fall in love. But the difference in their attitude is appalling. The female characters in the play, Anna, Mary and Janet, have varying attitudes towards marriage. Anna is clear about her priorities. She is economically independent and hence feels she does not have to get married for security. “I don’t have to sell myself out.” (p.16). In one of the flashbacks Anna recollects how she had refused Jack’s proposal of marriage. Marriage according to her, is a bondage and she prefers to keep her choices open. “You aren’t the world Jack,” she tells him “… All right then I’ll be unhappy, but I want a choice.” (p.32). Again in another of her flashbacks, when she is standing on the porch of her house after a quarrel with her mother as a young girl, she has her mind already made up “I am not going to be like you ma, I’m not… You’re stuck here. You never think of anything but me and my brother and the house…” Anna as a young girl, makes her choice very early in life, when apparently the only choice offered to women was to get married and have children. Anna doesn’t hold marriage in high esteem partly because she has seen the treatment meted out to women in this arrangement but partly also because she is a career woman. But at no point in the play does she attempt to mask her
feeling. She is truthful and her views are known to all the men who come in contact with her. When Dave proposes, she minces no words in telling him, “The wedding would be the last I’d see of you—You’d be off across the world like a dog with a fire cracker tied to its tail.’ (p.42) To Dave’s query whether this negative attitude is because of a broken marriage, she replies in the negative and calls it rather a “stable and well integrated” marriage in the worldly sense. She then stands up and shuddering at the very thought, recollects how her mother, who was quite talented and a gifted pianist could never touch a piano once she (Anna) was born. “My father never earned as much money as he thought life owed him ... My mother got more and more garrulous. In a word she was a nag. My father got more and more silent…” Thus the fact that marriage does nothing to further a woman’s career or her talent and the resentment is well brought out. Further in a psycho analytic session, Anna analyses her parents’ marriage and how insecure and incomplete they both felt within it. “The highest emotion they ever knew was a sort of ironic compassion... the compassion of one prisoner for another.” (p.48) Ever since she was nine, Anna had analyzed the so called stable marriages of her parents, her friends and her neighbours and it was enough for her to make up her mind that she shall have nothing to do with marriage. “I swore to God... I said God if I go down in loneliness and misery; if I die alone somewhere in a furnished room in a lonely city that doesn’t know me- I’ll do that sooner than marry as my father and mother were married.”(p.48) She sees them not as individuals growing together and complementing one another each
retaining their individuality, but rather as the jailed and the jailor, "living
together, talking to themselves and wandering what happened that made
them strangers" (p.49). At a later stage she ponders over the phrase "settle
down" in marriage which she believes is literally true as far as the woman
is concerned.

Janet on the other hand provides a complete contrast "I'm
just an ordinary girl and I want to be married." (p.23) Then there is Mary
who shares a room with Anna and is more often the butt of jokes with the
men. Both Tom and Harry show concern over the fact that she is
unmarried. What they can't comprehend is that any woman would choose
to remain a spinster, something that Anna not only fully understands but
also justifies. "Strange as it might seem to you, she doesn't want to get
married just for the sake of getting married" (p.18), she justifies. Harry
and Tom are at loggerheads but when it comes to marry both resound the
same opinion that Mary should marry "the first clot who comes
along."(p.18) to which Anna replies "perhaps she prefers to be sex starved
than to marry an idiot which is more than can be said about most
men."(p.18). Then there is Helen who does not actually appear in the play
but is often talked about. She is Harry's wife and the "forgiving woman"
whose husband goes around flirting with one woman after another and she
is supposed to forgive and forget. It is no surprise then that Helen is held
in higher esteem than Anna. Patriarchy has always made sure that women
remain biologically and psychologically dependent on men .Lundburg and
Farham declared that "the desire to be mother constituted the key to sexual pleasure and the culmination of the sex act actually occurred when the mother nursed the child who had been conceived".

These women are pitted against three men-Tom, Dave and Harry. According to Dave, marriage and family are no longer adequate compensation for the alienation of America. "You look at us and you see prosperity – and loneliness – prosperity and men and women in trouble with each other. Prosperity and people wondering what life is for,.” He has no qualms about making use of one woman to get rid of the other. Janet Stevens is pregnant with his child, but he wants none of the responsibilities associated with fatherhood. “I’m going to stand for you the mother of the world, the eternal conscience. I like women but I’m going to like them my way and not according to the rules laid down by the incorporated mothers of the universe.” (p.28) Janet Stevens is obviously no good for him though he did not think so when he was having an affair with her and got her pregnant. “How the hell could I marry her? She wouldn’t understand a word I ever said for a start.”(p.43) Anna knows Dave’s attitude, therefore she has categorically ruled out marriage. She knows she shall be left to herself the moment she marries Dave. She identifies Dave’s disillusion as embodied in a fear of female sexuality:” She's that terrible woman in your comic papers- a great masculine broad shouldered, narrow hipped black booted blonde beastess, with a whip in one hand and a revolver in the other. And that’s why you’re running.
She's after you --- as she's after every male American I've see.” (p.40) She further contends that the war between sexes “is the only clean war left. It’s the only clean war that won’t destroy us all. That’s why we are fighting it.” These speeches, as Michelene Wandor pointed out are echoes of Jimmy Porter’s substitution of the sex war for the class war, but the ideas are articulated here by a woman”.

Tom on his part is no better. Anna describes how Tom was living before he met her. “If he ever needed company, all he had to do was to ring up one of the many girls, he knew all of whom were in love with him “the telephone call at bedtime- are you free tonight, Elspeth, Penelope, Jessica? One of them came over, a drink or a cup of coffee, a couple of hours of bed and then a radio taxi home.” (p.19)

Thus women are made use of, exploited and then dumped by men. Harry is the worst. He is constantly cheating on his wife. He leaves her everyday and goes around philandering with other women. When asked about his wife, Harry replies in a much used formula, “Oh Helen is wonderful, delightful. She is very happy and loves me dearly.” (p.15). For him, the fact that he comes back to his wife is enough and his wife, according to him ought to be thankful for that. Anna knows men too well and therefore snaps back, “You married Helen who was very much in love with you. When she had turned into just another boring housewife and mother you began philandering. She had no alternative but to stay
put.” (p.16). Though Harry exploits women to get his own ends, he promises them nothing in return, yet he is dejected the moment any of his girlfriend decides to get married to someone else. His male ego gets hurt and he goes back in this moment of crises to weep on his wife’s shoulders and even expects sympathy in return. “She’ll forgive him alright. He’ll even use her compliance as an additional attraction for the little girls. My wife understands me he’ll say with a sloppy look on his face. (p.16) Harry is an ardent follower of Freud for he believes that women are there only for the male’s satisfaction. He wishes that there should be more women like Helen and not freethinking, independent ones like Anna. “God in his wisdom has ordained that there should be a certain number of understanding women in the world whose task is to bind up the wounds of men (P.69). Thus for men loving involves lies, hypocrisy and even secrecy, whereas women demand a basic honesty in the relationship. *Play with a Tiger* was also an important play as it was for the first time that anger, frustration and sexual drive as motive forces were shown as strong in women as in men. And the play intrigues one because here anger and sexuality were accepted not only as attributes of realistic characters but also as sources of female power.

Thus though Doris Lessing did not consciously write from the feminist stance, yet she wrote of woman’s experience. Literature written by women thus becomes different from that written by men that is, invariably male-oriented. As Showalter said that “because of their
educational, experiential, and biological handicaps,” women develop their “sympathy, sentiment and powers of observation” to bring the substance and significance of the female experience to readers"". This is also because of a distinctly female vision.
Notes:

1. (http://www.arlindo.coercia.com.)

2. Doris Lessing, Each His Own Wilderness in Three Plays by Lessing, Halls and Hasting. (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1968) 87. All subsequent quotations have been taken from the above edition and have incorporated in the text.


