

# The Golden Notebook Study Guide

## The Golden Notebook by Doris Lessing

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## Plot Summary

In a word, the novel "The Golden Notebook" by Doris Lessing can be best described as complex. It is structured in a complex form intended to mimic the complexity of the life of the main character, Anna. Although complex, the form is actually an attempt by Anna to simplify and compartmentalize what she sees as disorder and chaos in her world. The main plot focuses on Anna's quest for wholeness but at the same time addresses difficult issues such as gender relations, love and marriage, suicide, child rearing and politics.

The novel is comprised of a frame story interrupted by excerpts from Anna's four notebooks. The frame story, *Free Women*, details a portion of Anna's life. The story begins shortly after Michael, Anna's married lover, ends their five-year relationship. Anna's friend Molly has just returned from a yearlong trip and is dealing with her son's lack of direction in life. Anna is attempting to deal with this loss as well as trying to raise a daughter on her own, deal with a friend's suicide attempt and overcome her blocked writing ability.

This frame story is divided into five sections, each separated by excerpts from Anna's notebooks. These notebooks each details one section of Anna's life. Her black notebook contains information about the time period in which she lived in Africa. An experience in Africa where a black woman was impregnated by one of Anna's friends became the background for Anna's award winning novel. Anna's red notebook includes details of her membership in the British Communist Party. The next notebook, the yellow notebook, contains a partial manuscript of a novel as well as ideas for other short stories and novels. This novel, called *The Shadow of the Third*, closely mirrors Anna's own life. In the blue notebook, Anna attempts to keep a day-to-day factual record of her life. Anna makes a decision to stop separating her life into sections and integrates all of her life into one notebook - referred to as the golden notebook.



# Free Women: 1

## Free Women: 1 Summary

In a word, the novel "The Golden Notebook" by Doris Lessing is best described as complex. It is structured in a complex form intended to mimic the complexity of the life of the main character, Anna. Although complex, the form is actually an attempt by Anna to simplify and compartmentalize what she sees as disorder and chaos in her world. The main plot focuses on Anna's quest for wholeness but at the same time addresses difficult issues such as gender relations, love and marriage, suicide, child rearing and politics.

Friends Anna and Molly visit with each other after a year apart. Molly's former husband Richard calls to say he is coming to visit. Anna wants to leave but Molly insists she stay. While they are waiting, Molly chides Anna for not writing and then fixes them some beer. Anna tells Molly both Richard and Marion had been to see her several times while Molly was away. Richard is worried that Tommy, his son by Molly, spends too much time brooding. He wants the twenty-year-old boy to become involved in his business, a move that Tommy refuses. Molly buys strawberries from a street vendor. Richard arrives and the three begin to talk. Richard is unhappy because Molly has left Tommy alone for a year. He is concerned Molly doesn't take Tommy's lack of direction seriously enough. Richard and Molly argue about their differences and Anna again threatens to leave. Although the three agree it would be good for Tommy to be involved in his father's business, they know Tommy would not agree to take a business job. Richard argues it was Molly's raising that has made Tommy the way he is, indecisive and brooding.

The discussion turns to Richard and Marion. Richard is apparently unhappy because his sex life with Marion is unfulfilling and has been having affairs for nearly thirteen years. In the meantime, Marion has developed a serious drinking problem. When she has an affair and her lover wants to marry her, Richard is angry. The talk turns back to Tommy and as if on cue, the boy enters the room. Tommy shows the adults he has been listening in on their conversation. He then eats a bowl of strawberries, slowly, almost in a brutal manner. The discussion of how Tommy should spend his life continues. Tommy suggests he might become a teacher or writer but then admits he'd rather have a month or two more to do nothing. Molly consents but Richard is angry.

After Richard leaves and Tommy goes back upstairs the two women continue their discussion. Molly begins scolding Anna again for her lack of writing. Anna admits to feeling as if she is living in a world of chaos and close to the edge of cracking up. She admits to Molly she almost had an affair with Richard. Anna also mentions she has seen Michael again, the man with whom she had an extended affair. After they finish talking, Anna goes home to the flat that she bought on Michael's suggestion, with the idea that one day Michael would live in it with her.



Anna's room in her flat is the only place she can be herself. This room, decorated in red and black, portrays the contrasts in her life. The area serves as both her sleeping and working quarters. However, the majority of the space seems to be taken up by a large trestle table on which she works on her notebooks. This large table is reserved for this purpose only.

## Free Women: 1 Analysis

Themes begin to emerge as soon as the novel opens. One of the most obvious themes is the idea of whether women are better off married or single. The frame novel is given the ironic title of Free Women. This title obviously refers to Anna and Molly's lack of husbands. Even though they are free from husbands, these women are anything but free. They both have children as well as careers to deal with. On top of this, Molly still feels controlled by her former husband Richard. Molly and Anna's lives are contrasted by the life of Marion, Richard's current life. Marion and Richard are deeply unhappy with each other so much so that Marion has begun drinking and Richard has several affairs.

Tommy is an important character to watch as the novel progresses. He is caught between the unhappiness he sees in both his parents even though they have both taken different roads. Even though Tommy is allowed to decide which direction he wants his own life take, Tommy procrastinates in making a decision. Richard wants to force his son to take a business job while Molly wants to continue to give him his freedom. Tommy and his situation are contrasted by the milkman's son. This boy has earned a scholarship to college. He knows he can either take the scholarship and go to school, or begin working as a milkman. Although the boy has fewer choices than Tommy, he seems happier and more satisfied than Tommy does with his range of career choices. Note the foreshadowing of Anna describing Tommy as moving like a blind man.

Also notice Anna tries several times to make a point that she feels as if everything around her is cracking up. This breakdown is also an important theme in the novel as Anna struggles with her differing and conflicting roles. This theme is addressed much more in depth in Anna's notebooks.



# Black Notebook

## Black Notebook Summary

In this black notebook, Anna writes about her novel *Frontiers of War*. She tells about the time she spent in Africa. The experiences in Africa constitute the material for her novel. In this black notebook, Anna also keeps a record of the interest shown in her novel, particularly those wishing to turn her work into a film. She notes that with its popularity this book has become the property of others and is no longer a part of herself. For instance, a filmmaker wants rights to the book but plans to present her story in a different way. Anna refuses. The notebook is divided into two columns one is titled "money" and the other is titled "source." For three years, there are nothing but practical, money-related entries in this book.

There is then a synopsis of her novel, which Anna has written in tongue in cheek style. However, this synopsis is taken seriously and Anna realizes her book has been misunderstood by her readers. She then details the experiences in Africa that lead to her writing of the novel. It is primarily a story about color relations as a white man and black girl fall in love with each other. The girl has the man's baby but the man is unable to help the child because of the color barrier.

## Black Notebook Analysis

Here Anna seems to be trying to recount her experiences in Africa to try to determine the truth of her experiences. Although she tries to record a factual log of what happened in Africa in this notebook, she looks back to see the record is full of emotion and nostalgia. Anna is also disillusioned by the reaction to her book. Although it has sold well, she comes to realize it is mostly misunderstood. She feels the novel is a failure. Anna is also unhappy with the filmmakers who attempt to buy the rights to her novel. Each of these filmmakers wishes to portray the novel in a way in which Anna feels is untrue. As a result, Anna refuses to sell her novel.



# Red Notebook

## Red Notebook Summary

Molly writes a dozen pages about her doubts about the communist party. She plans to send this document to the party but Anna begs her not to send it as it could get Molly hanged. Molly consents. She asks Anna why she is considering joining the party. The next day Anna signs up for the communist party. As Anna writes in her notebook, she begins to see that everything she writes about the party is critical. She wonders why she is still a member of the party.

Three of Michael's friends are hanged as traitors to the communist party. He cries in his sleep. Anna helps get together a petition to help the Rosenbergs. These Rosenbergs are electrocuted and Anna feels sick as a result. Anna begins to feel isolated and believes she will leave the communist party on this account.

Michael and Anna visit Berlin in hopes of finding some of Michael's old friends. They find some people he once knew but they are suspicious of him. Some are outwardly hateful. Stalin dies. Despite the fact Anna and Molly feel they should be happy, they are not. They share a fear of the future. Anna continues to work for the communist party. She is sent to try to convince undecided voters to vote for the communist party.

## Red Notebook Analysis

Although Anna has joined the communist party and works hard for this party, she doesn't seem to really believe in or have faith in this party. She notes that other people around her who are members of the communist party seem to feel this same way. She sense communist party members are either lonely and view the party as their family or are people who are not political but have a strong sense of service.

There is also a certain amount of fear and uncertainty associated with the communist party. Anna discourages her friend Molly from sending the party the thesis outlining her concerns with the party. Anna is afraid the party will use the information to condemn and hang Molly. In addition, Michael is adversely affected by the party. After several of his friends are hung as traitors, he cries in his sleep. These, as Mother Sugar once said, are real tears. During a trip to Berlin Anna learns how distrustful communist party member are, even of each other. This experience adds to her disillusionment with the party.





# Yellow Notebook

## Yellow Notebook Summary

The information written in the yellow notebook appears to be the manuscript for a novel. It begins with Julia asking Ella if she plans to attend a party. Ella is busy trying to get her son, Michael, to sleep. Ella and Michael live with Julia in Julia's flat. Ella tells Julia she is not planning on going to the party. Julia is an actress while Ella writes for a women's magazine. Recently she has been writing responses to letters written to her magazine's medical column. The doctor who writes the column is giving the party to which Ella is invited. Julia nags Ella about the party and Ella finally relents and goes. Her divorce from her first husband was final last week, and she hopes to meet another man.

Ella disapproves of Dr. West's way of handling the letters. She pulls one from her bag and reads it to Julia. The two mourn the apparent lack of caring in the world. Ella thinks more about whether or not she wants to attend the party. Her thoughts turn to her novel, which is about a young man who commits suicide. Ella has the sense that people who commit suicide have been planning to do it all along even though they may not realize they have been making these plans. Ella finds herself ironing a dress to wear to the party. She has decided to go to the party after all.

It is a thirty-minute trip to Dr. West's house. Ella admits to herself she doesn't like to leave the house because she is afraid of the city. Dr. West's house has an untidy garden. Ella is met by Mrs. West who brags on Ella's work at the magazine. As soon as Ella enters the room, her quarrels with Dr. West over the letters are brought up. Apparently, the partygoers, most of them from the office, have been discussing the quarrels. Ella refuses to play along with Dr. West. A man comes from across the room to sit by her. Paul Tanner who is a doctor also tries to strike up a conversation with Ella. At first, Ella is hesitant, and then warms to him. She shows him the letter in her bag and the two discuss how Ella should respond to it. Paul is unwillingly pulled away to talk to another member of the staff.

Upon finding herself left alone, Ella decides to go home. Paul sees her leaving and follows her out. He asks if she wants a ride. She declines the offer but he insists. As he drives, he asks her questions. Ella feels he is trying to categorize her. He invites her for a drive the next afternoon, which she accepts. As the two drive, they discuss the ugliness of London and the ugliness of life. Paul questions Ella about her father. In particular, he asks if her father likes her. Ella has never thought about this before, but decides that he doesn't like her. They stop near a small field where they get out. Paul puts down a rug and waits for Ella to finish her stroll through the field. Paul questions Ella about George, her first husband, and then mentions his wife and children. The two make love. Ella is both happy and disappointed it happened so quickly. After they are finished Paul asks Ella how long it has been for her since she slept with a man. She feels he is degrading her and is hurt. He asks her to see a movie with him later in the



evening and she refuses. She tells him she will not see him again and goes into her house. Later he calls and she relents.

Instead of going to a movie, the two go to a coffee bar where Paul tells Ella stories of his job as a psychiatrist. After their discussion, she finds she likes him so much that she forgets the episode in the field. Paul walks with her into her house and they go upstairs. They make love again. This time Ella is completely happy. Paul comes each night that week. The following Sunday the two travel to Kew together. As he talks, Ella gets the sense from Paul's expression that he loves her but that he is telling her she can only expect so much from him. That night Ella does not react to Paul as she had on other nights. On the following night, he tells her he must spend the next night with his children.

In response to being left alone Ella has a one night stand with an editor who has wanted to sleep with her before. The man has problems and Ella feels it is her fault because she does not really care for him. She turns her attention to pleasing him, but feels chilled and depressed after the affair is finished. She sees Paul the next day and they both agree that their experience while apart were the same. Ella believes their time together begins at that moment. The only part of the affair that concerns Ella is Paul's lack of affection for her son Michael. She believes her happiness, however, will override any negative affect Paul has on Michael so she allows the affair to continue.

There is a break in the manuscript of the novel and Anna discusses her themes for the book. The main theme is to center around Ella's feelings about Paul's wife. As the novel progresses Ella will find herself transforming into a shadow of herself, the person she believes Paul's wife to be, in order to keep him close. Another theme will be Paul's jealousy. Ella will become convinced that their relationship brings out the best in Paul but the worst in Ella, a condition that will torment them when together. Ella's novel and Paul's obsession with this novel is another theme. Julia and her relationship to Ella is another important theme Anna plans to include in her novel. Ella's love for her son and Paul's attitude toward his profession are another pair of themes the novel will address.

As Anna reads through her novel in her mind, she sees yet another theme begin to show itself. This is the theme of naivety. Anna defines naivety as spontaneous creative faith. She writes that during Ella's years with Paul, he killed her ability to create through naivety. After another break, Anna describes the end of the relationship between Paul and Ella. Ella realizes Paul is trying to end the relationship when he stops helping her with her letters. Then she mistakenly comments to him that he speaks to her as his wife, he responds by withdrawing from Ella.

In the next section, Anna writes that Ella finishes her novel and it is published. Paul reacts badly to the material claiming it makes him feel as if men should stop living. Ella is hurt and doesn't understand his claim. Paul uses an example of women having their ovaries iced in order to have children without men, an accusation Ella is upset by. She claims she didn't write the novel with the idea that men were not needed. She claims she wants to have Paul's baby. She becomes overly upset by the discussion seemingly



upsetting Paul who comforts her, then teases her telling her she does indeed want to destroy all men.

Next Anna addresses the topic of the difficulty women have when writing about sex. She concludes that women believe sex is best not analyzed. Women see sex in terms of emotion and marriage in terms of love. Men, on the other hand, see sex as the reason for marriage. She notes that Ella knew she loved Paul because the first time they had sex, she experienced a vaginal orgasm. Ella believes she would not have had this orgasm had she not loved Paul and he had not needed and loved her. At the end of their relationship, Ella stops having these "real" orgasms and has only clitoral orgasms. It is at this point she realizes Paul is about to leave her. Paul also begins talking about going to Nigeria. Ella believes he will ask her to go with him.

One day Ella visits Paul's home while he wife is not home. Ella finds the house discordant and depressing. She is disturbed to find a stack of her magazines stacked on the kitchen table. In their bedroom, there are two twin beds. Paul says he is ashamed of himself as a husband, but not willing to free his wife to find someone who cares about her. Paul argues that his wife's life might be pleasant to her. Ella believes the opposite. Paul leaves for Nigeria unexpectedly. He does not offer to take Ella with him.

Later Dr. West tells Ella he has gotten a letter from Paul. Dr. West also states that Paul told him he'd been involved with a flighty mistress who had wanted to marry him. Dr. West admits he advised Paul to stay away from England as long as possible. Ella does not realize what Dr. West is talking about until she has a dream in which she is in Muriel's house waiting for Paul. At this point, she knows it is she who was Paul's flighty mistress. Ella reacts by buying herself new clothes as well as buying her own flat. This flat is large enough to accommodate herself, Paul and Michael. She finds herself waiting and watching for Paul to come back.

Anna is unhappy with her work because it is written from the viewpoint of the things that break up Paul and Ella's relationship. She considers writing only about two days of the relationship one during the beginning and one during the end of the relationship. Anna decides this approach will not work either. She feels the acts of loving are best shown on film while literature analyzes the actions after the event.

## **Yellow Notebook Analysis**

From the beginning of this novel, it is obvious that Anna is writing about her own life. Ella represents Anna while Julia represents Molly. Paul is Michael, the married man with whom Anna had an affair. In this novel format, Anna is free to explore the emotions she associated with her affair because they are happening to someone else. Anna also explores the role of sex in a relationship. Ella enjoys her first sexual encounter with Paul because their bodies seem to work well together. However, Paul's face bears a look that Ella finds disturbing. To punish Paul for going back to his wife for a night, Ella has a one-night stand with an editor she cares nothing about. As she cares nothing for this



man, she claims this act doesn't count as sex. When she and Paul are reunited, they realize how special the act of sex is when done with someone they truly care about.

Through the cover of *Ella*, Anna is able to relive and experience her break with Michael. She is also able to relive the good times she shared with Michael. Named *The Shadow of the Third* it soon becomes obvious that Ella chooses to focus on Paul's current wife. One day he takes Ella with him to his home to pick up a clean shirt. Although she does not want to Paul asks Ella to come inside and then takes her all through his house. Ella is disturbed by the chaos of decorating styles and themes inside the little home. She feels as if the house is in disagreement with itself. As she stands in the other woman's kitchen Ella forms of picture in her mind of Paul's wife. Ella is disgusted that any woman would be happy living in such a loveless relationship. To her surprise, Paul says his wife is extremely happy with their situation. As if to clench the matter of Paul's wife's happiness alone, later in the novel she refuses to go with Paul to Nigeria, says she would rather stay at home.

Note the way in which Paul's unhappiness with his work mirrors Anna's general unhappiness about life. He feels he is doing nothing but bandaging wounds with his work as a psychoanalyst. This is similar to the way Anna feels about her novel. Although she has put her heart and soul into this work, it is misunderstood and misused. Paul, unlike Anna, has already discovered an out. He plans to go to Nigeria where he feels he will really be able to do some good.



# Blue Notebook

## Blue Notebook Summary

After realizing she tends to turn all of her experiences into stories, Anna decides she needs to keep a diary. She begins by talking about Molly and Tommy's relationship. Tommy is angry with his mother for leaving his father. Anna tells Tommy the truth about his father. Molly sends Tommy to stay with Richard for the summer. After spending this much time with him, Tommy realizes that what his mother and Anna say about his father is true. However, he is still resentful of Molly. Anna worries that Janet will have the same feelings toward her when she grows up. Anna finds a journal entry from the day Janet was conceived. Although she made love to Max and married him, Anna admits that that man never got close to her personally.

Next Anna addresses her time with Mrs. Marks. Mrs. Marks seems determined Anna is suffering with writers block while Anna does not believe this is the case at all. Anna introduces to Mrs. Marks her fear that she will become frigid with men the way she was with Max. She then recalls an event where Michael angers her and, as a result, Anna finds herself unable to play with her daughter. Anna feels that her frigidity is caused by fear of death - that death is stronger than life. She shares her dreams with Mrs. Marks. Mrs. Marks insists that each dream holds Anna's creativity. Anna asks if they can ignore her dreams and Mrs. Marks agrees. It is at this point Anna stops dreaming.

At one point in their meetings, Mrs. Marks asks Anna if she writes in a diary. Anna admits she does. When Mrs. Marks tells Anna this diary is a way of unblocking her writing ability it angers Anna so that she stops writing. For nearly four years, this notebook is filled only with a variety of newspaper clippings about various world happenings.

At the end of her time with Mrs. Marks Anna begins making personal entries in her diary again. Anna admits to Mrs. Marks she has not been making personal entries in her diary, only cutting out newspaper entries having to do with war, death and destruction and pasting these in her diary. When Mrs. Marks asks Anna if she plans to start writing again Anna says that the bad things she sees in the newspapers outweigh her creativity.

Before her final visit to Mrs. Marks Anna has another dream. In this dream, she carries a casket to a group of people. She is convinced the casket holds something precious but when she looks inside it carries only bits and pieces of ugly stuff. The people have turned into businessmen and ask for the casket anyway. They are happy with what they find inside. Anna laughs when she realizes how she has cheated the businessmen.

## Blue Notebook Analysis

This section of Anna's diary is written, or compiled, when Anna is in psychoanalysis with Mrs. Marks. Anna records her sessions until Mrs. Marks angers her by indicating this



diary is a way of her creative nature being unblocked. At this point, she begins to only paste impersonal newspaper clippings in this book. It is only at the end of her sessions Anna feels free to write again. This inability to write is connected with Mrs. Marks' insistence that Anna's problems stem from her being blocked as a writer. Anna, however, does not appear to view herself as being blocked.

Anna's final journal entry, the one about the casket is particularly interesting although Mrs. Marks seems to find it uninteresting. It is assumed that this casket holds Anna's novel. Anna views her work as a bunch of junk, a badly written book. Her critics, however, are overjoyed with the work. In the end of the dream, Anna laughs thinking what fools she has made of everyone.



# Free Women: 2

## Free Women: 2 Summary

As Anna is putting her daughter Janet to bed, Molly calls looking for Tommy. Tommy has been to see Richard and has not come home yet. Molly is becoming concerned. Molly calls a second time saying Tommy has been to see Marion. After once again voicing her concern that something terrible is about to happen, the two women hang up their phones. Tommy surprises Anna by coming up the stairs. Anna tries to talk to Tommy about his visit with his father as well as the way the adults treat Tommy. She senses a rising hysteria in Tommy and is disturbed by his actions and statements.

Tommy sees Anna's notebooks and questions her about why she keeps them. As he reads on of the entries, he notes that Anna has described Janet as being in a phase. They discuss the use of this phrase and the adult's view of the child. The two also discuss an entry Anna has made about suicide. The phone rings and Marion announces she is coming over. Tommy leaves. Anna calls Molly and tells her she has see Tommy but that he is indeed acting very strangely. Anna is concerned she did not say the things Tommy wanted to hear.

Marion enters Anna's flat. She is drunk. Marion and Anna attempt to discuss the differences in their lifestyles with one being married and one unmarried. As they talk, the phone rings again. It is Molly screaming that Tommy has shot himself. Anna puts the now unconscious Marion to bed then runs into the street looking for a way to the hospital. When she arrives, she finds Tommy is expected to die by the end of the night.

## Free Women: 2 Analysis

In this section of Free Women Tommy suffers from some sort of breakdown and shoots himself with a gun. Although both Molly and Anna know something is wrong with him, they are unsure how to help him. Tommy goes to Anna and the two talk. However, Anna feels as if she has disappointed the boy with her answers. She also suspects that Tommy should not have read some of the information he did in her notebooks. In a twist, Marion also visits Anna. She is drunk, but aware enough that she is able to describe to Anna the unhappiness she feels in her marriage to Richard. Tommy seems to be concerned with the fact that all of the adults in his life are unhappy, a condition that he may feel is unavoidable.

# Black Notebook

## Black Notebook Summary

Anna summarizes a lunch meeting she has with a man involved in television movies. He plans to change the novel's setting to England. He also wants to do away with the color issue and turn the story into a film about class relations instead. Once they are on the street, Anna suggests they turn the entire book into a comic movie. Next Anna is approached by a company that claims it does not like to present plays with a racial theme or hints of extra-marital affairs. Anna notes to the company her novel contains both these aspects. They meet for lunch anyway. It becomes clear to Anna the company wishes to portray her novel as a political musical, an option Anna feels is unacceptable.

## Black Notebook Analysis

Anna is flooded with offers to turn her novel into a play, television movie or film. She is disillusioned by each offer as she feels that these moviemakers plan to turn her novel into something that it is not. Although the novel is written about the color barrier in Africa, these filmmakers claim it is merely a simple love story that could be set anywhere. Anna disagrees with these attempts to simplify her novel and retaliates by becoming sarcastic and hateful. After the interviews, she is depressed and ashamed. These feelings add to her dissatisfaction with the way her novel has been received.



# Red Notebook

## Red Notebook Summary

Molly and Anna research Quemoy. Molly has just learned her friends, the Forest brothers, are in jail. When she asked at headquarters about this pair, she is originally told the two were not in trouble. She now asks why they lied, and is given a lecture by headquarters on not panicking. Both Anna and Molly consider leaving the party. Anna and Michael talk about the communist party just before bed. That night Anna dreams of looking at the world from a distance. She sees different areas covered with different colored fabrics. Then the colors merge and the entire world is covered with a new color, then it all disappears into chaos. Although she cannot catch the meaning of this dream, she remembers the happy feeling that it gives her. She is happy.

Anna next includes the events of a writers' group meeting. Included in this section is a story about a member of the British Communist Party who has a rare visit with Stalin. The man recognizes Stalin as a great man. The group is silent after this story is read, then one listener comments they had believed the story was a parody. The members part disliking each other.

## Red Notebook Analysis

Anna and Molly's distrust for the communist party grows and they both consider leaving the party. Anna's dream about the fabric covering the world and changing into one color may be some sort of dream about world unity and acceptance. The idea of someone pulling one thread in this fabric and making all of this unity disappear into chaos shows how unstable harmony can be.



# Yellow Notebook

## Yellow Notebook Summary

After her break from Paul, Ella goes to Paris for a week at the suggestion of Patricia Brent. Ella is unhappy in Paris, remembering only the time she spent with Paul there. In her role in Paris Ella must work with writers from whom her magazine wants to buy articles. The writers must agree to have their stories rewritten for use in the British publication. One of the writers is a young man, preparing for marriage. As they wait for his fiancée, Ella tries to determine his type of woman. She notices him noticing women other than his fiancée. Once his fiancée arrives, it is obvious she notices this also.

Ella leaves the city early disillusioned and depressed. She recognizes the attempt to buy her fiancé, the same attempt Ella would have made to buy Paul if given the chance. Ella feels her real emotions are only those tied to being with a man. Being away from Paul has left her in emotional pieces. The plane that is to carry Ella home has a mechanical problem and the flight is delayed. Ella and the other passengers watch as mechanics work on the plane then thrown their arms up in - . The passengers are allowed back onto the plane and it takes off. All are nervous about their futures. Ella sits near a man who shares her uneasiness. This man, Cy Maitland, and Ella have an affair. Ella never has an orgasm with Cy, however, he seems to be overjoyed to be with her. He admits his wife "froze up" when they got married and that the two rarely have sexual relations. Ella and Cy part with affection. Back at Julia's flat, the emptiness of the affair begins to hit Ella. She informs Julia she wants to go to bed before the full weight of the depression hits her.

## Yellow Notebook Analysis

In this section of the yellow notebook, Anna gives the reader her views of suicide. As she notes Ella's death in the plane could not have exactly been termed a suicide. She does believe, however, the parent's love for its child keeps the parent alive. Most parents will not commit suicide simply because they do not want to hurt their children. The emptiness of Ella's life without Paul mirrors the emptiness of Anna's life without Michael. One must wonder if Anna has considered suicide but allows herself to remain alive because of her daughter.



# Blue Notebook

## Blue Notebook Summary

Michael discusses with Anna the end of their affair. They argue whether or not it has been a great love affair. Anna decides to take the events of one day and record them as truthfully as she possibly can. On the day that Anna planned to write about, she put off writing until the next day because she was so unhappy. Anna wonders if her special attention to the events of the day made it different from others.

Anna wakes early thinking she has heard Janet awake in the next room. Anna lies with Michael and tries to imagine how it must feel to have his tragic background. As she lies in bed, Anna feels herself growing tense over the things she must accomplish in the day. Just as it is time for Janet to wake, Michael begins to have sex with her, an action that adds to her frustration. She feels Michael enjoys taking her in hazard. The danger of Janet walking in on them represents the other women whom he betrays when he sleeps with Anna. Michael teases her about leaving him for Janet, a statement that further adds to her resentment.

Before Anna goes to care for Janet, she cleans between her legs so that the child will not be bothered by the smell of sex. Anna warms Janet's room and then fixes her breakfast, which she eats in bed. Janet dresses herself for school and then leaves before Anna must wake Michael. She is glad things worked out this way because she admits it is hard to be Michael's mistress and Janet's mother at the same time. She and Michael have breakfast together. She feels he wants to tell her something. They make plans to spend another evening together.

Anna buys food for the evening meal and then prepares for work. At the last moment, she notices her period has started. The knowledge makes her irritable. At work, she washes between her legs and applies perfume to keep others from smelling the smell of her period. At her job, Anna is to report to John Butte on two books she has read. She knows she has a fight ahead of her. Anna is an unpaid worker in a publishing office for the British Communist Party. After a lively discussion, it is decided both books will be published. Anna then settles down to review a stack of magazines to see if any material in them is suitable for the British Communist Party.

As Anna has lunch with a friend, she becomes firm in her decision to leave the communist party. She thinks back over the work she has done, the letters and novels she has reviewed. It was her idea to compile some of the better letters into a book. Anna will be glad to be free of her office companion, Rose, whom she does not like.

Anna leaves her office and goes home in the rain. The house is bustling with noise from Molly, Tommy and Janet. Anna cooks Janet's dinner and puts her to bed. She then prepares dinner for herself and Michael. Anna battles her feelings of happiness, guilt, tiredness and depression as she cooks. She believes Michael already has another



mistress and will come to Anna tonight only out of habit. She waits for him and he does not come. Finally, Michael calls and tells her he cannot come tonight. She feels hurt and rejected. She has a glass of wine and goes to bed. She cries in her sleep.

## Blue Notebook Analysis

In reporting on the whole of her day Anna gives a glimpse into how busy and stressed her life is. She wakes tense, she is resentful of her lover even though she realizes he is not directly responsible for this resentment. Anna's idea of the injustice of women is an interesting idea, one that women have struggled with for centuries. Women find themselves caught and trapped trying to be all of the things different people need them to be. They have to be a mother to their children; a lover to their husband or significant other; a cook, cleaning woman and general household manager as well as other various roles. These conflicting roles cause the resentment Anna feels. Unlike some women, however, she chooses to fight against this resentment, a fight that tires her.

Another interesting habit of Anna's that is brought up in this journal segment is her habit of washing between her legs. First, she doesn't want Janet to smell sex on her, and then she doesn't want those in her office to smell that she has her period. This washing away of these scents could only be a sign of an obsession with personal hygiene or it could be an attempt on Anna's part to cover up her womanhood, her sexuality. Although most women aren't proud of their periods, they don't go to the lengths Anna does to eradicate this smell.

In this section, Anna also writes of her disintegrating relationship with Michael. She knows he plans to leave her. In fact, she believes he already has another mistress. This breakup with Michael is one of the factors that leads to Anna's breakdown. On this same day, Anna makes up her mind to leave the communist party. It is through this party she has worked at a publishing house. Although her job was an unpaid job, having this job provided structure and reason for her time.



# Free Women: 3

## Free Women: 3 Summary

After a week in the hospital it is determined Tommy will live, however, his optic nerve was damaged by the bullet and he will be blind. Molly and Anna try to determine when they let Tommy down. They also defend themselves against Richard's attacks. When Tommy regains consciousness, Molly tells him the truth about his blindness. This truthfulness angers Richard further. Tommy insists no changes be made in anyone's lives because of his blindness. His bedroom is relocated to the living room in Molly's house so he won't have to deal with as many stairs. Molly and Anna agree that Tommy's presence makes them uncomfortable. For the most part, life returns to normal.

After Tommy's suicide attempt, Marion stops drinking. She also visits Tommy quite often. At Richard's request, Anna meets with Richard in his office to talk. She is aware he is having an affair with his secretary. Richard begins to talk about Tommy and Marion's relationship. He is hurt Marion no longer spends time with him or the children. Anna points out that she is no longer drinking. Richard insinuates it doesn't matter if Marion doesn't care for him. He plans to send Tommy and Marion away on a trip together. While they are away, he plans to introduce his children to his secretary, Jean, whom he wants to marry. Richard seems to think Marion has a plan against him. He calls Anna names at which point Anna tries to leave. He will not allow her to leave. The look on his face lets her know he is thinking of the time she almost slept with him. Finally, he opens the door and allows her to leave his office.

As she takes the underground home, Anna is aware she is in a fragile emotional state. A man staring at her bothers her, as it usually wouldn't have in the past. Anna feels a sense of panic as the man follows her off the underground. She stops at a fruit vendor and the feel of the fruit seems to bring her back to her senses. She returns home where Ivor, her boarder, has been caring for Janet. Although Anna is relieved Ivor cared for Janet during Tommy's hospital stay, she is uncomfortable with the man because he is homosexual. She worries about the affect his lifestyle might have on Janet. Ivor's friend Ronnie has recently come to stay with Ronnie, another situation that makes Anna uncomfortable.

When Anna returns home Ivor is reading a story about boarding school to Janet. Ronnie is singing in their room. Anna feels that both are making fun of her, that she isn't free even in her own home. Anna is surprised to find Marion sitting in the dark of Anna's room when she enters. Marion asks if Anna has seen Richard, then asks if Richard does indeed want a divorce. Anna confirms her suspicions and adds that Richard wants to marry his secretary. Marion admits she turned herself into something she wasn't in order to try to please Richard. All this time, she adds, Richard wasn't worth pleasing.

Meanwhile Marion brags on Tommy's intelligence and attitude. She asks Anna to help them with a project. Tommy has told Marion to ask Anna for Tom Mathlong's address. As



Marion talks, Anna realizes that Tommy and Marion have been discussing her and that they are using this excuse to adopt Anna as a cause, to save her. Anna is angry but gives Marion an address. She calls Tommy and questions him about Marion's visit. He claims he felt it would be good for Marion. After she hangs up, Anna comes to realize Tommy has changed into someone else. He is someone they should be afraid of.

As Anna gets Janet ready for bed and goes about her evening, she continues to worry about Ivor and Ronnie. She is uncomfortable with them in the house, but cannot bring herself to tell them to leave. She goes to the bathroom to find Ronnie using her lotion. She knows he hates her. He tries to take her lotion but she outsmarts him. A look on his face tells her he knows he shouldn't be trying to make her angry but can't help himself. Later she passes their room and they are talking, loudly degrading women's bodies. Anna is sickened by their talk.

Before she goes to sleep, Anna thinks of Mother Sugar. She dreams about a desert she must cross to find water, a dream she knows means she must make changes. She tells Ivor the next day that Ronnie must leave. Although she feels she is being a bitch, she stands firm in her decision.

## Free Women: 3 Analysis

This section of the book is distinct in its raising level of distress for Anna. Tommy's situation and his response to it cause her stress. Richard's response to Tommy and Marion's sudden friendship adds to this stress. To top things off, Ivor and Ronnie's homosexual relationship has caused Anna to worry Janet will be effected by the two being in the house. Several times Anna feels an uncontrollable panic and forces herself to calm down. Things seem to be at a turning point when she asserts her authority and orders Ronnie to leave the house.

# Black Notebook

## Black Notebook Summary

Anna watches as a man kicks and accidentally kills a pigeon on the London streets. This scene brings back a memory from Africa when Anna and her group went out to kill pigeons for a pigeon pie. She details the conversation, smells, sights and sounds of the day.

Under the heading "money" Anna details where a magazine has requested pages from her journal. She replies that she does not keep a journal but then makes up a few pages of a journal of a young male writer. Anna shows this to a friend, an American writer who adds more to the journal. They submit the journal for publication and it is published. The two have dinner together to celebrate. Another friend suggests Anna write a play based on the book *Frontiers of War*. The friend already has ideas on how to go about structuring this play. Also included in this section is a short story written by a friend as well as a variety of reviews of Anna's novel *Frontiers of War*.

## Black Notebook Analysis

These particular excerpts from Anna's black notebook show her increasing disillusionment with writing and with her own writing ability. The pigeon incident in the park sparks a memory for Anna that she cannot bring to mind right away. She is frustrated with the amount of knowledge locked in her brain that she cannot access. Anna and a writer friend also write a parody, which is published. They are disappointed, however, that their publishers don't recognize the comedy of the satire. Anna feels as if the things she has created, her novel included, aren't properly understood by the general public. In addition, Anna is disappointed by her novel. She doesn't feel as if it were her best work.



# Red Notebook

## Red Notebook Summary

Though she is no longer a member of the communist party Anna attends a communist party meeting. The members discuss the creation of a new, improved party. For nearly a year, Anna collects articles on this anticipated change in the communist party. About a year later, Anna writes again disgusted with her own naivety that the communist party would ever change. Molly speaks of Tommy being involved in the socialist party. She attended one of his meetings and is surprised how similar it is to the communist meetings of her youth. Molly is dismayed believing these young people should be more intelligent than their parents.

## Red Notebook Analysis

Even though she is not a member of the communist party any longer, Anna is still excited when she initially hears that changes are in store for this party. She is disillusioned once again when there are no real changes in the party. Molly's comments about Tommy and his involvement in the socialist party insinuate there have not even been any real changes from generation to generation. Those younger have not learned from the older generations' mistakes.





# Yellow Notebook

## Yellow Notebook Summary

Anna defines a new third to include in her novel. This third is Ella herself, the whole, healthy Ella. Ella is no longer this healthy person since she has been abandoned by Paul. Ella moves out of Julia's flat much to the chagrin of Julia. Ella feels completely alone. She now feels her identity has changed from a woman living with another woman to a woman living alone. Dr. West contacts her and offers an affair. Ella declines and Dr. West is angry. Dr. West is not the only married man who contacts Ella with this offer. Ella meets Julia at a party and they talk about these experiences. Ella sleeps with Jack, colleagues from work. Ella decides after this experience she will not sleep with anyone again until she falls in love. After this decision, Ella finds herself filled with sexual desire. After a discussion with Julia about the men who have tried to come onto her, Ella finds herself in a new phase where she gives up men and sex.

In the next section, Anna describes how Ella is a mirror image of herself. Anna describes how she decided to call her main character Ella. Anna next describes the stories Ella finds within herself. Ella then visits her father, asking him about his relationship with her mother. Ella's father tells her that her mother seemed to be sexless but was extremely jealous. Ella's father tells her people are best off if they leave each other alone. If they don't leave each other alone, he says they become like cannibals. Ella does learn that her father writes poetry.

## Yellow Notebook Analysis

In this section, Ella makes a very powerful insight about her and Julia's position of free women. She makes the point that it doesn't matter if Julia and Ella are free if all the men they meet are married. Ella makes this comment at a point when she is lonely and discouraged. She has just moved out of Julia's flat and has been bombarded by a series of men wishing to have extra-marital affairs with her. Ella sleeps with one man but realizes this action only makes her more depressed. At this point, she decides to give up men for good.



# Blue Notebook

## Blue Notebook Summary

Anna is not satisfied with the amount of emotion she finds in her entries. She details a session she has with Mother Sugar in which Anna realizes she is getting better. Anna mentions she is ready to move on alone. Mother Sugar points out the contradiction in this statement since Anna is a communist. Anna then talks to Mother Sugar about the cracks she believes there are in most all people. Mother Sugar takes the opportunity to tell Anna she should start writing again.

Next Anna writes that she now realizes that in moving to a new flat she did so not only to have room for Michael but more importantly to have room for her notebooks. Anna reads through her notebooks and realizes how much her breakup with Michael has changed her. She is scared because she doesn't recognize herself. Anna then begins to start having dreams about the Russian peasant vase. In her dreams, this vase dances, jumps, and menaces impersonally and without reason. In some dreams, the vase is an old woman or dwarf man. Anna finally stops writing about the dream because she feels by writing about the dream it will bring her into deeper danger.

Anna meets a man named Nelson at a political meeting. She sleeps with him, then discovers he transforms into a man she doesn't like soon after they sleep together. Nelson invites Anna to a party at his house. At this party, he deliberately picks a fight with his wife. He then tells his wife he will dance with Anna. He does dance with Anna. Nelson and his wife fight about Anna the remainder of the night. Nelson calls Anna the next day wanting to marry her. They argue and Anna is hurt. Nelson hurts her worse by asking if his actions and words have hurt her. At the end of this experience, Anna is afraid because she wants to run from any man who makes sexual advances toward her.

Anna next outlines another experience she has with a man named De Silva. De Silva tells Anna he met a woman on the street. He asked the woman to have sex with him and tells her the only rule is that she not respond to him. The woman promises, but of course, is unable to do this. De Silva was angry because the woman had spoiled his time. She was also angry and called him names.

Another story told by De Silva is about a man whose name De Silva doesn't give. This man sleeps with his cleaning lady every morning on the kitchen floor while his wife is upstairs. De Silva tells the wife about this affair. Next, he stays the night with Anna. The next morning he asks her if he can have a lady friend spend the night with him in the room above Anna's room. Anna finally realizes what it is he wants to do and that she should be angry. Anna continues to hear from De Silva and realizes he gets joy from causing pain.



## Blue Notebook Analysis

Several sexual issues are brought up in this entry. This is particularly so in the section that talks about De Silva. De Silva cruelly asks a woman to have sex with him and asks her not to respond to him. The woman naturally responds and De Silva becomes angry. In another instance, De Silva learns about a man's affair and tells his wife. Finally, he wants to have sex with another woman in Anna's house where Anna will hear them. De Silva seems to use sex as a tool to hurt others.

Another interesting incident occurs with Nelson, another of Anna's brief affairs. Nelson starts by seeming to be a thoughtful, caring man. He then transforms into a monster that scares Anna and makes her feel detached. Nelson also invites Anna to a party at his house and then uses her as a pawn to make his wife mad. This experience makes Anna want to run from all men who make sexual advances.



# Free Women: 4

## Free Women: 4 Summary

Anna waits for Molly and Richard. She is exhausted. Ronnie has moved back in and she finds herself in the position where she must throw both the men out. Marion has basically left Richard and her children and is now living with Tommy in Anna's old part of Molly's flat. Marion and Tommy attended a political meeting together and were arrested after a misunderstanding. Richard is angry because of the bad publicity. Molly is tired of feeling like a prisoner, accountable to Tommy and Marion, in her own home.

Richard and Molly send Anna to talk to Marion and Tommy. Although Anna doesn't know what she plans to say to the two, she packs a few papers and goes to confront them. She decides to try to talk to Marion alone in the upstairs flat. The rooms are painful to Anna because they are where she lived with Michael. She sees fear in Marion's eyes that Anna will try to convince her to go back home to Richard. As Anna tries to talk to Marion, she feels herself becoming hysterical. The same hysteria that has affected both Marion and Tommy seems to be affecting Anna. As Anna continues to talk, Marion admits how much she hates Richard and does not even want to go back to her children.

Anna tries to explain to Marion that she has moved into Molly's house when they hear Tommy's feet on the stairs. Like Marion, Tommy asks Anna if she plans to make Marion leave. Anna suggests they go on a vacation together to decide what they should do. Anna tells Tommy how good he has been for Marion. Tommy replies that he has decided that all people want to do it to be liked. Anna then tells Tommy he has changed, especially in the way he treats his mother. Anna leaves with the feeling that things will change.

Molly and Richard finally arrive at Anna's flat. Anna explains she believes things have changed even though she can't explain why. She suggests Richard offer Marion and Tommy another trip. This time she believes they will take the offer. Anna also suggests Molly try to talk to Tommy right away. They all part in good humor. After Richard and Molly leave, Anna tells Ivor to pack up and leave.

## Free Women: 4 Analysis

Even as Anna feels her world is coming completely apart, she is called upon by Molly and Richard to talk to Tommy and Marion. Anna lets her hysteria show and seems to connect with Tommy and Marion. After she leaves, she has a feeling things will be different.



# Black Notebook

## Black Notebook Summary

Anna now uses her black notebook to collect articles about hate and violence in Africa. In her final entry, she has a dream where a film crew is taping her novel. She is happy the director has gotten the set correct but soon realizes her story has been changed. She asks why, a question to which she does not get a satisfactory answer. This is the final entry in the book.

## Black Notebook Analysis

Anna records a dream in which she once again feels her book is misunderstood by a filmmaker. In this dream, the novel is actually changed by the director who doesn't seem to understand why Anna is upset he has changed her work. At this point, Anna realizes how little her African experience and her novel mattered.



# Red Notebook

## Red Notebook Summary

Here Anna's friend Jimmy tells Anna about Harry a friend of his who works as a teacher for special children.

## Red Notebook Analysis

This communist party story seems to condone a man who lived his life solely for the party. At the end of the story, the man marries, a small sign he has begun to find a life outside of the party.

# Yellow Notebook

## Yellow Notebook Summary

In this section of the yellow notebook, Anna abandons her novel *The Shadow of the Third* and begins to record various ideas she has for other short stories and novels.

## Yellow Notebook Analysis

Here Anna seems to lose her writer's block and begins to be able to record ideas for new stories and novels. It is interesting to note that most of these stories seem to spring from Anna's own personal experiences about love and men.



# Blue Notebook

## Blue Notebook Summary

Anna enrolls Janet in the boarding school she wants to attend. Janet goes to school dressed in her ugly uniform and leaves her mother alone in the empty flat. At this point Anna remembers a game she used to play as a young child. This game was a naming game where she would "create" the world around her by naming all of the objects in it. An American writer named Saul Green moves in with Anna. She is immediately uncomfortable around the man and begins to have panic attacks because of him.

Although she at first doesn't like the man, the two soon begin to have an affair. Anna learns another woman likes Saul and she assumes the two are sleeping together on the side. One day while Saul is away Anna reads his diary, which seems to back up the story that Saul is sleeping around. Anna confronts him with this information and he denies these affairs. Meanwhile it appears more and more that Saul is suffering with multiple personality disorder. One moment his is caring and loving and the next moment he is crazy and angry. Anna does not understand these changes and they drive her closer to the edge of breaking up.

One day while shopping Anna comes across a display of notebooks like the four in which she writes. She finds one golden one in particular that catches her eye. She buys it and takes it home. Once Saul sees the book, he wants it but Anna won't give it to him. Although she is tempted to give the book away, she decides to pack away all her other notebooks and just keep one notebook that includes all of her.

## Blue Notebook Analysis

It is in this portion of her journal that Anna records her lowest point. Janet has gone away to boarding school and has left her mother alone. Anna no longer has the girl to structure her days. Anna has also quit the communist party so she no longer has her unpaid job to give her day structure and her life purpose. Anna rents a room to Saul Green an American writer. From his actions and varying moods, it appears Saul may suffer with multiple personality disorder. Another aspect of his personality that points to this disorder is that Saul has large portions of his day he cannot remember. Being with Saul seems to sicken Anna and push her closer and closer to the edge. She even begins having panic attacks, which she finally attributes to Saul. Anna fights her way back and decides to try to integrate herself into one whole, healthy person. She will record this integration in a new golden notebook.





# Golden Notebook

## Golden Notebook Summary

The golden notebook starts after Anna and Saul have just had an enjoyable sexual experience. Saul leaves the room and Anna sits on the bed naked. Although she usually likes her body, she begins to realize she is disgusted by her body. Saul comes downstairs and strengthens her feelings by chiding her for sitting naked. As soon as he leaves, Anna feels good about herself again.

Soon Anna begins to feel sick and gets to bed. She sleeps and, as she sleeps, she dreams. She struggles to fight against a tiger (Saul) as a voice tells her she is capable of flight. Two men start fighting. Anna recognizes the men as Michael, her former lover, and Paul, from her novel. These men merge into one person. Anna sees the faces of the people she has known in her past. She believes this is so she will continue to work on the past. She begins to realize the things she has written about were written from her point of view only, not particularly the view of the truth. She tries to tell the story from another person's view but is not successful.

Anna wakes realizing Saul is in the house. She tells him that he is bad for her and he needs to break off the relationship. Saul is angry. Anna tells him he would leave when Janet came back anyway. She believes he would stay if Janet was a boy, but as she is a girl, she believes Saul will leave. The two talk calmly for a while but then Saul turns into his angry self when Anna mentions that they are both boulder pushers. Anna begins to feel sick again. She gets them some whiskey and they both drink. Anna becomes emotional because of the liquor and feels betrayed by Saul. Saul makes love to her. She falls asleep and wakes with Saul. Saul leaves for a walk.

Anna falls asleep and dreams again. She recognizes the projectionist's voice as Saul's. Anna wakes and thinks of the plot for a new story. In this story, a woman will have an affair with two different men, each on alternate nights. Saul suggests she write her story. In doing this, Anna can simplify her life within herself in order to keep herself from breaking apart. Saul forces Anna to take up a pencil and write. He even gives her the first sentence, "The two women were alone in the London flat." Saul says these two women represent the two women inside Anna. He says she must and will write this novel because if she can do it, he can also. Anna returns the favor and gives him a sentence to start his novel. Saul tells Anna he will leave on the conditions Anna gives him her new notebook and that she cooks for him.

Saul asks Anna to write the first sentence of his novel in the new notebook, and then give him the book. She does so and the golden notebook continues in Saul's writing a story about the Algerian soldier. This novel is published and does well.

## Golden Notebook Analysis

It is in this golden notebook that Anna finds healing. She asks Saul to leave and after some disagreement, he decides he does need to leave. Before he leaves, though, he gives Anna the first sentence of her next novel. Interestingly this sentence is the first sentence of The Golden Notebook's frame story Free Women. Anna likewise gives Saul a beginning sentence for his novel and sends him away with her golden notebook. Saul writes a novel based on this sentence and is finally published.



# Free Women: 5

## Free Women: 5 Summary

Janet requests to be allowed to go to boarding school, a request to which Anna agrees. Anna loses her daily structure when Janet leaves. Everything else in Anna and Molly's lives has changed as well. Tommy and Marion have gone on a trip, Richard and Jean have also gone away, and Molly is caring for Richard's three boys. Anna decides she needs a man to cure her blues and sees a man named Nelson. This affair does not go well and sends Anna even deeper into depression. She finds herself trying to bring some order to her world by ordering information in newspapers and journals. She cuts articles from these publications and pins them to her walls until her entire room is covered with the articles.

Anna is concerned Janet will come home from school to find her in this cracked state. She tries to work on her notebooks, but feels disconnected from them. She still feels something contained in these journals may have triggered Tommy's suicide attempt. Molly phones that a friend needs a place to stay the night. The man is instantly concerned when he sees Anna's newspaper covered bedroom walls. He convinces Anna to let him stay. They prepare for bed. Before sleep, he carefully clears all of the newspaper clippings from her walls. He reviews her notebooks, asking her if she is trying to put the truth in a cage. He also insists she not give herself over to guilt. He stays with her six nights. The final day, she asks him to leave and they part on friendly terms.

Molly has phoned Anna to tell her she is getting married. She plans to move and live in her husband's house in Hampstead. Tommy and Marion will be living in Molly's flat. Tommy has taken over Richard's place at Richard's office. Meanwhile Richard is settling in with Jean. Anna shares her own news. She plans to get a job working with a marriage counselor. She will no longer write. The two women comment on how odd life is, and then they part ways.

## Free Women: 5 Analysis

At the end of their struggles, both Anna and Molly have turned to traditional ways of life. Molly plans to be married. Anna plans to get a job and settle into the routine of a working woman. She announces she is giving up her writing. Perhaps the most important aspect of this chapter is Anna's - to look at and recognize life as what it is. She spends weeks trying to organize newspapers on her walls, in the same instance trying to organize her life. Finally, a kind man comes and takes away these clippings. It is perhaps Anna's ability to end the affair with Milt without hard feelings that proves her healing more than anything else. She also decides to get a smaller place, showing that she has moved on from Michael.



# Characters

## Anna Wulf

Anna is the main character of the novel. All events are seen through her eyes. She is a rather promiscuous, middle-aged woman living off the proceeds of a best selling novel she wrote based on time she spent in Africa. After becoming pregnant, Anna marries Max Wulf, whom she doesn't love. They are married less than one year. Anna raises her daughter, Janet, as a single-mother. After her marriage to Max, Anna becomes involved with a married man. She and Michael have a five-year affair. When this affair ends, Anna is heart-broken and disillusioned. Another facet that adds to Anna's disillusionment is the problems in the communist party, a political party of which she was a member. Anna admits to her friends she feels as if her life is cracking apart. She keeps a series of four notebooks. Each of these notebooks holds information about one particular part of her life. Near the end of the novel, Anna decides to combine the information from her notebooks into one book, an act that symbolizes the healing and uniting of her person.

Before moving into a place of her own, Anna shared a flat with her friend Julia and her son Tommy. One evening Tommy visits Anna. During the visit, Tommy reads part of Anna's notebooks. He goes home and attempts to kill himself. Anna struggles with the guilt that something written in her books made the boy want to take his own life. Tommy does not die from his suicide attempt but is blinded. Anna watches the boy transform into the very person he did not want to become. In the end of the novel, Anna takes a job as a marriage counselor and decides not to write anymore.

## Molly Jacobs

Molly is Tommy's mother and Richard's former wife. Molly married Richard when she was eighteen and stayed with Richard only a little more than one year. She works as an actress and, like Anna, is raising her son as a single mother. Unlike Anna's situation where there appears to be no father in the picture, Molly's former husband keeps tabs on Tommy. He often calls or visits Molly to argue that she is not raising Tommy correctly. While Richard would prefer Tommy get a job in Richard's office, Molly is content to let Tommy make up his own mind about his future. Molly has also left Tommy alone for a year while she traveled. Richard blames many of Tommy's problems on this separation. Molly is portrayed as being older and more assertive than Anna. She is seen as a mother or older sister figure to the younger girl. After Tommy's suicide attempt, Molly admits to feeling trapped in her own home by her son. In the end of the novel, Molly leaves her flat to Tommy and Marion and is remarried.

## Tommy

Tommy is Molly and Richard's son. He is a thoughtful, brooding boy of about twenty years in age. Although his life is open to take any direction he might want it to, Tommy



appears to be unable to make up his mind what he should do with his life. He is strongly set against working in his father's office and would prefer to be left alone to think. Tommy appears to study the adults around him carefully and to pick up on the idea that even though they have all taken differing roads, none of them is truly happy. After talking with Anna one evening about the choices he has for his life, he goes home and shoots himself in the head with a gun. A week passes before the doctors know for sure whether Tommy will live. Tommy does survive the incident but is blinded for life. After this, he becomes close friends with Marion, his father's current wife. As a result of Tommy's influence, Marion stops drinking and eventually leaves Richard. She and Tommy live together in Molly's flat. Although he was set against it before his blindness, Tommy takes a job at his father's office.

## **Richard Portmain**

Richard is Molly's former husband and Tommy's father. He is portrayed as an angry man with a grudge against women. He is disinterested and unloving toward his wife Marion until she finds another man. At this point, Richard becomes jealous and gets Marion back for himself. As soon as she is away from her other lover, Richard begins to neglect her again. Although he no longer cares for Marion and wants to marry his secretary, Richard is once again hurt when Marion begins spending time with Tommy. Although Anna and Richard appear to have a deep dislike for each other, there was one point at which Anna almost went to bed with him. He uses this information against her in one of their arguments to make her feel small and degraded.

## **Marion**

Marion becomes Richard's wife after his divorce from Molly. She bears Richard three children whom she does not seem to care about once she decides to leave Richard. While married to Richard, Marion takes up the habit of drinking heavily. When she and Tommy become friends, Tommy encourages her to give up this habit. Marion eventually gets up the nerve to leave Richard and moves into Julia's flat with Tommy.

## **Janet**

Janet is Anna's daughter by Max Wulf. It is Janet that gives Anna much of the stability and structure that exists in her life. As she grows up Janet requests to be sent to a traditional boarding school. This decision surprises Anna since Janet has been exposed to such an unstructured life. Janet, however, yearns for the structure and rules a traditional boarding school will provide.

## **Michael**

Michael is a married man with whom Anna had a five-year relationship. Michael is a European refugee whose mother and father along with other friends and family were



killed in communist gas chambers. Toward the end of their relationship, Anna becomes sure Michael has another mistress.

## Ella

Ella, the main character in Anna's novel *Shadow of the Third*, is Anna's mirror image. Like Anna, Ella has just suffered the loss of a serious relationship with a married man. Also like Anna, Ella is experiencing a fragmentation of herself. Ella is also a writer who is never really satisfied with her work.

## Julia

Julia is the mother-figure to Ella in Anna's half-written novel *Shadow of the Third*. Julia is patterned after Anna's friend Molly. Both Julia and Molly are actresses and Jewish. Like Anna once lived with Molly, Ella and her son live with Julia.

## Paul

Paul is a psychoanalyst and Ella's lover in the novel *The Shadow of the Third*. Paul is married with children. According to Paul, his wife Muriel is happy with her situation despite the fact her husband is never at home. Paul breaks off his affair with Ella when he goes to Nigeria. Ella believes he will call for her to join him but he never does. Muriel does not join her husband in Nigeria either, as she is too happy at home.

## Mrs. Marks/Mother Sugar

Mother Sugar is the pet name Anna and Molly use for a German psychoanalyst who treated both women. She is described in the novel as having a traditional and conservative view of life even though she was aware of all of its scandals and amorality. Anna spends several years in therapy with Mother Sugar. During these years, she refuses to write in her personal diary as Mother Sugar comments to her that it is this kind of writing that will free her writing block. Mother Sugar believed Anna's problems came from writer's block while Anna was determined that she was not blocked as a writer.

## Ivor

Ivor is a student from Wales who rents Anna's extra room. While Tommy is in the hospital, Ivor helps care for Janet and in turn convinces Anna to let him invite a friend to stay rent free. It turns out the friend is a homosexual man who is hateful to Anna. Anna is ultimately forced to ask both men to leave.



## **Ronnie**

Ronnie is Ivor's homosexual friend. Ivor convinces Anna to let Ronnie move in while Tommy is in the hospital. Later Anna is concerned their relationship will affect Janet and asks Ronnie to leave.

## **Dr. West**

Ella works with Dr. West at the women's magazine. Dr. West makes overtones of discouraging Paul's relationship with Ella but as soon as he gets the chance, Dr. West asks Ella if she will sleep with him.

## **Max Wulf**

Max is Anna's former husband and Janet's father. Max is the Willi in the black notebook. Anna does not love him. She marries him only to keep Janet from being illegitimate.

## **Saul Green**

Saul is an American writer who rents Anna's spare room. His multiple personalities and cruel antics push Anna over the edge, and she begins experiencing panic attacks after he moves in with her.

## **Cy Maitland**

Cy is the energetic doctor whom Ella has an affair with after her return from Paris.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Free Women**

This is the frame story of the novel *The Golden Notebook*.

### **The Black Notebook**

This is a notebook in which Anna keeps a record of her memories of her time in Africa. She also notes source for and forms of income from her novel *Frontiers of War* which is based on her time in Africa.

### **Frontiers of War**

This is the name of the best selling novel written by Anna about her experiences in Africa.

### **The Gainsborough Hotel**

The Gainsborough Hotel is a boarding house in which Anna and her friends stayed while in Africa.

### **The Red Notebook**

Anna's experiences in the British Communist Party are detailed in this notebook.

### **The Yellow Notebook**

This notebook contains the beginnings of a manuscript for a novel which closely mirrors Anna's own life.

### **The Shadow of the Third**

Anna writes the beginnings of this novel based on the experience of her broken affair with Michael.

### **The Blue Notebook**

Anna keeps a journal of her day to day activities in this notebook.





## **A Peasant Wooden Vase from Russia**

Anna has nightmares which include a vision of this vase.

## **Trestle Table**

This is the table on which Anna works in her notebooks.

## **Music Stool**

The stool is what Anna sits to write in her books.

## **Anna's Flat**

Anna buys this large flat with the idea that Michael will come back to her and they will live together there. Previously, she had lived with Julia, an arrangement with which Michael was unhappy

## **An inn in Paris**

It was at this inn that Paul and Ella stayed during a trip to Paris. Ella returns to this same inn alone at a friend's suggestion she find closure for her and Paul's relationship. The memories are too strong for Ella and she returns home early.



# Social Sensitivity

Although published simultaneously in the United States and Great Britain, *The Golden Notebook* did not gain wide readership until the 1970s when feminists embraced the novel for its realistic portrayal of the life of single women trying to raise their children outside the boundaries of tradition. Lessing's "free women" concept, in alignment with most feminist beliefs, helped not only to redefine sexuality issues but also provided literary models of the now famous motto "the personal is political" that so many feminist critics have maintained. Since then, the academic world has recognized the postmodern themes, narrative, and structure of the novel.

Having established herself as a writer interested in politics and recognized and self-defined as an author of realistic fiction, Lessing offers a different approach to novel writing in *The Golden Notebook*. The novel's structure, themes, and characters support a postmodern view. Not only the characters, but also the reader must question what is real and true—or more precisely, is there one reality and truth about any individual or event? That the main character, Anna Wulf, concludes that all human perceptions and recordings are imperfect and relative precipitates her temporary mental instability. Until she can establish a new sense of order from this realization, knowing that it too will eventually be replaced as she encounters new situations, chaos will appear.

Anna's notebooks depict how no one belief system or doctrine will provide a full understanding of the whole person. Because the notebooks each represent an attempt to record facts faithful to one particular belief system, each attempt will fail as bits and pieces of others begin to infiltrate.

For example, the socialist-realist aesthetics of Marxism and Leninism, clearly present in Lessing's early work up to the publication of *The Golden Notebook*, appear throughout the novel, particularly in the Red Notebook chapters. Clearly, however, political theories alone fail to offer a compelling truth by which Anna can define herself.

Anna's explorations have led her to reexamine her time in Africa when she was actively involved in apartheid issues. Her examination uncovers that such attempts were largely unsuccessful because although the individuals professed great commitment to the doctrine, they were continually drawn away by their own personal concerns.

Lessing's themes and characterizations also address many of the same issues that psychologists Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and R. D. Laing explored. The Jungian paradigm of achieving wholeness identifies the need to recognize both conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche. The conscious effort would be Anna's attempts to define and divide her life experience into neatly discernible notebooks. The unconscious side of the personality appears in dreams or shadows that reflect the denied aspect of the self. Lessing presents this most clearly during Anna's momentary breakdown.

The mystical experience that Anna undergoes, in which the perceiver knows himself as identical with what he perceives, is similar to William James's mystical commentaries in



The Varieties of Religious Experience. Anna's mystical dreams, embodied as specific revolutionaries, such as an African nationalist, an Algerian prisoner, and other people from her past, are recognitions of the dark side of her personality. Her out-of-body experience, this sense of merging with the All, is not a state one can permanently live in, however, without developing a schizoid personality. As described by her contemporary R. D. Laing in his writings near the time of publication of *The Golden Notebook*, a psychic breakdown oftentimes leads to reintegration.

Even though Lessing's awareness of psychology and psychiatry proved helpful to developing her themes and characterizations, psychoanalysis, too, has its shortcomings, as clarified in Anna's hesitation about Mother Sugar's approach and its lack of truly helping her towards reintegration.

In depicting a divided person who reflects the fragmentation of the surrounding world, an existentialist view appears in most postmodern literature. However, whereas works by such writers as Albert Camus offer little hope, Lessing provides a character who works through such despair, nihilism, and momentary insanity. Anna comes to a greater understanding of herself that will allow her to rebuild meaningful paradigms, but with the ever-present knowledge that they will continue to be subject to change.

One of the potential misreadings of *The Golden Notebook* is for a reader to focus on one theme at the expense of another one that oftentimes even runs counter to it.

Thus, a purely feminist reading, following certain traditions, might easily overlook the overarching organization that works against such ultimately limiting boundaries.

Certainly a reader today can benefit from theories that have appeared since the publication of *The Golden Notebook*. Rather than read the novel as an organic whole with one proper reading offered, Lessing's novel urges the reader to take apart the book much like post-structuralist theorists would do to arrive at compatible themes. Thus, one might say her novel is a precursor to more recent literary theories. Interestingly, acknowledgment of such a reading would indicate that reader response theory is quite valid, even a necessary function of the relationship between reader and text, as espoused by Wolfgang Iser and Louise Rosenblatt.

# Techniques

Lessing clearly experiments with the traditional forms of the genre with this novel by offering a somewhat fragmented narrative. Although the notebooks are written during a seven-year period, chronologically the reader must sort out not only the linear pattern but also Anna's life from the fictional life of her creations, such as Ella, and the recounting of an earlier time period of her life, when she lived in Africa. The events of Anna's life are not only divided into the four notebooks, but are also interspersed with her fictional writing, including her published novel *Frontiers of War* and the later beginnings of a short novel about an Algerian soldier that Saul completes.

Lessing's skill is great enough to indicate how attempts to dissect and label and organize all perceptions into an orderly fashion will fail. Repeatedly, entries in Anna's notebooks indicate necessary infiltration between notebooks and the resulting uneasiness as Anna records her attempts to label these inconsistencies.

Unlike the interior monologues of Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner, the reader does not often encounter an omniscient narrative voice that would provide guidance to interpret the chaos of Anna's life.

More similar to reading James Joyce, Lessing forces the reader to experience the chaotic confusion of Anna's piecing together an understanding as best she can. In other words, the form reiterates the theme.

Lessing also experiments with the conventional novel by employing metafiction through her use of a novel within a novel.

Her book explores how to successfully read or interpret life and the fiction that represents life. In 1971, Lessing first published a preface to *The Golden Notebook* in which she laments a number of themes left unaddressed by critics. She discusses how she hoped to "shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped." This statement clearly indicates Lessing's intent to create a form that best reflects the theme.



# Themes

## Fragmentation

The main theme of this novel is the idea of that a person can become fragmented. Anna's fragmentation is evidenced by her four notebooks. Anna keeps these notebooks in an effort to keep these different parts of herself compartmentalized and sanitary. In reality, it is this inability to regard all her experiences as a whole that keeps Anna from being a healthy person. It is only after she is able to integrate these individual parts of herself in her final notebook, the golden notebook, that Anna is able to being the process of healing.

In addition to Anna's personal fragmentation the idea of the division of a person is seen in other characters on a more general sense. Tommy, for instance, fights against being torn apart by the desires of his parents. His father wants him to be a businessman while his mother wants him to stay away from this lifestyle. Although he tries to come to his own conclusion about the direction of his life Tommy ultimately can find no answers to his questions and attempts suicide. He is only blinded by his attempt and in the end turns into the businessman his father wanted him to be.

In her diary, Anna writes about the division of roles dealt with by women. She refers to this division as the injustice of being a woman and indicates it can cause a form of impersonal frustration. This frustration is sometimes taken out on the husbands, boyfriends or children of the women. Anna instead fights against this frustration because she knows it is a result of the division within herself. She struggles with the conflicting roles of being a mother and a mistress. She is also consumed by the details of running a house and home as well as holding down a job. Women often feel they need to divide themselves more than men do. They see men as being waited upon while they are the ones doing the waiting.

## The Constraints of Freedom

The greatest prisoner of freedom in this novel is Tommy. As a young man, his life is open to choose any path he'd like. Although his father pressures him to be a businessman, Tommy's mother tries to not pressure the boy into making any sort of decision. Tommy seems to be stuck in this freedom unable to make a decision and resentful of the adults in his life for not forcing him to make a decision. Tommy once speaks in wistfulness of the milkman's son. This boy has two choices. He can either take a scholarship he's been offered and go to school, or he can become a milkman like his father. His situation is unlike Tommy's where any option imaginable is open to him. An additional aspect that makes Tommy's quandary even more difficult is that he looks at the different adults around him and sees that although they have taken different paths, none of them is really happy. Tommy's situation climaxes to the point he attempts to kill himself. His attempt is unsuccessful but he is blinded for life. After his suicide



attempt, Tommy changes into a person that Anna and Molly don't recognize. Anna says it is as if Tommy has turned into the person he tried to kill himself to avoid being.

In their conversations with each other, Anna and Molly refer to themselves as free women. They are free in the fact that they are unmarried. In reality, however, they are anything but free. They are constrained by a society that puts limits on its members' freedom. Molly and Anna feel they are defined in society only by their marital status. Even in this freedom to choose any man they wish, Anna particularly tends to settle with men who are already married. As she makes the point to Molly, it makes no difference if she is free if the men she chooses are not.

## Gender Relations

The idea of gender relations also plays a big role in this novel. Of course, the double standard is addressed. Men are expected to have affairs. Women, however, are not supposed to stray. This is seen especially clearly in Richard and Marion's relationship. Richard does not care for Marion and has numerous extramarital affairs. He is wounded and retaliates when Marion finds a man who truly loves and wants to marry her. Richard pretends he loves Marion long enough to pull her away from the man who truly loves her then reverts to his habit of having affairs and ignoring his wife.

Gender relations are again addressed in Anna's quest for someone to rent her spare room. She rented to room to a homosexual man, Ivor. Though this situation was at first ideal, it became unbearable for Anna when Ivor's friend Ronnie can to stay with him. Anna also knows she does not want a woman to rent the room as she feels a house full of women would also be unbearable. All the men who rent the room end up becoming sexually involved with Anna. In fact, it seems that any man that Anna becomes friends with at all she winds up sleeping with them. Does this mean there is a truth to the idea the men and women can't be friends?

## Sex as an Act versus Sex as Love

In Anna and Ella's promiscuous worlds, sex can mean a variety of different things. If they sleep with a man they don't care for, they simply write this experience off as not counting. With a man they truly care for, this act seems to elevate itself to a form of love. For instance, Ella says that she did not know she loved Paul until she slept with him. She claims this knowledge came from the fact she had a vaginal orgasm during intercourse. Ella believes she would not have had this type of an orgasm if she had not truly loved Paul and he had not loved her. Ella claims she knows Paul is about to leave her because she stops having these vaginal orgasms and experiences only clitoral orgasms.

Tied up in the whole idea of sex being love or only an action is the idea of childbearing. It appears some women love their children only as offshoots of their husbands while others love them as an individual in and of themselves. Marion holds the idea that a woman has children because she loves a man. This is the reason Marion bore Richard's



children and the reason she shows no interest in these children after she leaves Richard. Anna, on the other hand, has Janet with Max, a man she readily admits she never loved. However, Janet is the most important aspect of Anna's life even though she and Max are no longer involved with each other.

## Significant Topics

In reflecting the complexities and entanglements of contemporary life, Lessing offers a complete exploration of an individual trying to discover who she is in this ever-changing environment. The interior mindscape of the individual reflects the exterior world in which we live.

Having written a successful novel that others misread, including individuals who will be creating a film version, Anna realizes that she herself mistakenly approaches her memories with nostalgia and colors the truth. Thus, she attempts to record events in diary form—to present the truth more accurately. Anna's attempts to meticulously record the "truth" in her notebooks, however, fail. Eventually, Anna realizes that no one approach or theory will allow an individual to recognize the whole person.

Although Anna's state of mental disarray does not consume the bulk of the book, the disintegration provides a realistic portrayal of mental confusion. Such existential explorations will explore suicidal tendencies as well. Anna recognizes with trepidation that individuals can greatly affect one another's perceptions of the world. Not only does Saul's presence weigh on Anna's emotional state, but also her recorded emotional states have affected Tommy's view of the world, and she feels partial responsibility for his suicide attempt.

One must recognize, furthermore, that the novel offers a new sense of order, however momentary and subject to change, in the Golden Notebook that she creates through Saul's prompting. Experiencing mental illness together, the two lovers must break away from one another to reestablish their own identities, but only after they each provide the other with a stepping stone.

The irony remains that Anna was both driven to madness and released from madness through her notebooks. The final golden notebook represents the reintegration of self-awareness that Anna craves.



# Style

## Point of View

The frame story *Free Women* is told from the third person point of view. It is, however, told through Anna's viewpoint. The reader is given insight on what Anna feels as well as her thoughts and emotions. The thoughts and emotions of other characters are presented through the filter of Anna. In Anna's notebooks, however, a different point of view is used. The black notebook, for instance, is written from Anna's first person point of view. When speaking of herself, Anna refers to herself as I. The blue and red notebooks are also written from the first person point of view. The yellow notebook, which tells the story of Ella and Paul, is told from the third person point of view. In the yellow notebook, the events are told through Ella's viewpoint. The golden notebook is also written from Anna's first person point of view. Unlike the rest of the novel, however, this notebook is written in almost a stream of consciousness style. The actions and happenings in this section seem dreamlike and even disconnected in some points.

## Setting

There are a variety of different settings included in the novel. The black notebook sections of the novel are set in Africa while the majority of the remainder is set in London, England. Sequences of action occur in Molly's flat and in Anna's flat. Perhaps the most important set in this novel is the room in Anna's flat, which she sets up as her writing room. It is in this room that she both works on her notebooks and does most of her living. She has covered the walls of this room with newspaper clippings in an attempt to find herself when Milt comes to stay with her.

In the manuscript of Anna's novel *The Shadow of the Third*, settings include Julia's flat as well as Ella's flat. Other places of interest include Dr. West's home where Ella and Paul meet, Dr. West's office where Ella works and Paul's home. Note the way in which Paul's home is described as a chaos of different decorating styles and colors. This chaotic setting is intended to mimic the way Ella feels about her relationship with Paul.

A majority of the story also takes place in the pages of Anna's notebooks that makes them, in a way, part of the setting. It is in these notebooks that Anna's thoughts, feelings and emotions come to life and are allowed to express themselves.

## Language and Meaning

This story is told in a very conversational tone, which makes it very enjoyable to read and to understand. The novel is broken up about fifty percent dialogue and fifty percent exposition. The majority of the exposition is made up of Anna's writing in her notebooks, a form of dialogue with herself. Also during the descriptive passages included in the





novel, note Lessing's ability to describe a place or an object so that the reader can almost feel or smell what she is describing.

Although the novel *Free Women* could stand alone as an independent work, it is important to the meaning of the novel that Anna's notebooks also be included. The writings in these notebooks give Anna's own personal perspective on what is happening in her life and how she feels about what is going on around her.

One should also note this book deals with adult topics and uses quite a bit of adult language. The language is not dirty language but it is the language of adult sexual love. In scenes with Anna and Michael as well as Ella and Paul, the acts of love are described quite vividly. These descriptions are necessary for the novel because the feelings and personalities of the characters are tied up in the way they experience and feel about their sexuality.

## Structure

This novel is structured around a frame story that focuses on the lives of Anna and Molly. This frame story, which is called *Free Women*, is divided into five sections. The first four sections of *Free Women* are followed by excerpts from Anna's notebooks. There are four notebooks, each of which addresses one particular part of Anna's life. The black notebook includes information about her time in Africa, the red notebook includes political information, the yellow notebook the manuscript for a novel and the blue notebook a diary. After the fourth installment of these notebooks, Anna decides to give up her attempt to separate her life and tries to incorporate all of her experiences into one record which she refers to as the golden notebook. Following this golden notebook is a final installment of the novel *Free Women*. *Free Women 1* is the longest section of the book as it accounts for slightly more than one-third of the book's length.

## Quotes

" 'The point is,' said Anna, as her friend came back from the telephone on the landing, 'the point is, that as far as I can see, everything's cracking up.'" Free Women: 1, pg 1

" 'Free women,' said Anna, wryly. She added, with an anger new to Molly, so that she earned another quick scrutinizing glance from her friend: 'They still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them.'" Free Women: 1, pg. 4.

"One novel in five hundred or a thousand has the quality a novel should have to make it a novel - the quality of philosophy." Free Women: 1, pg. 59.

"Human beings are so divided, are becoming more and more divided, and more subdivided in themselves, reflecting the world, that they reach out desperately, not knowing they do it, for information about other groups in other countries. It is a blind grasping out for their own wholeness, and the novel-report is a means toward it." Free Women: 1, pg. 59.

"The real revolution is, women against men." Free Women: 1, pg. 202.

"Literature is analysis after the event." Free Women: 1, pg. 216.

"Obviously, my changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself." Free Women: 1, pg. 217.

"The difference between my father and me is that I know I'm commonplace and he doesn't." Free Women: 2, pg. 252.

"She understood suddenly that she would never come with this man. She thought: for women like me, integrity isn't chastity, it isn't fidelity, it isn't any of the old words." Free Women: 2, pg. 311.

"While Michael grips me and fills me the noises next door continue, and I know he hears them too, and that part of the pleasure, for him, is to take me in hazard; that Janet, the little girl, the eight-year-old, represents to him partly women - other women, whom he betrays to sleep with me; and partly, child; the essence of child, against whom he is asserting his rights to live." Free Women: 2, pg. 319.

"He prefers Janet to have left for school before he wakes. And I prefer it, because it divides me. The two personalities - Janet's mother, Michael's mistress, are happier separated. It is a strain having to be both at once." Free Women: 2, pg. 321.

"The real crime of the British Communist Party is the number of marvelous people it has either broken, or turned into dry-as-dust hair-splitting office men, living in a closed group with other communists, and cut off from everything that goes on in their own country." Free Women: 2, pg. 328.



"There they sat, thinking in spite of themselves of the mutilated boy just below them, who was now the centre of the house, dominating it, conscious of everything that went on in it, a blind but all-conscious presence." Free Women: 3, pg. 361.

" 'He's happy for the first time in his life. That's what's so terrible...you can see it in how he moves and talks - he's all in one piece for the first time in his life.' Molly gasped in horror at her own words, hearing what she had said: all in one piece, and matching them against the truth of that mutilation." Free Women: 3, pg. 362.

"As Ella cracks and disintegrates, she holds fast to the idea of Ella whole, healthy and happy." Free Women: 3, pg. 430.

"All this was taken by her as part of the hazards and chances of being a 'free woman.'" Free Women: 3, pg. 433.

"Yes, cannibals. People are just cannibals unless they leave each other alone." Free Women: 3, pg. 444.

"I remember saying to her that for the larger part of our time together her task was to make me conscious of, to become preoccupied by, physical facts which we spend our childhood learning to ignore so as to live at all." Free Women: 3, pg. 448.

"In fact I've reached the stage where I look at people and say - he or she, they are whole at all because they've chosen to block off at this stage or that. People stay sane by blocking off, by limiting themselves." Free Women: 3, pg. 450

"But sometimes I meet people, and it seems to me the fact they are cracked across, they're split, means they are keeping themselves open for something." Free Women: 3, pg. 453.

"Well, Anna, I've been thinking a lot about that sort of thing, since I tried to shoot myself, and I've come to the conclusion that you're wrong. I think people need other people to be kind to them." Free Women: 4, pg. 498.

"Do you know what people really want? Everyone, I mean. Everybody in the world is thinking: I wish there was just one other person I could really talk to, who could really understand me, who'd be kind to me. That's what people really want, if they're telling the truth." Free Women: 4, pg. 498.

"Only one person read them. He tried to kill himself, failed, blinded himself, and has now turned into what he tried to kill himself to prevent." Free Women: 5, pg. 629.



## Topics for Discussion

Consider the irony of the title of the frame story *Free Women*. In what ways are Anna and Molly free? In what ways are they confined by their freedom?

Explore Tommy's suicide attempt. Was this attempt the result of too much freedom? Why or why not? After surviving his attempt, why did Tommy decide to turn into a person like his father, a type of person he didn't want to be?

Discuss Tommy's relationship with Marion. What attracts them to each other? Why are they good for one another?

Consider the injustice against women that Anna speaks of in the Sept. 17, 1954 entry in her blue notebook. Do you agree that her anger is impersonal? What are the causes of this anger?

Discuss the role of sex as it is portrayed in the novel. Describe how each woman's personality is affected by her opinion of herself as a sexual being.

Discuss the roles of Anna's notebooks. In what ways do these notebooks keep her from healing? How do the notebooks, the golden one in particular, allow her to experience true healing?

Compare and contrast the roles of women versus the roles of men as portrayed in the novel.

Compare and contrast Tommy and Janet. Although they have grown up in similar family situations, Janet seems to have a better grasp on what she wants in life than Tommy does. Why is this? What makes the two children similar? How are they different?

Consider Anna's breakdown. In what ways is Saul Green responsible for her anxiety? Why does he provoke these anxious feelings in Anna?

## Literary Precedents

Events during and after World War II precipitated individuals, particularly artists, to question the meaning of life that have resulted in what is generally identified as postmodernism. Within such works of art, the reader might expect to discover not only new themes but also experimental forms to express those themes. Examples include Ford Maddox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, and James Joyce's many works, including *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.

Although *The Golden Notebook* has its post-modern points, it is not the first instance of self-conscious narrative voices.

Cervantes' *Don Quixote* maintains such a dialectic between artifice and sense of reality that the individual eventually recognizes as illusory. Similar to encountering James Joyce's characters, such as Stephen Daedalus, the reader encounters a stream of consciousness; however, Joyce's characters do not make such elaborate attempts to identify and label every thought and action.

The existentialist works of such authors as Albert Camus explored the despair and nihilism of the modern world. Rather than offer such an ending, Lessing recognizes the potential of another source, that emanating from the unconscious side of the individual. Dreams appear during movement away from social interaction.

This mysticism, a forerunner to Lessing's later explorations of Eastern thought and philosophy, appears in Anna's creation of new meaning. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, Lessing presents a mystical realization that a new world view is needed and individuals must find the means of enduring the new knowledge.



## Related Titles

The novel's first line, "the two women were alone in the London flat," is a wellrecognized beginning scene for much of Lessing's fiction. Repeatedly Lessing has presented a pair of women at the beginning of her works, including *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*.

Unlike the omniscient narrative of her earlier "Children of Violence" novels featuring *Martha Quest*, Lessing employs a different strategy in *The Golden Notebook*. By providing a character whose writing is fragmented with so many points of view, Lessing allows a greater understanding of narrative voice that also reflects the theme. Form mirrors content more clearly.

Lessing's explorations, including her initial novel *The Grass Is Singing*, indicate an emphasis on the psychic distortion of perception—that, in fact, perception of reality is illusory and necessarily subjective.

IDEAS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS 2. How does the structure of the novel *The growth of psychology-related professions and theories during the twentieth century have greatly informed and influenced works of literature. Anna's attempts to make sense of her world after a nervous breakdown that results from the old definitions and boundaries not holding reflect the dilemmas of the modern individual in an ever-changing world. Mental instability may not only be a result of that but also an opportunity to grow and create a newer understanding of self and one's place within society. As authors explore these issues, they will attempt new strategies for developing such elements as theme and characterization.*

1. Is this novel an example of a historical moment in history reflected through literature or does it still offer significant themes for today's reader?

reflect the theme?

3. Many critics have drawn parallels between the life of *Anna Wulf* and that of its author *Doris Lessing*. Should this novel be read as autobiographical? Does it matter if we know facts about *Doris Lessing's* life?

4. How does language and writing fail the main character, *Anna Wulf*?

5. Does the theme of this novel suggest that institutions, such as political parties, marriage, etc., be dissolved?

6. *Doris Lessing* has also published under the pseudonym *Jane Somers*. Critics have drawn parallels to the theme of *The Golden Notebook*, In what way can you?



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994