

Study of Liberal Feminism in Doris Lessing's Golden Notebook

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Abstract

Doris Lessing subverts the traditional female image in *The Golden Notebook*, and her heroines are brave enough to express their inner love and hate and pursue true freedom. Lessing's lifestyle of equality between men and women and her advocacy of women's courage to pursue freedom provided a new perspective for women's literature and even world literature. In addition, Lessing's thought on female freedom has pointed out the direction for contemporary women even at a higher level in real life, so it is of profound practical and social significance to deeply discuss her thought on female freedom.

Keywords

The Golden Notebook; Feminism; Female Freedom.

1. Introduction

Doris Lessing, the grandmother of English literature who is revered as a feminist icon, is also known as a "double star" with Woolf. Nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Man Booker Prize. Born in Iran in 1919, he spent his childhood living under a gas bomb after World War I. Fifteen years old because of eye disease she dropped out of school, changed to a self-study way read literature, and later worked as a telephone operator, nanny, stenographer, and so on. Twice married and divorced, she moved to Britain with her young son in 1949, with a draft of a novel in her purse. The book, soon published under the title *The Grass Is Singing*, made Lessing famous. In 1962, her magnum opus *Golden Notebook* was released. As a highly controversial masterpiece, it became the most sufficient reason for her to win the Nobel Prize.

The *Golden Notebook* is composed of black, red, yellow, blue, and gold notes. In structural form, frame Narrative is adopted, which is led by the "free woman" framework. "Black Notes" describes Anna's experiences in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Africa. She uses what she sees and hears to reflect on the political conflicts and racial discrimination of colonialism. Her "Red Notes" recorded her political life and reflections on communism. "Yellow Notes" is her own emotional experience, intercalated with an autobiographical experiment titled "The Shadow of the Third Party"; "Blue Notes" is her diary, recording her daily life. The final "Golden Notes", different from the previous four color notes, marking the process from division to integration, is a summary of Anna's life. In the middle of the 20th century, in the context of international political turmoil, ideological confrontation, and unpredictable situation, the novel presents the contradictions and conflicts of political, emotional, and social life faced by an intellectual woman, as well as the mental state of the split of her inner world. From mental breakdown to reintegration, Anna's cognitive process of breaking through the shackles of old rationality and old order and moving to new rationality and new order through irrationality is shown. [1] Lessing combines the chaos and crisis of the world in the middle of the 20th century into the cognitive process of the heroine's female consciousness, which is full of strong dialectical tension.

2. Doris Lessing's Life Experiences and Feminist Thoughts

2.1. Personal Experience

Doris Lessing's literary creation not only contains macroscopic national issues, but also involves the emotional issues of men and women in daily life, which is closely related to Lessing's early life experience. In her early years, she actively participated in the anti-colonial left-wing movement and joined the Communist Party. She got married twice, but both marriages did not last long. In her painful life, writing became Doris Lessing's spiritual companion. Therefore, Lessing's early life experience influenced her literary creation and showed her yearning for communism and peaceful society, which made Lessing have the characteristics of strong will, self-reliance and self-improvement. Doris Lessing is very good at creating characters with firm will and self-strengthening spirit in her novels due to her personality characteristics. Her descriptions of emotional crisis and female problems in the patriarchal society are very unique. Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is the foundation of the feminist movement. In the novel Lessing mainly created free but painful images of women, their life, love and so on are in extreme division. Thus, by showing those images' lives and political struggle, the author aims to express her own feminist point of view. Doris Lessing is a female writer who is very serious about her work and likes to challenge new things. Therefore, in her literary creation, she often offends those who disagree with her. Through the description and shaping of the characters, the novel shows the current situation of the real society. This way of exploring the spirit of the times through literary works makes Doris Lessing's novels often contain her persistent political ideas and artistic beliefs [2].

2.2. Feminist Thoughts

The Golden Notebook is written by Lessing in 1962. From her first work, *The Grass is Singing*, to her best work, *The Golden Notebook*, it is easy to see that Lessing's mind has evolved and matured continuously. Lessing has always been concerned about the living state of women, had an insight into the whole social phenomenon, constantly explored the way for women to seek freedom and liberation, advocated the harmonious coexistence of men and women, and gradually formed the unique feminist thought of mutual achievement. Lessing criticizes binary opposition, opposes putting men on the opposite side of women, and views the relationship between men and women narrowly. She realized the real value of relationship between men and women. Through communication and complementation, the two sides can finally achieve the ideal state of the universe and realize the real "freedom" of women.

The Golden Notebook takes the twisted society as the background, and the characters' bumpy fate as the main line. It deeply analyzes the survival status of contemporary women and their demands for freedom, and embodies her unique feminist thought. In the novel, Lessing intersperses the black, red, yellow and blue notes "freedom" throughout the story, and *The Golden Notes* serve as the finishing touch to express the author's understanding of life. The novel describes the writer's experience, political life, emotional marriage and spiritual life of Anna as a free woman. In the story, Anna encounters blows and setbacks everywhere. The author uses Anna's identity to express the reality that women are under control everywhere in the society. At the same time, she implies that the pursuit of superficial "freedom" is narrow and has no effect on changing women's own situation. Anna also has a deep introspection in the pursuit of "freedom", and realizes that the "freedom" advocated by feminism will only draw a prison for herself. On the contrary, only by making peace with the world and facing life with a smile can one be truly free. On the road of constant exploration for freedom, only "harmony" is the "king way".

First of all, harmony of mind and body is the only way to achieve self-harmony. In the long river of history, human beings have been constantly groping, constantly perfecting their own life,

pursuing their own value, and realizing the high level of spirit. As the text says, "we strive all our lives to make men a little wiser than we are, so that they may understand what great men have always known." [3] Just as human beings continue to explore the unknown and promote the progress of human history, Anna also experienced the four kinds of black, red, yellow and blue notes that made her lost before she got The Golden Notes, which symbolized "truth" and made her move to a higher level of spirit. She realized that harmony of body and mind is the best state of self-harmony. After experiencing the injustice and cruelty of the society, she knew that she should seek her own harmony, understand the world fully and comprehensively, and strive to improve herself. At the same time, we should accept the dark side of the society with an inclusive attitude, strengthen our heart, exercise our endurance, and face the frustrations and pains brought by life with an optimistic and positive attitude. In the end, all the hardships we have experienced will turn into a halo that will come back to us, supporting us and making us invincible. Anna realized that only by achieving the inner harmony of body and mind could she make a foothold in society. Only by establishing a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with others can the whole society achieve a harmonious and beautiful state. Secondly, only gender harmony can achieve social harmony. The relationship between Anna and Saul in The Golden Note represents a typical relationship between men and women. Lessing gives readers a new perspective to deeply think about the fate of women and re-examine the relationship between men and women. Anna and Saul have experienced all kinds of unbearable tests life has given them, but they still do not give up the yearning for a better life. Beneath Saul's neurotic facade, Anna sees his true heart. Because of this, Saul was attracted to Anna's unique temperament. Under the influence of Saul's honest attitude, Anna reassessed her life and became more positive about her future life. In this way, Lessing describes the process of freeing women from opposition to harmony in the face of patriarchy. We "need to take a dialectical view of the relationship between men and women, and narrow sexist prejudices are abandoned in Lessing's work." [4]

The Golden Notebook is Lessing's most complete work exploring women's pursuit of freedom and liberation. The uniqueness of her thinking lies in her willingness to face the reality, to face the world dominated by male values in order to find better ways to gentle this sexual society. In Lessing's eyes, free women, as independent individuals, constitute the society and perfect the society by realizing the value of their lives. In the process of pursuing freedom, women should learn to "compromise" with the world. This "compromise" is actually a kind of "mutual achievement". It is also an embodiment of women's "wisdom" to fight for proper rights and interests with the attitude of retreating to advance. This is where Lessing's feminist thought excelled.

3. The Dilemma Faced by Females in Pursuing Freedom in the Golden Notebook

In the Free Women section, Lessing describes the events surrounding Anna in 1957. Anna and Molly are new age women influenced by the feminist movement. Free women define their identity, but outsiders only see the fact that they do not marry. Anna and Molly divorced when their marriage failed to meet their expectations of love, and raised their children alone. In their view, the reason why a free woman is free is that she cannot be bound by her family. To obtain the right to vote, traditional family is the necessary way to obtain economic status and social status of women, and marriage also means completely became her husband married women accessories, means that married women without property rights, can't control her inheritance, custody, and there is no right of civil action. [5] But Anna was different from Molly. Anna had written a well-received novel and was able to live off the royalties. Molly is an actress and can make a living from acting. Being financially independent allowed them to mercilessly mock

Molly's ex-husband Richard, a national financial oligarch. The most dominant role of the traditional family for women is the economic pillar, which has no constraints on free women at all. In this way, Anna and Molly become members of a unique group of women, who are not in the economic unit of a family, nor are they the accessories of the male master of any family. Such an identity is both fascinating and repulsive to men. Because of the double standard of sex between men and women, men are free to engage in sexual relationships with other women, which can be described as a man's affair. For women, especially married women, having sex with men other than their husbands is a typical "slut" behavior, which is not allowed in patriarchal society. But when it comes to single, unmarried, free women like Anna and Molly, men tend to see them as the best candidates for romantic affairs. In the yellow notes, Anna's character Ella is surrounded by married men who try to have affairs with her when their wives are away. She sees all of these as the dangers or opportunities that come with being a "free woman." But just because of her special status as a "free woman", Ella also got the experience of passion that those women who were tied to the family could not get.

Another characteristic of free women is that they go out of the family into society and participate in public affairs. Anna's experience of living in Africa gradually shaped her belief in Marxism. Her left-wing group in Africa often discussed the issue of national independence of African countries day and night. The end of World War II also depended on the accession of the socialist Soviet Union. "All kinds of people were unconsciously encouraged and inspired by the Communist Party, or pushed to a new life" [6]. Let a person to the socialism society beautiful longing deepens. Anna also recalled the experience with nostalgia and wrote her acclaimed novel *The Edge of War*. Her belief in Marxism, which she believed would lead to a different and more complete society, led Anna to freely choose parties when she returned to London, where she joined the Communist Party in 1950.

After all, free women like Anna and Molly were a minority in a traditionally patriarchal society, where most women were confined to the home like Richard's wife Marion. A year after Marion was married to Richard, he lost her in his heart. Marion takes care of the three children, helps Richard receive business friends, hosts lavish parties, and does her job as a qualified wife, while Richard is bored with Marion. Due to the development of women's liberation movement, the man become hidden to the requirement of women stay at home but essentially the same, Richard to his wife with a "pseudo knight spirit Ma Lien hinted that she is a boring old middle-class women, personally asked her why she didn't find a lover, when Ma Lien really ready to associate with a man who is interested in her, Richard again because of vanity and possessiveness, To reclaim Marion as his own. The double standard of men and women for sexual relations with other members of the opposite sex makes Richard not allow Marion to have affairs comparable to men, even if Richard does not love Marion, even if he has numerous affairs, because of the patriarchal society's view of women, he will not allow her to have an extramarital affair, not once. As a result of the patriarchal social tradition, Richard regarded his wife as his accessory. Richard even implied that he hoped Marion would change according to his wishes to increase his sexual attraction to him. The tendency to objectify a woman tends to treat her as a sexual object rather than as a person, especially when she is enslaved and deprived of her human rights. [7]

As one of the country's financial oligarchs, Richard also controlled the source of the family economy. Without financial resources, Marion can only do her husband Richard's accessories. He gave Marion a fixed amount of money for her living expenses, and let her manage the household expenses with a fixed amount of money, even buying new clothes and other bills that Richard had to go through. When Marion wakes up, she realizes that she has been under Richard's thumb and even asks the women of the time, "That's what women are, isn't it?" Marriage is a fiscal union, and the family is the foundation of a hierarchical system, in the small family unit, women must obey the male control, brainwashed by the society of women, and even

deliberately please men "by male identity" ideology exerts a subtly shaped women, but after the women's individual consciousness awakening, to realize their own oppression. [8] Marion, who had used to wear a wide, flowered dressing gown to please Richard, was ashamed to wear something she hated to please Richard. In addition to Marion, there are many traditional women in the family who are always courting men and trying to fulfill the role of good wife and good mother prescribed by society.

The economic crisis that broke out on Wall Street in the United States in 1929 swept the whole capitalist world. In order to divert the domestic crisis, some capitalist countries were ready to invade other countries and occupy the resources of other countries. In 1929, the Soviet Union also began to worship Stalin. On Stalin's 50th birthday, Pravda published a large number of articles celebrating Stalin's birthday. After the Congress, Stalin's personality cult was basically formed. It was also at this time that the tribute to Stalin began to become an integral part of speeches at many events, including celebrations, gradually settling into a regular pattern. [9] Stalin also began to assume the mantle of personal myth. The inheritance and development of Marxism by Lenin and Stalin made the Soviet Union and Stalin a once-in-a-thousand years myth in the eyes of Western communists. Stalin was worshipped not only in the Soviet Union, but also in the Communist parties of European countries. During the great purge of the Soviet Union in 1937, Stalin's position became more and more consolidated, and works depicting Stalin's glorious image and great achievements began to appear in literature. On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, kicking off the European theater of World War II. In 1942, the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, China and 26 other countries signed the Declaration of the United Nations in Washington, and the anti-Fascist United Front was established. On May 8, 1945, Germany signed the unconditional surrender, the Second World War in Europe. The "Leningrad Case" in 1949 and 1950 destroyed the socialist democratic legal system of the Soviet Union and the democratic centralism within the party. Due to the great role of the socialist Soviet Union in the victory of the war, the Communist Party members in Europe chose to continue to believe in Stalin. At this time, Anna joined the Communist Party of London. Although the cause of the London Communist Party is constantly rushing about, Anna's doubts are also increasingly heavy. After Stalin's death in 1953, Anna and Sally with depressive excitement, thought that with the passing of Stalin's personal myth, rigid system and the party bureaucracy will completely change, the party will be better and better, but the Soviet domestic counter-revolutionary still worse, in 1954 began to rehabilitate the counterrevolution suffering people. With deep disappointment, Anna quit the London Communist Party in 1954.

The impact of the war and the collapse of faith in the Communist Party made both men and women in this era feel intense spiritual oppression. Anna's lover Michael was Jewish, and all seven members of his family, including his parents, were executed in the gas chamber. Most of Michael's friends were dead, too, at the hands of Communists. [10] A man who carries the past twenty years of European history, one of the reasons he is happy to be with Anna is because she is not a part of that history, and the two do not sit across from each other and sigh. Michael got emotional and physical satisfaction from Anna that his wife could not give him. To some extent, Anna was healing Michael. When Michael no longer needed Anna and felt that Anna's desire for marriage made him stressed, he abandoned her without hesitation, ending their five-year relationship, which was undoubtedly a fatal blow to free women. A series of US "espionage" investigations began in 1948, and Hiss's trial in 1950 became the most important evidence that there were indeed Communists in the government, heightening concerns about "internal security issues". The American monopoly bourgeoisie wanted to promote the tide of anti-Communist and anti-democratic persecution, so McCarthyism came into being. The outbreak of the Korean War intensified the "red fear" and anti-Communist sentiment in the United States, and politicians were afraid of being blamed for being "red" or "pro-communist" [11]. More than 20 million Americans were subjected to different degrees of censorship, which

forced American Communists to flee to other European countries one after another. Anna met Nelson, a Jewish writer who came to the United States as a refuge. Anna liked this humorous and sarcastic American, and once thought that this was the new lover who would replace Michael. However, due to Nelson's sexual dysfunction, she established friendship and trust with Anna. Nelson invited Anna to a party at his house where all the Americans were on the left and on the political blacklist. In a foreign country, they are constantly nervous about political persecution, but with a humorous irony of self-mockery to cover up the manic mood. The pressure in the political and social environment is increasing, and with it the pressure of responsibility within the family. Nelson was considered a red in the United States and had to live in London, where the stress of fear of political persecution prevented him from writing new plays and, therefore, from having any new financial resources. His wife, who wakes him up at 4 a.m. every morning to write scripts, forces him to get up early for work because of the high cost of living. The times put more and more pressure on men, making men yearn for women who are gentle, tolerant and relaxing. The Times also force women to become sour and mean women who continue to put pressure on men. Men in the family can not get warm care and seek out women outside the marriage. Women because of the insecurity of men's behavior are more desperately tied to men. It's a vicious cycle that leads men to complain that women are "untouchable" and women to complain that there aren't enough "real men" left. The root cause of this situation is the gender inequality system, women since ancient times the female temperament because of irrational and differentiate by rational man in the field of family, and with the "natural rights" has always been a rational man, the man also wants to be engaged in science, medicine and law accordingly explore in the field of such as high-end. When the rough times, men in the face of increasing pressure, both political persecution and the arrival of may also have to face the responsibility of raising a family, and because women are bound within the family not to participate in public affairs, so you can't understand the man in the face of political pressure, men also because they don't understand to take care of the family of hardship and blindly believe that women are secure. The influence of gender inequality is magnified in the era of inequality, which is the root cause of the hostility between the sexes.

4. Doris Lessing's Exploration of the Thought of "Free Women"

As the novel develops smoothly, Doris Lessing's thought of "free woman" runs throughout the whole story, and the will of "free woman" is also reflected in every part of the work. In her preface to *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing said that the novel should not be seen as a clarion call for women's liberation. She learned as she wrote, and many ideas and experiences burst forth in her creation. In my opinion, the "free women" in the novel has beyond the traditional cognition of the stating meaning, it is closer to the concept of the Chinese scholar Chen Yin que put forward by the principle of "the spirit of independence and freedom of thought". This is a kind of pursuit of independence and freedom of thought consciousness and ability, for all mankind, whether men, women, adults and children are very important and precious.

In the "Free Women" section, Anna finally gives up writing, leaves her flat, joins the Labour Party, and begins social work as a marriage counsellor. Molly married a Jewish businessman and entered the traditional pattern of marriage and family. It seems that free women are finally giving up their freedom and choosing to return to society and tradition. After her divorce from Richard, Marion first became involved in politics, but politics was just a means for her to attract attention. When she realized that she did not really care about the working class, she had to give up and buy a fashion shop to do high fashion. From this point of view, after experiencing the pain of free women, Anna and Molly did not find a foothold in the society of free women. The patriarchal society often regarded them as the best option for irresponsible one-night stands, while the true love that free women longed for was only an illusion. Marion, a traditional

woman, wakes up and doesn't want to be controlled by her husband Richard and gets divorced. After opening a fashion store, she is surrounded by a group of men who are not normal. So where is the future for women?

In the "Golden Note" section, Lessing may have given us the answer. Anna, who suffers from writer's block, and Saul, who suffers from schizophrenia, magnify all their pathological parts in their relationship. Saul, the writer, admits that he is a red under the pressure of McCarthyism, and faces possible political persecution and doubts about the communist belief, which makes him under great mental pressure. One of the salient symptoms of Saul's schizophrenia is the "I, I, I, I" speech, a collection of theories that seem subjective but are actually a mixture of social and personal experiences. Faced with a man who has suffered and wants to find a wise, gentle, motherly woman who is also a sexual partner and sister, Anna's traditional maternal temperament is awakened and she loses her will to heal this thin and traumatized man. Maternal temperament is the division of male to female temperament, and the sexual role is to take care of the housework and the baby is classified as female [5]. The mother has both the desire to protect and control the child, and Anna becomes a jealous madman. She doesn't want to know the whereabouts of Saul all the time, and even peeks at Saul's diary. Saul is also spurred on by Anna's jealousy. He knows that Anna has read his diary and deliberately wrote about dating other women. Two people constantly amplify their own sickness to hurt each other. In the constant cycle of quarrel and comfort, Anna experiences a female role in a dream that she has never played, and obtains a more complete female experience; Saul also admits that he thinks Anna's writing is a challenge to his sense of male superiority, that he likes to rule over women, and that he is a hypocrite who shouts "equality slogans". But society also needs such hypocrites to speak differently about gender, to give other men a reasonable and fair perspective on the other gender. By saying "no" to Saul, a man, Anna broke the cycle of sadism and masochism and stepped out of the social rules for women to obey men and the motherly role. Saul began to respect Anna and a woman from the bottom of his heart from this moment.

5. Conclusion

At the end of *The Golden Notebook*, the two main characters, Molly and Anna, kiss each other goodbye in their apartment. Molly married a progressive businessman as a way out of her intense emotional life, while Anna decided to get a job and stop writing. In different ethical relationships such as love, family and society, the different ethical choices of various characters reflect the subjectivity and internal contradiction of the "free woman" will that the author wants to express. In the ethical relationship of love, the identity and status of the two emotional parties are often not equal, and the ethical demand for the fairness of emotional giving and return is often ignored or suppressed by gender. In the family ethical relationship, when people have the ethical identity of husband and wife, parents and children, the primary problem is how to maintain the balance between emotion and responsibility. In the social ethical relationship, every individual has the freedom to choose occupation and belief, and every nation and country has the freedom to choose blockade or communication. It is of great significance to examine the "free female" will of individuals and groups in ethical relations for the text to play its ethical teaching function. Although Anna does not adhere to her so-called free female life in Lessing's works, her "free female" will still have important enlightenment significance in resisting power suppression and pursuing individual happiness. What the real "free woman" pursues is not only material liberation, obtaining material freedom, but more importantly, spiritual liberation and freedom. Human liberation can be aided by but cannot depend on any external force. The ending of Anna's return to real life doesn't seem to offer any answers, and that's what real life is.

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