

Analysis of Feminism in Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook*

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Abstract: Doris Lessing was one of the most successful writers in the 20th century. In 1962, his world-famous *the Golden Notebook* came out. The novel is regarded as a classic that highlights the growth and liberation of women, and Lessing is also known as the earliest and most powerful voice in the history of women's liberation, a feminist who never compromised. Through the analysis of *The Golden Notebook*, this article shows the feminist connotation between the lines.

1. Introduction

1.1 Lessing and *the Golden Notebook*

The novel uses a large number of realistic descriptions, symbols and details description, with a degree of relaxation and being full of timeliness. Lessing's experience of never giving in to marriage, objection to racial segregation, and seeking equality between men and women, made her an admirable but controversial figure. Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007. The committee believed that the novel induced a rich association with women's experiences and it examined the divisive civilizations skeptically and farsightedly.

1.2 The plot of *the Golden Notebook*

The protagonist of *the Golden Notebook* is a female writer, Anna Woolf. She used four notebooks to record her life and wanted to use the fifth one - the golden notebook to integrate the four notebooks, which finally helped her to restore a complete life. From the notebooks, it can be seen the colorful inner world of women and the complex life of women in all aspects.

The novel depicts the true life of the protagonist. The black notebook records Anna's growing experience; The red notebook records intuitive views of liberal women on politics; The yellow notebook is a novel written by Anna; The blue notebook is a diary that records the personal experiences of liberal women. Lessing reflects the life of Anna in all aspects through notebooks. Anna wants to integrate the fragmentized experience, but the diary did not help Anna overcome her identity crisis but exacerbated the deterioration. With the help of Saul, Anna integrated the notebooks into golden notebook and recovered from the chaotic state. Anna's recovery also helped Saul to find himself again. Through the experience of Anna and Saul, Lessing proved that men and women are not enemies, but collaborators who can perfectly cooperate. The four notebooks highlight the image of "liberal women". The purpose of *the Golden Notebook* is to explore the plight of writers who have social responsibilities in the lost and alienated period.

1.3 Lessing's feminine consciousness

"Feminine consciousness" refers to the understanding of women's social and economic situations, as well as of the relationships between their personal experience and social economy, politics, and society. [1]

Although Lessing believed that fiction did not represent feminism, the issue of women is undoubtedly one of the important themes. The novel depicts the situation of women in the 1960s. Lessing supported women's rights, realized racism and class differentiation, and clearly observed women's difficulties and needs. Besides, Lessing promoted feminine consciousness and value system, and the female characters in each novel strive to build social, political and material reality. [2]

2 Statue of Liberty and its confusion

2.1 The relationship between men and women under “Phallocentrism”

“Phallocentrism” emphasizes that men are the center, while women are just the symbol of men's desire based on their own needs. Simone de Beauvoir, the founder of the feminist movement, said: women were “servants, demons, conspirators and cheaters in life, playthings of men, men's desires, and reasons for male destruction”. In marriage, the husband was God and the absolute authority of the wife. Richard Portman was a typical male, and his wife, Mollie, was young, gentle, beautiful and quiet, but shortly after his marriage, he had affairs with many women. But he didn't have the slightest guilty. In the face of Mollie's accusation, he even suggested her find a lover. However, when a man really liked Mollie and wanted to marry her, Richard was irritated and wanted to regain her. In fact, Richard did not care about Mollie, and only because his vanity was hurt. After Mollie returned to him, he immediately mixed up with the secretary. Richard regarded Mollie as his servant, not a lover who longed for his husband's love. He was a patriarchal product, who was arrogant, hypocritical, and selfish.

Mollie was a typical traditional woman, who still felt lonely, despite being materially rich. In front of her husband's betrayal, she once wanted to leave, but when she thought of her three young children, she decided to continue to endure her hopeless marriage. She calmed her inner pain by buying drunk and venting her struggle against reality. Marriage turned Mollie from a lovely girl into a drunk woman. She often complained about Richard who “regarded her as a children's maid.” Under Phallocentrism, the education of men to women was not to instill truth and knowledge, but to force women to become their accessories. Under the influence of the culture, women were forced to gradually adopt this as their own value orientation. [3]

2.2 Liberal women

2.2.1 The image of “liberal women” in the *Golden Notebook*

Anna had ideals, living a relatively stable life. The profession of being a writer made her independent. Anna defined herself as a typical image of an independent liberal woman, and divorce made her free to fall in love with other men. However, these men chose Anna not because they liked her, but to satisfy their needs. Although Anna thought she was a free woman, she still wanted to get a marriage in her heart. In order to make life meaningful, she recorded her feelings and emotions in her notebooks.

Anna believed that her four notebooks could help her escape from the chaos of reality and maintain the integrity of life. But because of the nature of personality, she was on the verge of collapse. In the end, Anna conducted a self-analysis and got a more comprehensive understanding of life and herself. The many Annas in the notebooks saved Anna in reality from being fragmented.

2.2.2 Anna's pursuit of self and freedom

Love is important to both traditional and liberal women. Anna could not tolerate the relationship without love, so she chose to divorce. After the divorce, Anna lived in a beautiful house, wearing fashionable clothes, and she even dared to actively lure men. Anna's attitude towards sexuality was different from that of men in her novels. She focused on the combination of sex and love, while men tended to ignore love. When she realized that she was only Michael's venting tool, she was very painful. Even so, she decided to give up and return to herself.

With the desire for freedom, Anna joined the political movement and joined the Communist Party with great political ambitions. However, Anna found that she had no right to speak at all, and freedom was nothing but fantasy. In the end, Anna decided to leave the party, and the pursuit of freedom was also ruined. [4]

In *the Golden Notebook*, Lessing gives Anna different roles: mother, writer, woman who urgently needs love. Anna could not coordinate these roles, and the psychological obstacles, the political disillusionment and the abandonment by the lover made Anna almost crazy. She sought the help of a psychiatrist, but it did not help, so she was immersed in her private diaries. With the help of Saul, a communist and writer, Anna recognized her writing barriers, and actively sought new self and her relationship with the outside world. Finally, Anna coordinated different roles, returned to

normal life, cared for children, found a job, overcame writing obstacles, and completed the novels. [5]

In the end, Anna realized that the notebooks could not help herself get rid of the chaotic life but aggravate the anxious mood, and they nearly made herself collapse. Therefore, she abandoned the four notebooks and integrated them into the golden notebook, which is the key for her to discover and seek freedom.

2.2.3 Liberal women's Confusion

Lessing vividly showed the life of liberal women, depicting the pain and confusion in their hearts from many angles. Although they strived for freedom and equality in work, life and marriage, social reality set various obstacles for them. Some have abandoned their pursuits in the face of difficulties and become male accessories as traditional women. Other liberal women still persisted in their ideals and continued the hard journey. They experienced various confusions: the confusion in love caused by dependence on men, their mental confusion caused by different roles in life, the confusion on female roles caused by raising children and political confusion caused by the restrictions imposed by patriarchal society on women's political ambition. Life experiences affected them to get rid of dependence on men and to make efforts to seek independence.

The novel shows the scene of liberal women fighting for a free life, but the confusion puts them in a dilemma. Therefore, "liberal women" have obvious irony, and it is difficult for liberal women to have real freedom in life.

3. Conclusions

The Golden Notebook vividly and truly describes women's life, mental state and behavior. Feminists regard it as a "biblical" that everyone must read. Lessing was good at describing independent women with strong will, reflecting the emotional problems brought about by the patriarchal society, and calling for more people to pay attention to the reality of women. The complexity and innovation of the roles in the novel is highly praised, making the novel a milestone in the women's liberation movement.

The rich theme in *the Golden Notebook*: the relationship between men and women, political expectation and disappointment, women's pursuit of freedom and self, and the struggle with the patriarchal society have made the novel enjoy great popularity. The most striking thing is to describe the experience and confusion in women's real life, as well as the pursuit of freedom and equality.

Although Lessing said that *the Golden Notebook* was not a clarion call for women's liberation, readers can still feel her concern and sympathy for the fate of women. Anna was a liberal woman, but she encountered a lot of confusion in the pursuit of herself: (1) Although she was not bound by marriage, she cannot tolerate a life without men's love. (2) Anna actively joined in the Communist Party, but eventually gave up because of the disillusionment of political ideals. (3) Anna loved her daughter very much, but Janet chose a boarding school regardless of her feelings. Anna felt very lonely and injured. (4) Anna's career had brought her abundant wealth and honor, but she lost her writing inspiration and fell into spiritual confusion and dissociation. In the end, Anna succeeded in finding herself with the hard work and the help of Saul.

In short, in a patriarchal society, women who want to seek freedom and equality need to overcome many difficulties. However, the most important thing for women in the gender war is not the final victory, but the accurate and sensitive self-cognition and the relentless pursuit of self and freedom.

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