



THE PARADOX OF FREE WOMEN IN DORIS LESSING'S "THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK"

DORIS LESSING'İN "ALTIN DEFTER" ADLI ROMANINDA ÖZGÜR KADIN ÇELİŞKİSİ

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Abstract

Although Doris Lessing's "The Golden Notebook" is regarded as a feminist novel by many scholars, it is also mostly criticised due to the overt male domination upon various female characters. Moving away from the feminist purpose by focusing on the experiences and struggles of these different women characters, Lessing emphasises the significance of peeling off all the socially constructed labels and recognising the distinctive true identity particular to each woman. Following this focus, the author also creates an analogy between the content and the form of the novel by reflecting the chaos in the mind of the women characters to the chaotic form which is divided into parts. Hereby, it can be aptly argued that by building a chaotic atmosphere around the women characters who deem themselves free, Lessing problematises the concept of free women in this particular novel. This paper sets out to analyse how Lessing illustrates the paradox of free women in "The Golden Notebook" through the chaotic content and form.

Öz

Doris Lessing'in "Altın Defter" adlı romanı birçokları tarafından feminist bir roman olarak değerlendirilmesine rağmen, çeşitli kadın karakterler üzerinde bariz bir şekilde görülen erkek egemenliğinden ötürü de çoğunlukla eleştirilmiştir. Farklı kadınların deneyim ve mücadelelerine odaklanarak feminist amacından uzaklaşan Lessing, bu romanda sosyal çevre tarafından inşa edilmiş etiketlerden sıyrılıp her kadına özgü doğru ve gerçek kimliği bulmanın önemini vurgular. Bu odak noktası doğrultusunda yazar, kadınların zihinlerindeki kaosu, romanda bölümlere ayrılmış olan kaotik düzene yansıtarak romanın içeriği ve formatı arasında da bir paralellik kurar. Bundan dolayı, Lessing'in kendilerini özgür addeden kadın karakterler için kaotik bir atmosfer yaratarak özgür kadınlar fikrini sorunsallaştırdığını iddia etmek yerinde olur. Bu çalışma, Lessing'in "Altın Defter" romanında özgür kadın çelişkisini kaotik bir içerik ve format kullanarak nasıl resmettiğini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

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Introduction

Doris Lessing (1919-2013) is regarded as "one of the early voices of the feminist movement" by many scholars and critics (Whittaker 18). With the translation of her novels into various languages from Spanish to Turkish, she has gained international fame. Additionally, her early years spent in Africa and her description of these years in her novels even place her among the African writers in African literature (Cairnie 13-16). One of these novels is *The Golden Notebook* (1962) which is believed to be a key text in the feminist movement of the 1960s. Even though this aspect of the novel is an issue still debated, the reason to consider the novel a feminist literary work is its content dwelling on the struggles of women in the 1960s, including marriage, motherhood, politics and professions. Upon this vantage point, the novel is regarded

as a ground-breaking and thought-provoking work by women writers and feminists such as the British writer Natalie Hanman who states that “*reading this book changed [her]*” and also “*helped to steer [her] towards knowing which questions to ask, in order to try to do things differently*” (“Doris Lessing”). Nevertheless, some reviewers are irritated by the “*overstated political message*” of the novel while others emphasise a “*sex war*” that constitutes most of it (“Doris Lessing”). It can be concluded from what Julie Cairnie registers on Lessing’s reaction for all of these comments that she finds most of the reviews hostile and argues that “*[t]he novel could not be written now*” (16-18). Yet, the novel continues to be a milestone not just for Lessing’s career but also for women readers. Margaret Moan Rowe records that

[d]espite Lessing’s statements, the most recent American paperback edition of *The Golden Notebook* underscores the novel’s power over women readers when it quotes from Elizabeth Hardwick’s review for *The New York Times*. According to Hardwick, ‘*The Golden Notebook* is Doris Lessing’s most important work and has left its mark upon the ideas and feelings of a whole generation of women.’ (36).

The reason for such an impact of the novel is the portrayal of the chaotic lifestyles of the women of the sixties in a realist manner by revealing the illusion of freedom. The protagonist of the novel, Anna, creates an illusionary world in which she deems herself free and independent, which leads to her psychological breakdown. Even though *The Golden Notebook* covers many aspects of life from social to political and from economic to literary, this psychological condition of the protagonist and how she recovers from it are the main themes of the novel. By building a chaotic atmosphere around the women characters who deem themselves free, Lessing problematises the concept of free women in this particular novel. From this critical stance, this paper sets out to analyse how Lessing illustrates the paradox of free women in this particular novel by portraying freedom as an illusion through the chaotic content and form.

It is important to notice the ongoing discussions about the autobiographical elements forming the content of Lessing’s novel since they blur the line between fact and fiction for the critics and readers. According to Roberta Rubenstein, Lessing accepts that the third and fourth volumes of *Children of Violence*, titled *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958) and *Landlocked* (1965) are “*the most ‘directly autobiographical’ of all of her fiction, after which, she claims, she ‘left autobiography behind’*” (99). Critics agree that *The Golden Notebook* consists of many factual characters and events with which Lessing is familiar. Yet, interestingly, Lessing herself states in an interview that

“she was ‘appalled’ at the ‘frivolity’ and ‘amateurishness’ of the reviews” (qtd. in Schlueter 29-30). According to Lessing, while focusing on the autobiographical elements, the reviewers missed the main point in the novel which is the fragmentation in Anna’s life. The clear affinities between the author and the author-protagonist of the novel are mostly interpreted by the critics as Lessing’s attempt to create a representation of herself in the novel. Such a tendency of the critics is voiced by the author herself as confusion and she accuses them of “turn[ing] the book into ‘*The Confessions of Doris Lessing*’” (qtd. in Schlueter 30). One of the detailed studies on the issue belongs to Rubenstein in which she makes an analogy between Lessing’s romantic relationships at the time she writes the novel and those of the protagonist. Rubenstein also argues that the novel in question was written before Lessing’s claims regarding her break with the autobiographical form (99). She continues to portray the years Lessing was writing *The Golden Notebook* which

draws significantly and at times quite transparently on her political, aesthetic, and intimate experiences during the fifties. During that decade, she had two significant romantic relationships, each of four years’ duration—with an émigré Czech psychiatrist whom she gives the pseudonymous name ‘Jack’ in her autobiography and with an American expatriate named Clancy Sigal who, though later a novelist and film-script writer, was unpublished when he and Lessing met. (99).

By attracting the attention to lots of similarities between Lessing’s life and her novel, Rubenstein proposes that the novel becomes a ground for the author to intermingle fact and fiction so much so that even the protagonist, Anna Wulf, is also not capable of creating a fictitious work without being influenced by her own life (100). Anna’s unpublished novel, *The Shadow of the Third*, works as a site for the character in which she analyses and discusses her literary and romantic relationships through another fictional woman writer, Ella. Putting aside the different views, Lessing’s use of autobiographical elements in this novel is to blur the strict boundaries around fact and fiction, which will be discussed later in this study.

Whether *The Golden Notebook* is an autobiography or not, it is for sure that it portrays the struggles and breakdowns of not only the women of the sixties but also of the following periods since the issues Lessing delves into in the novel such as the question of freedom, the possibility of a healthy relationship between two people and the question of responsibility are still waiting to be answered. Accordingly, it would be wrong to assume that the novel offers a clear-cut solution to the problems

mentioned above. Instead, it suggests, with the epiphanic moment of Anna at the end of the novel, that the reason for the struggles and difficulties of a woman's life lies in the motivation to form a unified identity by disregarding the binaries created by social codes.

The Chaotic Content and Form

In addition to the discussion on the autobiographical elements, *The Golden Notebook* is a revolutionary work in terms of its content and form. As a point of fact, the content and the form of the novel seem to complement each other. Contextually, it tells the story of a "free woman," Anna Freeman Wulf, and her experiences which are gained from her relationships with a number of people/characters including her friends, lovers, her daughter, Janet, and also her professional relations. According to Ruth Whittaker, "[o]ne of Mrs Lessing's aims in *The Golden Notebook* is to give readers an idea of the intellectual and moral climate of Britain in the mid-twentieth century, and she does this by using themes which seem to her to convey that climate" (61). This thematic aspect paves the way for the novel to be placed among the British realist novels. Yet, Lessing's understanding of realism differs from her contemporaries whom Lessing finds inadequate and deficient in terms of presenting a larger vision of life including all humanity, not just the standard British way (Mulkeen 263). This is a different and diverse version of realism Lessing portrays in *The Golden Notebook*. She conveys this realist climate through Anna's personal and political relations since she has multiple roles in the novel as a mother, wife, friend, lover, writer and communist.

While Lessing creates a realist tone through the thematic concerns, she uses and abuses the realist aspect of the novel in the chaos created by different notebooks of Anna. Especially in the red notebook, the real events are conveyed to the fiction with newspaper clippings. However, to employ all of these identities in one character and also in one novel, Lessing experiments with the form of the work by creating it in a fragmented style, which disrupts the realist tone. Commenting on such a quality of the novel, she states that it "is an attempt to break a form; to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them" (qtd. in Schlueter 32). In a similar fashion, Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis reads this structural pattern as a revolt against

the limitations imposed by the traditional novel form; it encourages boundaries and limitations in the name of clarity, it does not allow for enough freedom and open endedness to portray complex experiences. Hence it cannot convey a flexible, creative preception [*sic*] of reality, a

perception that allows for the breaking down of the divisions that define but also limit people. (427).

In order to demonstrate the psychological breakdown of Anna, the author challenges the realist aspect of the novel by breaking the form into pieces each of which tells the moral and intellectual climate of the age from a different perspective. Accordingly, in the novel, Anna has four notebooks for “*the variety of moods, memories, thoughts, conscious and unconscious motives and habits that make up the individual Anna Wulf*” (Whittaker 64). Since Anna is torn between the roles and the duties she has to fulfil, she would like to gather the pieces of her life up by categorising her thoughts, feelings and memories in these notebooks. The notebooks are separated according to their colours: “[A] black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook, in which [she] make[s] stories out of [her] experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary” (*The Golden Notebook*¹ 475). Even though Anna has four different notebooks for four different contexts, it is clear in the novel that the categorisation of her life is impossible for Anna since she sometimes writes her experiences disregarding the context of the notebooks: “*This art of comment belongs to the blue notebook, not this one*” (GN 536). Additionally, Tommy, the son of Anna’s friend, Molly, emphasises that these thoughts and memories are presented in a chaotic form albeit Anna’s categorisations: “*I don’t think there’s a pattern anywhere - you are just making patterns, out of cowardice*” (GN 275). The chaos in the notebooks is reflected in Anna’s divided and fragmented personality even though she struggles to find a unified identity for herself. Hereby, Whittaker proposes that “*Doris Lessing, is, to some extent, parodying the conventional realist novel, and by its flatness allows us to see how the chaos and vitality of the notebooks has indeed been structured, but in the process, diminished*” (66). It can be rightfully argued that this chaos proposed by the notebooks is so universal and impersonal that it both contributes to the realist aspect of the novel by emphasising the vitality of such a breakdown and subverts it by blurring the line between fact and fiction.

Furthermore, while telling the same events in a nonlinear way and in different notebooks several times, Anna makes changes in the details and even the name of the characters. At first, it can be thought that the notebooks are Anna’s subjective accounts of events which are objectively told by an omniscient narrator in the “Free Women” sections. However, it is understood through the end of the novel that the section titled “Free Women” is a novel written by Anna who is able to recover from

¹ The title of the novel will be given as *GN* in the following quotations.

the writer's block with the help of Saul in the final golden notebook. The first sentence of the novel *Free Women*, "[t]he two women were alone in the London flat" (GN 3), indicates that the "Free Women" sections which have been read as facts since the beginning of the novel are also fiction. Thus, these sections "may take all the liberties of fiction. There is no reason for the 'facts' they contain to agree totally (or at all) with the 'facts' in the notebooks" (Carey 440). According to John L. Carey, this is the structural plan of Lessing in *The Golden Notebook*. The reality for Lessing is the entanglement of fact and fiction and they cannot be separated, limited or categorised similar to Anna who cannot categorise her real life and her fictional works. Carey aptly argues that

an essential condition for reality's existence is the almost futile attempt of the artist to give it form. He [the artist] does this, not by artificially imposing words, but by letting the form grow organically from the whole of 'reality,' from 'fact' and 'fiction,' dream and waking, the subjective and the objective. (454).

Even though Anna categorises her life in the notebooks as fact and fiction and uses newspaper clippings to promote the realist effect, she is not able to write since she does not let the fact and fiction intermingle and "grow organically" in Carey's words. It is not until she celebrates the chaos in her life that she begins to write. To further argue, this structural plan explains all the discussions on the autobiographical aspect of the novel between the author and the critics. Creating Anna, Lessing aims to demonstrate the inseparable feature between the life of the author and the fictional works s/he writes. From a different perspective, this chaos, lack of unity and fragmentation in the novel, according to Sophia Barnes, creates a multiplicity of voices: "If we read *The Golden Notebook* as polyphonic, we can reinvigorate the terms of existing debate regarding Lessing's simultaneous employment and subversion of novelistic conventions, foregrounding the interplay between convention and subversion as the source of the novel's innovation" (136). Barnes contends that Lessing's novel is not only a subversion of the traditional forms but it is a "reformulation of the literary form itself" (135), which deconstructs dichotomies and continuously produces new discourses and critiques. It can be stated that Lessing both benefits from the perspectives provided by the realist novel and also deconstructs the conventional style with a new characterisation in regard to the novel's chaotic structure. Therefore, *The Golden Notebook* with its unique style is Lessing's contribution to the realist convention regardless of the subversion it contains.

The Golden Notebook as a Subversion of Feminist Novel

Since its publication, *The Golden Notebook* has been studied and discussed in several aspects regarding its thematic concerns such as Marxism, colonialism, racism, the role of the artist in society, and most importantly, feminism. Capitalising on such a range of themes, it can be asserted that the novel mirrors the social, political and literary circumstances of the mid-twentieth century. To further argue, it not only mirrors but also parodies the mainstream movements of the age in a realist tone. In this respect, Lessing subverts classical feminism by problematising the concept of free women through the explicit male domination and motherhood in this novel. Even though the novel is considered a milestone for Women's Liberation at the time it was written, recent criticism agrees that it is not a feminist text for various reasons. Lessing refuses such an interpretation in the 1971 preface of the novel stating that "*this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation. It [...] was written as if the attitudes that have been created by the Women's Liberation movements already existed*" (9). In parallel with this, Carole Klein avers that Lessing explained her approach to the movement in an interview with Lesley Hazleton in 1982:

Lessing insisted that the novel was not meant as a call to arms for women's liberation. In fact, none of her books had been written from a specifically feminist perspective. She felt that the women's movement had latched on to the book because it was a new kind of writing about women. (192).

After these explanations, Elizabeth Wilson suggests that critics agree with Lessing denying to read it as a feminist text because of Anna's characterisation as an "*antithesis of women's liberation*": The feminists of the late 1960s "*were trying not to feel bounded within masculine sexuality. They were trying to find a voice in politics, to live politics, to take women into the political arena instead of rejecting the political arena as an ultimate falsification*" (Wilson 60). Lessing, on the other hand, prefers to state the problems these women came across in the sixties in a realist way. She challenges the concept of free women and reveals the illusion created by such movements.

As opposed to the Women's Liberation movement that seeks to be accepted in every area of life as the 'other' rather than trying to resemble the male counterparts, the protagonist of Lessing's novel, Anna, attempts to gain her freedom by mimicking the men around her. While trying to achieve freedom in every aspect of her life, Anna actually loses her identity and starts to question who she is. That is why and how she becomes a member of the Communist Party: to define who she is, to find unity

in her life and to recover from her breakdown. Therefore, the feminist subtext is just one of the layers in the novel contributing to the main concern which is Anna's breakdown from social, political and literary perspectives. In a similar manner, Whittaker claims that *The Golden Notebook* should not be read as a "purely feminist novel simply because of the women's dissatisfaction with men, since this interpretation means ignoring many of the things Doris Lessing is actually saying" (68). Dwelling on these various layers in this novel, Moan Rowe pinpoints the paradoxical nature of the novel focusing on the bodily experience since

[i]n *The Golden Notebook* Lessing kills 'the Angel of the Body' and gets close to what Woolf said she and no other woman writer had been able to do: 'telling the truth about my experiences as a body'. Lessing does this on the level of fiction and metafiction as Anna records her own physical experiences and as she analyses the problems of a woman writing about sex. In the yellow notebook Ella/Anna/Lessing celebrate the vaginal over the clitoral orgasm, the emotional over the mechanical attitude toward sexuality. (42-43).

Bringing the sexual experiences to the front, Moan Rowe attracts attention to the search for the physical self. While Anna is disgusted by her naked body and her period blood at the beginning, she realises towards the end, in the "Golden Notebook" section, that this is who she is. She finally finds the unified identity she has been looking for as she travels over her body map and she becomes conscious of her sexual needs as a woman. Sternberg Perrakis concludes that "Anna can now feel separate from others but also have a sense of kinship with them that doesn't overwhelm her own sense of identity" (426). Instead of picturing liberal feminist characters who fight for a social and political place in society, Lessing lays bare the problems of being a woman in the 1960s from the perspective of women searching for who they are. While creating psychologically weak and dependent women characters, Lessing, as a matter of fact, honestly demonstrates the problems of the women of the 1960s. Thus, the novel stands on a paradoxical ground where its precise nature cannot be decided. Rather than marking this literary work whether feminist or not, its chaotic atmosphere must be celebrated. In this context, Elizabeth Maslen proposes that Lessing is "always primarily concerned with social change, with the social constraints on both men and women as to their gender roles, rather than with specific explorations of women in terms of solely sexual difference" (24). Instead of detecting binaries in every aspect of life, Lessing emphasises the significance of unity and entanglement in women's movement. In addition to her contribution to the realist convention, this

kind of subversion of classical feminism can also be studied as Lessing's share in the feminist movement.

The Paradox of Free Women

Even though the core of the work is the novel titled *Free Women*, the protagonists of this part of the work, Anna and her friend Molly's freedom is questionable because it seems that they both need love, marriage and even male domination in their lives although they call themselves free women. Maslen rightly suggests that

[t]he idea of being a 'free' woman, a woman living outside the confines of marriage, is full of ironies as she comes to explore the concept in the context of her time; for according to the prevailing attitudes to man/woman relationships, 'Free' women are too often seen as simply good lays. (22).

Both Anna and Molly are divorced and become single mothers because they do not love their husbands. The reason for their marriage is revealed at the beginning as "a need for security and even respectability," but not for love (GN 7). Marriage is a safe zone for them in which they will be 'free' from the accusations of society. Claiming to be free women in terms of their sexual lives as they can have sex with whoever they want, both Anna and Molly try to resemble their male counterparts as they associate freedom with sexuality. Therefore, their freedom results in their being mistresses of men who are in an unhappy marriage bond, which is quite ironic. What is also interesting for these characters is that, albeit their different personalities, Anna and Molly are the same from the perspective of the traditional society and its codes since they both are different and the other. It is clear that they are "interchangeable" and "play the same role for people" (GN 7-8). The interchangeability does not stem from their similar personalities but "only the way of life they try to pursue with the sexual freedom in it makes them the same from the one-sided male perspective" (Arslan 59-60). Seval Arslan continues to explain the situation which Anna and Molly are put into by society:

In their attempt to resist the social norms restricting women's lives and freedom, Anna and Molly cannot save themselves from falling into a different definition which regards them as free women although they are not that free at all. They cannot still become individuals on their own, but they are defined as a different group of women that cannot fit into the structure perfectly. (60).

Their nonconformist nature is also revealed by Anna claiming that “[they] try to have things both ways. [They]’ve always refused to live by the book and the rule” (GN 11). This is to demonstrate how this type of free women is categorised and othered by society eliminating their differences. Such an attempt to categorise women is similar to what Anna does with her life in the notebooks. Even though she claims to live not by the book, Anna is ostensibly influenced by the social restrictions and definitions. Her insistence to define her social, political and literary roles demonstrates that she lives by the book and the rule of society.

Ironically enough, Anna and Molly’s definition of themselves as free women is triggered by another woman character, their binary opposition in the story, Marion who is the wife of Molly’s ex-husband, Richard. From their perspective, Marion is the ideal angel in the house, a submissive wife and an affectionate mother to the children. Moreover, she is defined by them as “*stupid ordinary Marion*” (GN 27). However, even though Marion does perfectly fit into the structure, she is again “*treated like a housewife or a hostess, but never as a human being*” (GN 22). As opposed to Anna and Molly, Marion cannot find the strength to leave Richard at the beginning of the novel and to become a single mother regardless of the fact that she is ignored and even cheated by her husband. Therefore, it can be argued that even though her marriage provides her with a safe zone that free women lack, Marion’s life is also chaotic, fragmented and lacks unity. Her fragmentation is revealed in her dialogue with Anna. Marion says: “*Oh but I think I’ve come because I’m envious. You are what I want to be – you’re free, and you have lovers and you do as you like*” (GN 279). Similar to Anna and Molly, Marion is also in need of finding and saving herself from this chaotic life, which she is able to do in the end by devoting herself to the prisoners in Africa to provide them with better lives. When Marion gives up her self-sacrificing roles as a wife and a mother, she becomes the other and a threat to Richard’s life. Yet, together with Tommy, Marion reaches a full awareness of herself, her capabilities and her individuality as a woman, which are taken away from her behind the marriage mask. To put it differently, Marion who forgets about her femaleness starts to question her life, duties and sacrifices under the labels of wife and mother. She realises that she is more than those labels, she is a woman first.

However, with a different approach from Marion, Anna believes that being in love with a man organises her life to some extent. Upon Marion’s remarks on freedom, Anna answers: “*I’m not free,’ said Anna; heard the dryness in her tone and understood she must banish it. She said: ‘Marion, I’d like to be married. I don’t like living like this’*”

(GN 279). Making an analogy between marriage and order, Anna would like to eliminate the chaos in her life by being a wife since this definition draws a clear picture for her rather than being the other, “free” woman. That is why every time she is left by a man, she finds herself devastated. This kind of male domination is an organised, orderly life and a safety zone for Anna in which she can categorise herself among other ordinary women. By analysing marriage with two different approaches, Lessing subverts the conventional account of marriage as an orderly life. Additionally, she proves that “*the first step should be taken by women to free themselves from this dependence to achieve a quest for identity and freedom*” (Arslan 75). Accordingly, she pictures Anna, in the final “The Golden Notebook” section, as saving herself from her chaotic world not through a marriage bond but only through recognition of her faults and abilities.

Anna’s thoughts on marriage can also be observed in Ella, Anna’s fictional character in her novel *The Shadow of the Third*. Ella’s romantic life and her relationship with Paul, a married man, are the reflections of Anna’s real-life experiences. Being in a relationship represents the safety zone for Ella since only then she is aware of who she is. Ella is even jealous of Paul’s wife for being in that safety zone:

At first Ella does not think about her. Then she has to make a conscious effort not to think about her. This is when she knows her attitude towards this unknown woman is despicable: she feels triumph over her, pleasure that she has taken Paul from her. When Ella first becomes conscious of this emotion she is so appalled and ashamed that she buries it, fast. Yet the shadow of the third grows again, and it becomes impossible for Ella not to think. She thinks a great deal about the invisible woman to whom Paul returns (and to whom he will always return), and it is now not out of triumph, but envy. She envies her. She slowly, involuntarily, builds up a picture in her mind of a serene, calm, unjealous, unenvious, undemanding woman, full of resources of happiness inside herself, self-sufficient, yet always ready to give happiness when it is asked for. (GN 206-207).

It can be observed that Ella idealises Paul’s wife by picturing her as “calm, unjealous, unenvious, undemanding” because being a wife requires such titles. Focusing on the motif of Paul’s wife, one can also question the title of Anna’s novel, *The Shadow of the Third*, since it is not clear who the shadow is in this novel: Ella or Paul’s wife. Yet, dwelling on the lack of unity and boundary in Ella’s identity, it can be aptly argued

that Ella is the formless and blurry shadow in this story who cannot determine who she is without Paul. Therefore, it can be put forward that similar to Anna, Ella also alternates between being an angel in the house and a free woman. She goes through an identity conflict between the past and the present, between the conventional gender roles and the New Woman. Interestingly enough, even though she is the mistress of the man she loves, she regards this relationship as a serious one, even as a marriage. Considering this fact, she acts as if she is Paul's wife as it can be pointed out in Paul's statement: "*But Ella, you're my mistress, not my wife. Why do you want me to share all the serious business of life with you?*" (GN 212). The fact that he draws a line between his wife and mistress indicates that, according to him, a free woman lacks the qualities of a wife. Paul constantly reminds her that she is his mistress, insults and degrades her with questions about her sexuality and also with comments on how she looks. Yet, no matter what Paul says, Ella believes that he is the right man for her and changes herself according to Paul's wishes, which shows her dependence on Paul.

Male Domination

In addition to the codes the marriage institution holds as a safety zone for these women, dependence on men can be visible in the professions of Anna and Ella, as well. Both of these characters are writers who experience writer's block throughout the novel. Yet, their writing skills are undermined by both their lovers and also other males who dominate the language and the industry of novel writing. Both of these women use their writing ability to analyse their relationships with a second thought and from the perspective of an outsider. Ella, as Anna's protagonist, is portrayed as a dependent woman similar to the author herself and functions as Anna's alter-ego who helps her to understand her relationship with Michael. It is stated by Carey that

[b]y allowing both Ella's character and the plot of the novel to work themselves out organically and naturally, Anna uses both to help her understand her own relations with Michael, of whom Paul, Ella's lover, is also a projection. Anna's love affair with Michael was the central event of her personal life during her first years in England. Like Paul, Michael is a married doctor who returns to his wife. Through the use of this 'fictional' work ('fictional' in the sense that it is written by a 'fictitious' character), Lessing performs another intricate step in her attempt to 'break certain forms of consciousness.' (449-450).

Additionally, Ella's stories are also written traditionally with the concept of love and project her relationship with Paul. In other words, these characters write in order to figure out their lives, relationships and to reach a level of consciousness. It is also ironic that the males in their lives challenge this function of fictional writing by limiting their identity as a writer and also insulting their writing ability, which leads them to experience writer's block. Ella hides her writings from Paul in case he may not like them and she is ready to give up writing if Paul wants: "*Suppose Paul had said to me: I'll marry you if you promise never to write another word? My God, I would have done it!*" (GN 314). Albeit her being a free woman, Ella is not in search of an independent identity but longs for a stable identity by being the wife of Paul.

In a similar fashion to Ella, Anna's novel is subverted by the film industry which is another male-dominated business. The film producers would like to simplify her novel *Frontiers of War* into a love story that takes place in England. The novel, originally, takes place in Africa and dwells on the social, economic and political issues in a colonial land. Anna bears the guilt for this novel due to the responsibility she feels as a writer, especially a communist one, to employ more universal themes by embracing all humankind but on an individual level. However, she is entrapped between the personal fictions and the communal facts and the ability of the language to convey these truths. Caryn Fuoroli asserts that "*[t]he first black notebook section reveals that Anna's writer block comes partly from her guilt at having written Frontiers of War [...]. What seemed to have been a representation of truth at the time it was written, now appears to be dishonest*" (148). To put it differently, Anna's search for unity and wholeness is reflected in her first novel and the language she uses there behind the conflict between the personal and communal issues. In a similar vein, her joining the Communist party also stems from her longing for unity and belonging in her life. However, she is disappointed due to the lack of solidarity in the party as depicted by her upon listening to a factual story from a member of the party:

What seemed to me important was that it could be read as parody, irony or seriously. It seems to me this fact is another expression of the fragmentation of everything, the painful disintegration of something that is linked with what I feel to be true about language, the thinning of language against the density of our experience. (GN 302).

Similar to her identity, the language is also fragmented according to Anna and that fragmentation manifests itself in the account of true meaning. That is to say that Anna becomes aware after that scene in the party that the patriarchal language used by the party members lacks the unity to convey the facts and to embrace every aspect

of life. That language serves the patriarchal and capitalist norms regardless of the ideals of the party. Because of that, she cannot find a place for herself at the party, either. As a result, she leaves the party disappointed since it cannot provide her with unity and order.

Motherhood

Lessing makes use of the theme of motherhood to subvert the classical feminist ideas since motherhood is presented as another side of the fragmentation in these women characters. In addition to getting married, being a mother is a way to determine their identities, a way to categorise their lives. Moreover, by introducing three different motherhood through three different mothers, the author seems to assert that there is no ideal in motherhood. All of them represent the issue of motherhood on different levels. The responsibilities of a mother limit these women so much so that they seem to lose other sides of their personalities to become good and caring mothers for the children. While Marion is already a self-sacrificing mother who devoted her life to her children, Molly is always held responsible by Richard for Tommy's suicide attempt and later his blindness, which she strongly rejects at the beginning. So, in a way, Marion and Molly seem to exchange their roles as mothers towards the end of the novel. That is to say that when Tommy goes blind, Marion gives up sacrificing her life and identity for her children, but instead, Molly takes up this role from Marion, the woman she despises at the beginning by calling her stupid. Later in the story, Molly takes responsibility for Tommy's attempt by showing him a great amount of care, never leaving home and sacrificing her life in order to be a mother, a guide for Tommy. In this respect, Tommy's blindness should be interpreted metaphorically because after the suicide attempt, his eyes are opened to the realities in the world and he reaches self-satisfaction. Molly, on the other hand, loses her sight, vision and aim in life by sacrificing herself for her son. While Molly is not around him as a guide at the beginning, after Richard's accusations, she feels the burden and turns into a 'mother' in the conventional sense.

Anna and Ella, from the beginning of the novel, are in that liminal point between motherhood and free women. Although they regard themselves as free, they cannot get rid of their maternal duties, which makes them dependent on their child. For instance, whenever Ella is out with Paul, she keeps thinking about her son Michael and feels guilty for not being around him. Similarly, Anna's lifestyle is so much drawn around Janet that she always tries to find a reconciliation between her lovers and her daughter. She is a significant part of her daily routine in which Janet is actually

'mothering Anna.' Anna's motherhood is interpreted by Arslan in the following quotation:

Anna takes her motherhood as a means of claiming herself normal and ordinary, because in her other role as a free woman she is full of disappointments and failures. Every time she feels herself in a chaos, she makes sure that Janet is there for her to be responsible for so that she has a meaning in her life to keep her sane and strong. (Arslan 100).

That is why she is devastated and feels rejected when Janet goes to boarding school since she is her normality, her security and responsibility (GN 543). Therefore, motherhood becomes a safety zone for Anna in those times when she cannot find a man to marry. She conforms to the strict codes of society regarding a woman's identity by continuing to display her motherhood on Janet. However, through the end, Anna realises that motherhood is a limitation to her identity: "*An Anna is coming to life that died when Janet was born*" (GN 548). She becomes aware of the fact that defining her roles in the borders of motherhood killed her identity. In the end, she understands this situation clearly as finding her unified self away from all other etiquettes of society such as a wife, lover and mother. She is now just Anna.

Conclusion

To conclude, in *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing portrays the paradox of free women with an emphasis on the chaotic content and form of the novel. The struggles experienced by the women of the 1960s and how these struggles lead to a conflict and a psychological breakdown in the female identity are the main thematic focus in the novel. However, the author presents the situation ironically by illustrating conformist females who regard themselves as free. That is why, rather than directing harsh criticism to the patriarchy, Lessing makes a critique of women who undermine their ability and reduce their identity to those of patriarchal codes. She sheds light upon the illusionary world of free women by problematising the concept. Moreover, the realist effect built through the content is deconstructed with the chaotic style of the notebooks in which Lessing intermingles fact and fiction. Dwelling on the fragmentation and the breakdown of the protagonist Anna through the free women paradox, she ostensibly challenges the traditional forms of writing in terms of theme and style. Lessing uses and also abuses the conventional realism and feminist movement in order to make a statement on women's struggles in the sixties.

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Summary

Doris Lessing is one of the significant figures in feminist literary criticism. Accordingly, her novels are mostly studied as key texts in feminist movement. One of these novels is *The Golden Notebook* (1962) in which Lessing honestly and realistically portrays the fragmented and chaotic lifestyles of the women of the 1960s. Although her novels influenced a whole generation of women, it would be a reduction to read her novels just from the feminist perspective. Even though *The Golden Notebook* covers many aspects of life from social to political and from economic to literary, the psychological condition of the protagonist, Anna, and how she recovers from it are the main themes in the novel. By building a chaotic atmosphere around the women characters and shedding light into their illusion of freedom, Lessing problematises the concept of free women in this particular novel. From this critical stance, this paper sets out to analyse how Lessing illustrates the paradox of free women in this particular novel through the chaotic content and form.

The Golden Notebook is a revolutionary work in terms of its content and form. As a point of fact, the content and the form of the novel seem to complement each other. Contextually, it tells the story of a "free woman," Anna Freeman Wulf, and her experiences which are gained from her relationships with a number of persons including her friends, lovers, her daughter, Janet, and also her professional relations. While Lessing creates a realist tone through the thematic concerns, she uses and abuses the realist aspect of the novel in the chaos created by different notebooks of Anna. Especially in the red notebook, the real events are conveyed to the fiction with newspaper clippings. However, to employ all of these identities in one character and also in one novel, Lessing experiments with the form of the work by creating it in a fragmented style, which disrupts the realist tone. In order to demonstrate the

psychological breakdown of Anna, the author challenges the realist aspect of the novel by breaking the form into pieces each of which tells the moral and intellectual climate of the age from a different perspective. Since Anna is torn between the roles and the duties she has to fulfil, she would like to gather the pieces of her life up by categorising her thoughts, feelings and memories in these notebooks. The notebooks are separated according to their colours: “[A] black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook, in which [she] make[s] stories out of [her] experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary” (GN 475). Even though Anna has four different notebooks for four different contexts, it is clear in the novel that the categorisation of her life is impossible for Anna since she sometimes writes her experiences disregarding the context of the notebooks. The chaos in the notebooks is reflected in Anna’s divided and fragmented personality even though she struggles to find a unified identity for herself.

The novel has a wide range of thematic concerns from Marxism to colonialism and racism. Capitalising on such a range of themes, it can be asserted that the novel mirrors the social, political and literary circumstances of the mid-twentieth century. To further argue, it not only mirrors but also parodies the mainstream movements of the age in a realist tone. In this respect, Lessing subverts classical feminism by problematising the concept of free women through the explicit male domination and motherhood in this novel. The protagonist of the novel, Anna, is portrayed as an “antithesis of women’s liberation” (Wilson 60). Even though she deems herself free, Anna is dependent on every title attributed by the society to her. She defines her identity through such titles and believes that this would bring order and safety in her life. That is why the concept of free women is presented as a paradox in this novel. Dwelling on this concept as an illusion, Lessing lays bare the social, political and literary problems of the women of the 1960s in a realist tone.

To conclude, albeit *The Golden Notebook* is studied as a feminist text for a long time, it can be realised that it subverts the classical feminist ideas. Instead of imposing feminist ideals, Lessing illustrates this paradox of free women by building a chaotic content and form in this particular novel. Focusing on the fragmentation and the breakdown of the protagonist Anna through the free women paradox, she ostensibly challenges the traditional forms of writing in terms of theme and style. Lessing uses and also abuses the conventional realism and feminist movement in order to make a statement on women’s struggles in the sixties.