

The Construction of *The Golden Notebook*

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This essay will try to answer a number of questions familiarly asked of narratives, and to suggest why the answers found in this instance help to measure the remarkable achievement that is *The Golden Notebook*.¹ Moreover, since this book is similar in some respects to other works of our time—books which appear

¹ Oddly enough very little has appeared in print which is concerned with the structure of the book, though what has appeared indicates the need for such analysis. Frederick P. W. McDowell, for example, in two essays says that *The Golden Notebook* is courageous but disorganized; more ideological than aesthetically formed—despite some nice scenes and characterization. See his articles, “The Devious Involutions of Human Character and Emotions’: Reflections on Some Recent British Novels,” *WSCL*, 4 (Autumn 1963), 339-366; and “The Fiction of Doris Lessing: An Interim View,” *ArQ*, 21 (Winter 1965), 315-345. Dorothy Brewster, in *Doris Lessing* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., [1965]), pp. 136-157, remarks upon the numerous questions raised by *The Golden Notebook* and upon its many thematic interests, and points out the Mashopi Hotel episodes of the black book as especially effective; but she regards the questions as for the most part unanswered, and, like McDowell, is not much taken with particulars of structure. On the other hand, Selma Burkom, in “‘Only Connect’: Form and Content in the Works of Doris Lessing,” *Critique*, 11 (1969), 51-68, uses Forster’s famous slogan to good effect in discussing Lessing’s books, though on the subject of *The Golden Notebook* her interest in humanistic realism and the need to reconcile splits is more focused on theme than on structure, however admirably focused. I am indebted to the Burkom essay on thematic matters, as indeed to Paul Schlueter, “Doris Lessing: The Free Woman’s Commitment,” in Charles Shapiro, ed., *Contemporary British Novelists* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. 48-61. While Schlueter discusses themes and characters, he is also good on the brilliance of structural concept, though not very detailed thereon (see esp. pp. 55-58 of his essay). I owe a special debt to some of my graduate students for their insights into structure—esp. to Susan Sims, Michael Civin, and Linda Frederick. Finally, to see what was occupying Doris Lessing’s attention in the late 1950s, one might well read her essay “The Small Personal Voice,” in Tom Maschler, ed., *Declaration* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), pp. 185-201. She here lays out the private-public, social-sexual, humanist-anarchist splits which motivate her and inform her work. Interestingly, the date of this article, taken together with its content and the 1962 publication of *The Golden Notebook*, suggests that Doris Lessing may have been doing some stock-taking and recapitulating before moving ahead with the final two volumes in the *Children of Violence* series (*Landlocked* and *The Four-Gated City*)—much as Evelyn Waugh wrote *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* in self-examination before finishing his *Sword of Honour* trilogy.

to be written by themselves, or wherein the author is virtually inseparable from the thing written—some of our answers may comment indirectly upon how to read, say, *Pale Fire* or *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, as well as *The Golden Notebook*. The questions I want to consider, then, while I admit from the outset that they cannot be so tidily separated from one another as I must inevitably tick them off, are these: who says what to whom? how? why? when? where? with what results?

I

The question of author (who?) is obviously first and last, and perhaps the most far-reaching and nearly all-inclusive of these considerations. The title page says that Doris Lessing wrote the book, but that fact merely complicates the difficulty of answering this first question. The next-best reply is that Anna Wulf did the job. And this response brings us into precisely the predicament we must confront if we want to take in the book; that is, the reply begs the further question, Who is Anna Wulf? Clearly (though after a while), *The Golden Notebook* comes into being because Anna Wulf asks exactly that question. The answer will be that Anna Wulf is *The Golden Notebook*; but in the less cryptic interim, this assertion breaks down somewhat as follows.

(a) Doris Lessing as author functions as Anna Wulf, editor of all the volumes on her (Anna's) trestle table. This editing and overseeing Anna is the one who writes the bracketed linking sections of the volume, and of course she writes as if from the outside, in the third person. As I hope to show, aside from its being symmetrically appropriate that we posit an Anna-editor rather than settle for the obvious Doris-author (no self is alone or complete in these fictional environs, after all), it is also necessary to allow for this editing role if, for instance, the golden notebook is to make sense within *The Golden Notebook*.

(b) If we hereafter take for granted that Doris Lessing, who created the entire volume, merged her authorial self with her outermost fictional self, Anna-editor, and if we then move further into the book from the outside editor's stance, the next part of this first answer is that Anna Wulf as editor selects and orders passages (and summarizes or paraphrases others) from the four notebooks written concurrently from 1950 to about 1957 by the four selves who during those years tried to make the case for "themselves" as Anna. This schizophrenia takes the form of black, red, yellow, and blue notebooks. Anna-editor selects or summarizes from the four books chronologically (though a given book may itself move back and forth in time, or even lose track of clock and calendar), and presents these selections not as four separate entities, each reprinted complete in itself, but as divided into four multi-colored clusters—so that the arrangement of black-red-yellow-blue, times four, sustains and indeed intensifies the desired illusion of split personality and of variously mounting tension variously recorded.

(c) The question of who is writing becomes plainly trickier as we move into the four notebooks (though, again, they were all written during the years 1950-57), because we must speak of the writer of each book as in some sense "Anna," and must refer to each writer as "herself." Whatever the traps, however, let us

proceed. The writer of the black book sub-divides her narrative into two first-person narratives. Under "Source" she attempts to remember and reconstruct the early 1940s experiences which went somehow into Anna Freeman Wulf's first and only novel, *Frontiers of War*, a best-seller set in Africa. She also parodies that novel. Then under a parallel column headed "Money," she narrates her encounters with British and American film and television executives wishing to adapt the novel for their media. Also under "Money" the Anna of the black book composes her own third-person retrospective review of *Frontiers of War*, and includes certain contemporary reviews of that book. The parallel columns eventually disappear in favor of numerous newspaper clippings recounting African violence in the 1950s, and then this first-person Anna's notebook-ending account of a film-dream merging characters and events separately depicted in the notebook.

The red book is second (or so Anna-editor lays things out in linear manner, all the while reminding us that though the four books are set out in a constant order upon the trestle table, their pages have been filled sporadically and in no discernible order—rather as one might experiment upon a xylophone). Again the narrative is a first-person account, this time of Anna's disillusioning experiences with the British Communist Party; and again the narrative is abandoned in favor of clippings on global violence, especially that traceable to the Soviet-American cold war. The red book ends with an account, once more in Anna's first person, of her friend and fellow ex-Communist Harry Mathews, in his settling into bourgeois marriage, paternity, schoolteaching.

In the yellow book the stance is predominantly third person as Anna begins a novel called *The Shadow of the Third*. The novel's Ella is of course Anna fictionally distanced, and such is the relationship between Anna's life and all the characters and events in *Shadow*. This novel is thus no more susceptible of completion than Anna's identity and future are clear. On the other hand, Ella herself is writing a novel about a young man semi-consciously planning suicide: he succeeds and Ella's book—of which we read no part (cf. Saul's Algerian story as parallel)—is finished. From time to time Anna interrupts her third-person fictional effort here, and writes her first-person reflections on what she is up to. She concludes that she cannot finish the novel (*Shadow*) unless she can set down the truth about Anna-Ella; but that setting down any words at all gives the lie to real experience, and that she will just have to wait for the "right images" to turn her aesthetic defeat into victory. Accordingly, the novel stops and the yellow book trails off with nineteen numbered autobiographical story-leads (some fictionally distanced; most in the usual first person of a writer's notebook) in implied search of those "images." Like the clippings which end the two earlier notebooks, these story-leads strike a reader as frantically controlled efforts to keep a grip on the everyday reality of a writer with intense sexual and political needs, but one who cannot manage to blend art, sex, and politics satisfactorily.

Much the same psychological curve is described, understandably, in the blue book, which is Anna's first-person diary of occurrences and insights in the writ-

ing present (whereas the black book had gone over the past to make it once again present; the red book had dwelt on the writing present, but had been aimed more at the public or political Anna than at the closeted author in her reflections on her personal life; and the yellow had tried to set her public and private lives into fictional perspective). Much of the diary recounts the three most important experiences of the years 1950-54: her joining, working for, and leaving the British Communist Party; her intense love affair with Michael; and her time in psychoanalysis under Mrs. Marks, "Mother Sugar." All of these experiences are of course talked about and projected in other books in various ways, but in the diary they are rather more fully developed as Anna talks most intimately with "herself." It is in this book, for example, that the "real" name of Anna's second husband, the father of her daughter, Janet, is given as Max **Wolf**, whereas in the apparently autobiographical black book that husband-father *role* had been played by Willi Rodde. This naming difference is anything but arbitrary or careless, of course; rather, it serves to remind us of the fiction-fact perplexity which is *The Golden Notebook's* beginning and end. As at the ends of the earlier notebooks—which are not earlier at all—so here too she tries to stop chaos and her babbling by resorting to absolutely naturalistic detailing and then to pinning clippings on her walls. And as there, so here too she is lucid enough to see and to write out her sense that she is approaching insanity: that no one self or style gets all the Anna-truth, and that she cannot bring the separate selves together. Her panic is acute when she sees herself tempted to go in one of two directions: on one hand is the possibility of willing madness—of yielding entirely to the pull of schizophrenia; on the other hand she can pull herself into balance by selling out—by adopting the attitude on display in her "joy-in-spite" dream and in the attitude and conduct of her Ceylonese acquaintance Mr. DeSilva; namely the view that nothing really matters and that the only sensible thing is to give up and stop caring about making the outside meet the inside, the man the woman, the public the personal, the head the heart, the morally social the morally aesthetic. Of the renowned Anna-Saul confrontation in this blue book, let us say for now that its importance lies, for our immediate purposes, in its giving her a middle way to avoid the two evil extremes (though we have yet to deal with the complexity of that middle way). After carefully cross-referencing blue book details of this psycho-sexual therapeutic battle and the nineteen numbered story-leads in the yellow book, and all the while skillfully balancing newspaper clippings and numerous precisely detailed and dated items against a dream-like aura of timelessness and placelessness, Anna is "cured" in a manner of speaking. This means that she is strong enough to decide upon putting all of herself into a single book, as she writes in concluding or stopping the blue book.

That single book is not the golden notebook in which she writes as she puts away the other four. When we ask who writes the golden notebook the answer is slippery but I think honest and inevitable, given the course of the later stretches of yellow and blue books: Anna and Saul both write the golden book—as Anna-author shows us by leading off that notebook under Saul's epigraph, and as Anna-editor tells us, bracketedly, in closing out the notebook telling us

that the handwriting changes from here to there (as it does, by the way, in several other instances throughout *The Golden Notebook*) and summarizing the plot of Saul's novella together with information on how well it sold. This answer may, as I say, seem slippery because, whereas up to now we have discussed several Annas, we are here positing the inclusion of Saul in that collection. Such, however, is exactly the case. As a result of their yellow-blue encounter Anna and Saul are the same self (selves), psychologically. Separately, he needed her and she needed him to do so; separately, each recognizes the possibility of a cured self in the mirror that is the other; separately, however opposed they are, each is attracted to the evil extremes of insanity and indifference; separately, she is stronger and able to give him his novella's first line, so that he can then respond by giving her a first line. Significantly, we find in the golden notebook that Anna writes down *both* of the first lines (and this "sentencing" is the other face of reprieve, as we shall see). This is solid support for the present point, but obviously it leaves us to consider whether the golden notebook manifests her decision to get all of herself into one book. Plainly, the golden book is a *transition* to the keeping of that promise, and therefore carries the symbolically glorious hues of that to which it gives eventual rise. This short golden volume is mightily necessary, in that some transition is essential to what follows. The golden book, in recording the fact of therapy, shows Anna freeing Saul (her other self) to write the Algerian soldier's story—the story of gratefully dead intellectual and soldier-peasant, themselves alter egos; the successful suicide story of the kind that Ella—another of Anna's surrogates—had completed in the yellow book. Saul in his turn "springs" from psychic imprisonment "their" other self, named Anna, to write *Free Women*, which of course in its acceptance of compromise and in its relinquishing of ideals is also a kind of suicide. The student and the farmer in Saul-Anna's novella are matched by Molly and Anna in Anna-Saul's third-person novel. The cure is not a reconciliation of grateful dead and living dead into some unnamed ideal condition, nor does it suggest that such harmony can ever be achieved. All it does is signify the betterness of not quitting—of "boulder-pushing," even without any prospect of getting to the top of the mountain. Both *Free Women* and the Algerian novella are failure stories; that they are therapeutic lies in their signifying that only strength could look upon the two failures and remain sane without selling out. The compromises made by Anna's third-person characters Molly and Anna in *Free Women* are the abandoning of their political, social, artistic, sexual ideal; but however platitudinous their choices, no other alternatives are available short of literal suicide. The same point (in *Free Women*) about the value of compromise is found in Anna's creation of Tommy, who fails to commit suicide and lives to cope with the possible.

Almost no alternative to suicide offers itself. In fact, of course, the uncompromising alternative is the single book into which Anna has indeed put her many selves—not the golden notebook, but *The Golden Notebook*. The answer to who writes *this* book is, "All the Annas who, reconcilable or not, and whatever named, are Anna." That is, *The Golden Notebook* is not *Free Women* or the Algerian story or any of the notebooks, and no more than any of these does it solve the

identity problem, reconcile numerous splits, or bring to an end "the naming game." But as a diverse record of failures it manifests wholeness and oneness comparable to those of a seamless garment. Moreover, even as it cooperates with the reader's imagination in developing this remarkable aesthetic unity, it does so by refusing to cut corners, soften blows, avoid difficulties. It is an extraordinarily successful shaping of cumulative failures. *The Golden Notebook* embraces without pretending to reconcile all the Annas. All of that is what I meant, then, in saying that Anna Wulf is *The Golden Notebook*; and in fact without the completed volume we would not have all her selves. The full book is thus paradoxically all-inclusive and incomplete.

To round out the answer to this first-last question, we must ask who writes *The Golden Notebook*. And the answer is that the (un)finished product is a collaborative job done by Anna-editor arranging and ordering the parts given "her" by Anna the writer(s). It is therefore an impersonal Anna who not only speaks to us in brackets, but orders the sections as we come upon them: *Free Women 1*; black-red-yellow-blue segments (1st); *FW 2*; b-r-y-b (2nd); *FW 3*; b-r-y-b (3rd); *FW 4*; b-r-y-b (4th); golden; *FW 5*. The *Free Women* novel, beginning and recurring within and closing out the full volume, may at first suggest in its drab naturalistic manner that this is Anna-writer's last word (as Anna-character in *Free Women* may lead us to suppose); but such is no more the case than that Anna-character is the complete Anna. Rather, the temporary last word (which is all we can talk about) is *The Golden Notebook*, and Anna-editor's patterning of its parts insists that Anna is as several as the extent of her moral imagination. Thus the complete volume—Anna herself—is rounded, begun and ended, sealed off, and continually promised, not by *Free Women 1* and 5, but by the implicitly dissolving covers of *The Golden Notebook*, the book which is the who of this initial query.

II

To determine specifically what Anna as *Golden Notebook* says—always in writing—we have inevitably to break into her-its organic unity once again and examine *The Golden Notebook* part-by-part. As in the first section of this essay, I will proceed, however inadequately in view of the volume's integrity, according to compositional chronology illusorily established: i.e., from the five notebooks to the two breakthrough stories (the Algerian story and *Free Women*), to the editing and ordering of all these raw materials into *The Golden Notebook*. In dealing thus with each part, I will be attending to our remaining inquiries as well; to audience (to whom?), method or technique (how?), reasons or motives (why?), kinds of occasion (when?), places overt or psycho-moral (where?), and considerations of result or effect which should return us from parts to whole.

As the segments of the notebooks begin,² Anna-editor prepares readers to encounter schizophrenia. She tells us of preliminary doodling in all the notebooks,

² Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. [1963]), p. 55. Subsequent references will be to this paperback edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

and, in addition to stating that the four books mean split personality, mentions the fact of varied penmanship—much as she will editorially mention it elsewhere (see pp. 314, 400, 549). Then as the black book begins in Anna-writer's first person, she notes the fact of darkness and thereby signals not only the difficulty of dredging up the past, but the obvious symbolic value of this black book's dealing with Africa. Although Anna writes for Anna, the black book is different from the blue diary. In the black book Anna is trying to get at who she is by reviving for herself the autobiographical experiences (who she was) that went into her novel, *Frontiers of War* (this under "Source"); and also (under "Money") recording—bitterly, amusingly, ironically, straight or in parody—the roles played by herself and assorted entrepreneurs discussing what might be done to "adjust" the novel for movies or television. What eventually dawns on a reader with some force is that while he never sees a page of *Frontiers of War*, he senses what made it possible for a younger woman to write the novel, why that novel was true to some earlier Anna, and therefore why a later unspecifiable Anna is ashamed of having falsified then what she is now trying without success to express truthfully of those experiences. The reader's awareness is served by his knowledge that, whatever Anna's present feeling about the novel's untruthfulness, the commercial media invariably suggest such atrocious alterations that she is driven to the impossible parodic task of out-desecrating her book—an effort which, conversely, she would not bother to make were she not still convinced that *some* real truth of her African time is implicit in that book and still worth recovering. Her inadequate novel is immeasurably more valuable than what others would do to it, then; but at the same time it is so false to what she feels to have been reality, that she carries about severe guilt because she continues to live on the royalties from her best-seller.

The reason that best-seller is not itself reproduced is, of course, that Anna-editor wishes artfully to practice the sort of omission (which she pursues elsewhere as well in her selectivity) which will compel the reader to face and work with the same problem faced by Anna of the black book: to reconstruct the past that was herself, from her imagining *now* what that must have been and from her reactions to the fruits or aftermath of that novel. Also, obviously, we are made aware, by this before-and-after method, of the familiar impossibility of anyone's ever reviving experience as it was—to say nothing of ever satisfactorily getting the words to reproduce or substitute for life as lived. In other words, what Anna of the black book wants is not only to remember who she and the rest of the African cast were, but indeed to become again that same person and to re-live those same events, and to merge that past with the present events she knows and with the person she now is. She wants to be everyone (cf. H. C. Earwicker) at all times, and to feel immediately all of everyone's lives at whatever time, and to remove any barriers between—on one hand—those persons and lives at all times, and—on the other hand—the language which expresses all those/these persons and experiences. She will not be satisfied of the value of literary art until she can comprehend and live life and art as interchangeable, as themselves merged in resolution of another important split.

Whatever may be the inevitability, to the reader, of Anna's failing to realize such total integrity, we are concerned with the demands she makes and the lengths to which she goes, rather than with what we may think of her aims. Thus the important thing is to see her as driven by her demands in alternate directions. At one moment she is filled with self-loathing, malice, the desire to hurt, the temptation to cynicism and despair, the wish to commit suicide because her failure to achieve the impossible makes her want to think with DeSilva that "it doesn't matter." At the next moment, however, she recognizes these dangers to her humanistic idealism, attempts to manage sex, motherhood, friendship, politics in the realm of practicality, sympathizes with the commercial agents whom she elsewhere hates (together with herself) for their foul motives, knows instinctively the mutual value in the apparent contradiction between and among insects' killing and begetting here, and humane socialists' slaughtering pigeons and tearing up one another there. Such things have their effect not because of anything the least bit thematically innovative, but because of the forceful way in which they impose themselves dramatically in the narrative. To shorten things a bit: Anna now is driven away from writing and toward the pseudo-objectivity of newspaper clippings and toward insanity not because she lacks what many would call the common sense to recognize the impossible and come off it, but because she knows all about what others' common sense would dictate and will not admit its necessary validity.

The audience for Anna's present introspection is indeed herself, but such a statement only puts us back into the region of question-begging. The self is sometimes in the position of one simultaneously writing and reading a first-person projection of that self in the past. Then again that self now can reflect on the Anna of the past about whom she could not both have known at the time and simultaneously written her novel. In the same way, Anna today can describe apparent oppositions which in no way cancel, but in fact enrich, persons and occurrences. For instance, she now sees Willi and Paul as mirrors of each other in both their hostility and their kinship; and sees as well both her ability to identify with each of them, and the suspiciously "bad" person she must be/have been to be attracted to them. This mirror device is a constant in *The Golden Notebook*, because it is a psychological habit of all Annas, who are the book. Thus, this black book Anna not only wants to be everybody, but she tries to express the mirror relationship between Maryrose and her beloved brother; between the mirror-like "bad" men to whom she is attracted, and her "good" wish to avoid men who really want her—a wish grounded in her desire not to be dominated or enslaved by such "good" men; between her psycho-sexual efforts to be liberated as a woman, and her political work to liberate herself-as-everybody from injustice. Mirrors, then, are symbols of roles or parts played. When the parts won't mesh, Anna knows panic, moves from writing to newsprint, and ends the black book on the frantic-despondent note of sterility because races, sexes, Annas won't come together.

Meanwhile in the red book the familiar course is pursued, this time associated with a publicly symbolic color keyed to Soviet Russia (as the black book

has its publicly symbolic reference to Africa). Here again Anna now talks to herself about Anna then, and again she creates the illusion that this is and will remain for her eyes alone—suggesting not at all, that is, what these pages will eventually do within the over-all *Golden Notebook*. This is the shortest and simplest of the four original notebooks, because what Anna now has to recall can be handled briefly. She tells herself that she knew even when she joined the British Communist Party in 1950 that the Party would exercise strong splitting power upon her and that this would be inevitable given the strain inherent within the group's ideology. When she has written out a few of these painful splits between the need to adhere to rigid doctrine, and the private acknowledgment by intelligent Communists that the doctrines are often ludicrous and destructive of their own avowed ends, she has done all she need do to remind herself of the desperate hope that drove her into membership and the painful need to sever connections with several good persons who remain somehow capable of seeing what she saw but also of staying with the cause. As the red book ends, she still clings to the faith that her exertion "matters," but the sense that the lessons learned by herself and her mirror-friend Molly will likely be ignored by Molly's son, Tommy (and by Anna's daughter, Janet—Tommy's mirror), together with her detailed knowledge of international violence in 1956-57, forces her back to news-clipping. However, as her black book concludes with a dream-film subconsciously hanging on to the demand for unity, so the red book ends, if on a low note, with the story of Harry Mathews' emergence from Anna's kind of political crisis herein redly rehearsed.

Where black and red books serve the purpose of reminding Anna of the mysterious manner of her youthful socio-political convictions' getting organized into an artifact, and of her post-novelistic struggle to act upon her convictions in London of the 1950s despite her inability to wed art to politics, the yellow book shows Anna-author writing a fiction in the third person—i.e., trying to get closer to herself by gaining aesthetic perspective. Whatever the result of this endeavor finally, one difference from the earlier-but-simultaneous notebooks is that here Anna not only does not find herself irreconcilable because art and life are disparate, but, with a twistingly ironic difference, she finds that herself remain irreconcilable in this case precisely because art and life are *not* separable; because, that is, the fictional remove at which Anna would place her Ella-self is no more distant than the various Anna-selves, though Ella is indeed in a work called fiction whereas Anna thinks of her writing self as outside that fiction, in life.

The conventional distinction between life and created illusion is therefore shown once again to be illusory (cf. Proust, Barth, or more simply the Durrell of *Bitter Lemons*). For this reason I take "the third" in Anna's title, *The Shadow of the Third*, to refer to this or that member of the familiar sexual triangle, to be sure, but also to the still vague but nonetheless real self that Anna-writer cannot bring to life as the satisfactory union of Anna and Ella (creator and created; artist and politically active woman plus projection of that self but at a distance ideally establishing oneness or the antithesis of distance). This Anna-Ella sepa-

rate togetherness is reinforced, moreover, by the mirroring and other-selfing which the reader sees Anna to have effected in carrying out her authorial task. She carries forward the Anna-Molly duality by naming Ella and Julia; she creates a childless Julia and names Ella's son Michael; she converts Anna's lover Michael to Ella's Paul (no doubt to get at some of the social-racial-national-emotional differences between the two, as well as at the similarities between those differences). In this way, what may look at first like a fairly pointless re-labeling of figures whom we know from other notebooks instead manifests the reason for steady references (esp. in the blue book) to *naming* as that which is fundamental to artist and artifact alike. Re-naming thus lets Anna see others' selves, recombined, as both mirroring their originals and coming alive as realized rather than shadowy "thirds." And this of course is the very nature of imaginative act.

In this yellow case, the illusion is that we as readers are more conventionally, if inadvertently, in on the narrative, because it has about it the air of a novel meant for eventual publication—and this in spite of its being, unlike the earlier books but like the blue book, colored indifferently or in no way that looks familiarly symbolic (Swedish film-titles to the contrary notwithstanding). The life-art paradox is further reinforced by our seeing that this novelistically distanced fiction tells us more than seemingly more intimate books about the Anna-Michael (Ella-Paul) love affair, and appears also, for all its illusion of distancing, to involve us intensely in that affair. That is, the yellow-book novel at first looks public, although the "place" of its setting proves to be at least as convincingly private as we find elsewhere in the full volume.

But of course Anna cannot sustain her novel, and she therefore writes self-interruptions in the first person, wherein she tells herself of her inability any further to develop the fiction which she is trying to write in order to convince herself that while Ella-writer can complete a suicide novel, what Ella-writer cannot manage any better than can Anna is the solidifying of that "third" who is left incomplete and shadowy when Paul deserts her. When the novel breaks off, Ella is reabsorbed into the character of her creator and the unfulfilled pair, as Anna-writer once more, give way to Anna's story-leads, which are both her frightened attempts to hang on to sanity and an artistically useful connection with the near chaos of the blue book. Panic thus approaches at this book's end as at the others'. Credibly enough, here we know something disastrous is in the wind when the first-person writer admits to being unable to assert imagination, and yields to the need to wait for those "right images"—that is, for the literature to write itself; for that self-written literature to create (by naming) the self, the identity, who is the unfindable writer.

Simultaneously fourth among the original notebooks is the blue diary, wherein Anna-writer tries to stick to the facts alone—an effort which we can see, from the foregoing commentary on the yellow book, to be doomed because of the inherent nature of language to preclude the impossible immediacy which Anna would effect, and to place itself apart from that which a writer may inaccurately speak of as a reproduction of experience. Once more Anna is writing for her eyes, after her yellow-book imagining of how her Ella-novel would come at some

other reader. The blue diary emphasizes the simultaneity of her political-sexual-psychoanalytical experience from 1950 to 1954, at which later date she has no political-social home, Michael abandons her, and, ironically, Mother Sugar pronounces her mentally healthy. In this notebook the time-shifts are frequent because the crisis is acute and the illusion of immediacy, "nowness," is more intense than in the other three notebooks, as well as because, in the overview of *The Golden Notebook*, the blue book makes a transition between the numbered stuttering which ends the yellow book, and the breakthrough laid out in the golden book. Anna conveys her near-crackup by narrating (sometimes to Mother Sugar) herself as seen in dreams, in reveries, at filmic distances. Her fantasies are shown to be waking and sleeping, even as her illusion consistently melts into what she fears to call reality, and her fiction into fact. Therefore it comes as no surprise to one who has read the notebooks to this point that after 1954 she first makes her tensely futile grab for narrative objectivity, and then begins posting upon her walls news reports of assorted inhumanities, rather than seek her own words for such deeds. In the pages of the blue book Anna's writing again of Harry Mathews, of the American Nelson, and especially of DeSilva combines impressionistically with her recurring "joy-in-spite" dream to signify to her and to us who read, her own still-lucid awareness of her felt options, none of which she accepts: that is, she can settle for herself as trivial, or see all endeavor as of no possible value, or compromise in a manner now unthinkable to her. She can also commit literal suicide.

This is the Anna-situation into which the American Jewish leftist writer Saul Green walks. The blue book has already shown us Anna's reflections on herself as novel, as her own alter ego, as dream and dreamer; as shooter and shot, as various avatars symbolized by doubles, twins, mirrors, and as "namer" (see esp. pp. 200-205, 213-216, 292, 295, 300-312, 402-410). With this well-emphasized background (and of course examples abound in other notebooks as well), we are better prepared to see Saul Green as Anna's latest and most convincing manifestation of all these characters and qualities in herself and outside herself. That is, in commonsense terms, Anna and Saul exist separately before, during, and after their meeting; but blue book terms transcend commonsense terms without obliterating them, and we therefore see Anna recording that the two separates love-hate each other, manipulate-yield to each other, psycho-sexually create (or otherwise "make") and destroy each other. Moreover, the separates could not be convincingly shown to be and do all these things unless they were capable of *naming* each other, of realizing the identity of each other. Finally, metaphorically but psychologically as well, they could not name each other's free-imprisoned identities had they not *become* each other in a very real manner of speaking (see esp. pp. 469, 476-478, 481-483, 486-519). The intensity of the blue book comes from Anna's words approaching more closely here than elsewhere what cannot be written: the *experience* of one-and-many perfectly and harmoniously realized. That she approaches insanity, chaos, in this encounter-merger is paradoxically and beautifully rendered by the careful, fearful lucidity of Anna's cross-referencing the later stages of blue and yellow books,

and by her thereby specifying and implying both that she won't lose her mind and that she won't have to accept any one of the dehumanizing alternatives apparently available to her imagination before Saul's arrival on the self-scene. At this point we do not know what she will happily do instead, nor precisely how and why the Anna-Saul I-thou experience effected a cure. We know only that the cure is real, however qualified. In fact, Anna herself knows only—without knowing how and why—that madness has been terribly met and its carrion comfort resisted, that her selves can and must and should now separate, and that she wants to buy a golden notebook for reasons fairly unspecifiable.

Unspecifiable, that is, except as a means of enabling her to put aside the four other books and write all of herself in one book (p. 519). This ambition is of course not realized in the golden notebook, as we have said. Instead, what we find here (pp. 523-550) falls into three parts: a detailed recording of the last stages of the blue book crisis; a set of discussions wherein Anna-Saul face their post-critical condition and possible actions much as I have tried to summarize these matters in the previous paragraph; and, importantly, therapeutic laughter as accompaniment to their being able to give each other a new start that will break them out of their writers' blocks. Thus, in this brief notebook they talk about what Anna privately recorded in the blue book, and what they accept is Mother Sugar's (Freud's) familiar conservatism: they accept what they're glad to be able to choose, which is all they can have. Having lived the need to go Freud's way, they are able to name and become their experiences vicariously in their writing. And because each of them has created, made, known, become the other (verbs interchangeably psychological, sexual, religious), each instinctively supplies an opening line that will take his other self along one of the routes which the two have just now taken as one. Each makes the other's art possible as each makes the other's life possible, and both achievements are one even as both achievers are one. Thus in acknowledging that he, not Anna, can write the Algerian soldier story which she starts for him, Saul is really stating what Anna must have realized before both imagining such a first line and turning it over to her self that can handle it. Conversely, that other self cannot follow up the "two women" sentence that his identification with Anna enables him to feel as right for his self that is Anna, and simultaneously we know the sentence to be right because, like Saul (and Tommy), we have read her notebooks and are privy to her use of doubles (even as she has read Saul's notebooks). The two-in-one accept the inevitability of separation as of beauty-in-destruction, and thus see boulder-pushing as a kind of success rather than as the failure described by Paul in the yellow book-novel (pp. 181-182). They know now that life and words are not one in the post-critical, viable world; but the golden book ends with their nevertheless giving each other the gift of words to seal their giving of selves. Anna writes that the two of them will "always be flesh of one flesh, and think each other's thoughts," whatever distances might intervene (p. 548), and thereby supplies a tentative explanation for our having Anna's words in the golden book given to us together with the fact of Saul's having taken that book away with him. To expect to find out where that book is (Bristol? Reno? Xana-

du^p) or whether they made a Xerox copy, is like insisting to be told who made all those phone calls in *Memento Mori*. It is to misread the book, to read some other kind of book rightly. At the same time, to evade this trap may enable one to amend my earlier remark, that Anna is *The Golden Notebook*, to read: Anna is Saul is *The Golden Notebook*. What this always means is that these three are/is a book self-selected, -edited, and thus -created by Anna-editor, of whom/which these same participles must then be predicated.

At the same time, however, Anna-Saul's mutual naming and giving of self- and inter-identity mark a failure which is the other side of their triumph. That is, what they sanely get straight is the necessity to live with and act out of separate, broken, selves. Their victory resides, then, in their facing this need and being able to live with it, rather than in some psychic or spiritual integration. Another way to say this is to emphasize that the split goes on, but that now they can handle it. Saul is not to be thought literally dead or in jail (despite the particulars of the Algerian story) and Anna as Saul's alter ego is not to be identified with Anna in *Free Women* (any more than Anna was able to identify completely with Ella in *The Shadow of the Third*). Or again, we may put the matter this way: Anna as Saul imagines, in the Algerian story, annihilation as the only foreseeable conclusion awaiting attempts to reconcile all conceivable sets of opposites, while Anna as Saul imagining Anna sees the possibility of settling down to social work and hard, disciplined schooling.

What this distinction clarifies, one hopes, is that Anna-editor, in consciously shaping *The Golden Notebook* for us readers, an audience, is the beginning-and-end of this fictional enterprise, in that what she does is to separate, interperse, heighten the importance of, the selves which Anna-author has named and become. And this editorial ordering has the effect, in turn, of sustaining the balanced separation of selves which the reader may have supposed to have been harmoniously united in the golden book. *The Golden Notebook* is, then, what the literary artifact archetypally is—word-patterned chaos; but it presents itself in this oxymoronic way without at all taking back anything of the problems and dilemmas narrated along the way. In fact, to put the artistic process and the accomplished work once more paradoxically, the success of the book is its playing off against one another of all the particular failures that are the identity of Anna-author. *The Golden Notebook* is not the protracted story of how Anna made it after Saul left her; rather, it is the literary record of all the Annas in their striving to be one. All the Annas requisite to the naming of one Anna are therefore the contents of *The Golden Notebook*, but those separates are no more finally assemblable as words and notebooks than as split selves. "She" is somehow all here as *The Golden Notebook*; but Anna-editor cannot piece her together definitively.

Perhaps the appropriate closing-out of these psycho-aesthetic observations is that Anna-editor's failure to be final comes of her own identification with the other Annas whom she edits into *Golden Notebook* shape: she can no more get fully outside the selves that she edits than Anna-author could sever herself from Ella. And this failure is obviously one more sign of that success attending si-

multaneous inside-outside vision. We can fairly say that *The Golden Notebook* doesn't "come out" or otherwise finish as one customarily speaks of fiction's doing; rather, it "keeps on going" because honesty cannot bring it to any conclusion. Moreover, to the extent that it "keeps on going" for us as readers, it sucks us into the illusion and into the identifying-naming game (p. 469); so that all characters are Anna-author(s) are Anna-editor are Doris Lessing are *Golden Notebook* are we. All of *us* are then *The Golden Notebook's* organic unity: that culminating presentation of the fixedly fluid which is the name and being of Anna.

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I have tried to say how all's one in (and as) *The Golden Notebook*, though the book's major premise is that *one* cannot be. Almost certainly, some who have read this far will be wondering how it is possible for anyone to talk at length about such a book without going into detail on the subjects of politics and sex, social equality and individual liberation, revolution collective and personal, clitoral *vs.* vaginal orgasm. All I wish to say in response is that my approach has been not *primarily* thematic, but structural and aesthetic, and that I have chosen this approach in order to specify a reading which I think both broad enough and precise enough to serve as basis for whatever thematic interpretation one may wish to make. Without such an overview, I submit, a given thematic study will have no way to fit itself into the massive, intricate undertaking that is *The Golden Notebook*, quite apart from whether this essay will adequately provide that overview. Just as Doris Lessing has attempted to make an aesthetic object touch upon, project, movingly develop, and then become one with all that which comprises it, so I have tried—at a critical remove—to show that aesthetic considerations are not trivial, humanly irrelevant side-issues, but the means of becoming ends; of getting at and then merging with all those various subjects, themes, issues which may well engage us diversely. Properly understood, Henry James was right: "Art *makes* life."³

³ I am grateful to the University of Oregon's Office of Scientific and Scholarly Research for the Summer Research Award which assisted me in the writing of this paper.