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## The Female Novel of Education and the Confessional Heroine

As its point of departure, this article takes T.S. Eliot's argument about tradition and the individual talent and, from a feminist literary perspective, applies it to the work of a contemporary woman novelist. I examine Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* in terms of the common concerns of the community of women as expressed in the solidly female tradition of the argument for education, women's major contribution to the evolution of the novel form, and the development of the female (and feminist) novel of education.

Lessing is to be distinguished from other twentieth century British novelists to the extent that she is a moralist. Intellectually, Lessing is a rationalist sharing in common with the female novelists of the eighteenth century a concern to regulate the hearts and passions of her heroines. Thus, like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Maria Edgeworth before her, Lessing creates a confessional heroine whose defining characteristic is the capacity to think. Traditionally, when confessional novels center on the *thinking* heroine, the critical action is not outward, but rather the inward progress to judgment whose intellectual, moral, and emotional terms are represented in the conflict between sense and sensibility. In the twentieth century, the confessional heroine identifies the generic conflict between female dependency and female autonomy as the conflict between the warring demands of the heart and the head. Thus Anna Wulf, the heroine of *The Golden Notebook*, makes a conscious choice between sensibility—which as a system is the worship of self—and sense—which as a moral system represents the individual's right to responsible liberty. It is Doris Lessing's way of presenting the individual, more specifically her scepticism about female subjectivism, that distinguishes her from other twentieth century novelists and links her to the eighteenth century tradition of moral didacticism in the novel. Like them, she is a critic of indulged feelings and has her heroines learn to submit their passions to the control of reason. It is ironic then

that Lessing—in her public remarks—has betrayed the intellectual and feminist catechism of her readership. This betrayal—for example, her deep distrust of the very academy her novelistic forebears craved to enter—has not yet been sufficiently perceived because she appears to confront the catechism, in most of her novels, certainly in *The Golden Notebook*, through a female lens. However, when we turn the eye of history upon her we shall see that Lessing is a deeply traditional novelist.

## TRADITION

It seems to me that the conditions which made it possible for a Shakespeare to exist are that he shall have predecessors in his art, shall make one of a group where art is freely discussed and practiced, and shall himself have the utmost freedom of thought and experience. Perhaps in Lesbos, but never since, have these conditions been the lot of women.

Virginia Woolf, 1920<sup>1</sup>

Virginia Woolf's remarks here on the woman writer's exclusion from the masculine preserves of literary convention, formal training, intellectual liberty, and fraternal encouragement appear to deny women any access to tradition, whose fructifying presence T.S. Eliot claims essential to the development of individual talent. Thus, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* both make pungently clear how many were the practical obstacles faced by women writers. Stressing masculine prerogatives (formal education in particular), noting women's historic privation, inevitably women's contributions were judged as qualitatively and quantitatively inferior in these masculine realms. Woolf's critical paradigm is founded, however, on a narrow—because solely masculine—model of literary history since it holds as insignificant those traditions available to women writers, their common legacy as a generic community which has been subordinate often, but always a part of the human community.

What then have been the responses made through time by the community of women? And how has one woman writer, Doris Lessing, evolved from these solid female traditions? One traditional response made by the community of women to cultural, social, political, economic and legal prohibitions has been protest. Contemporary analyses of women's estate in the current flourishing of feminism have early historical precedents in such works, for example, as *Hac et Hic, or the Feminine Gender more worthy than the Masculine* (1683) and *An Apologie for Women, or an opposition to W.D.C., his assertion*

that it was lawful for husbands to beat their wives (1609) where English women pamphleteers declared their rights in the public forum. In terms of the history of literature—and the evolution of the novel—a more significant female tradition is women's concern with and argument for education. A recurring preoccupation in the diaries, letters, and memoirs of early twentieth century women writers is the need for intellectual self-discipline. Earlier, the pursuit of education informs "the feminine novel . . . up to about 1880" where it is "commonplace for an ambitious heroine . . . to make mastery of the classics the initial goal in her search for truth."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this ambition has historical precedents at least two centuries earlier when in the Tudor period learned ladies formulated theories for the intellectual advancement of other ladies.<sup>3</sup>

Despite some educational reforms, until well into the nineteenth century, women were systematically excluded from the masculine provinces of power. More importantly, the main body of Latin learning with its creative lore, its literary techniques, its literary predecessors, its philosophical traditions, was inaccessible to women, whatever ambitions some few writers might have had. As Father Ong comments in *The Barbarian Within*, "the Latin world was a man's world":

The monopoly which Latin exercised in formal education combined with the structure of society in the West up until the past few generations to give the language its strangest characteristic. It was a sexually specialized language used almost exclusively for communication between male and male. Girls went to school with boys only while they learned vernacular vocabulary. Girls were dropped as soon as boys moved on to Latin . . . this pattern is closely connected with the position of women in society. . . .<sup>4</sup>

This exclusion meant that the classical legacy was not available to women writers, a literary legacy which, in Eliot's and Woolf's view, is essential to the tutoring of talent.

How then do we explain the intellectual and creative genesis of women's writings? What literary model did Mrs. Manley consult when she wrote an erotic romance, *The Adventures of Rivella* in 1714? Who encouraged Fanny Burney to write in 1778 the first feminine *bildungsroman*, *Evelina or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*? Historians of the novel have long observed that the proliferation of circulating libraries through the eighteenth century fostered the growth of a novel-reading public who, in turn, developed a craving for this literary *genre* as though it were—to quote a con-

temporary practitioner, Hannah More, "a complicated drug." What were the prevailing female "types" in the circulating novels?

In the 1770's, minor writers were tentatively marking new ground in an important area; sentimentalism as a philosophy and literary movement developed, allowing insight into the subjective mind, an insight which fostered the growth of narrative writing whose defining characteristic was the concern with the hero's subjective response to affecting situations. Then strong opposition to sentimental literature built up in the 1790's, that decade when, among other revolutionary visions, feminism as a discernible advocacy emerged. What was the relation then between feminism and sentimentalism? We know that the favourite themes of Mrs. Brunton, Mrs. Opie, and Hannah More involved the regulation of the heroine's mind, self-knowledge, and self-control. Apparently, the over-cultivation of the sensibility was seen as a great moral danger by conservatives and radicals alike. Whose reading habits, then, were being addressed when Jane Austen (in *Emma*, 1816), Maria Edgeworth (in *Angelina*, 1832), and Charlotte Lennox (in *The Female Quixote*, 1752) took as the moral core the necessity of emancipating their heroines from the sexual and social fantasies stimulated by reading romantic literature?

To answer any of these questions is to suggest that solid female traditions are discernible in English women's writing over the past three centuries. Though their achievements are rightly regarded as singular, neither Jane Austen nor Charlotte Bronte is unique in choosing as a legitimate moral cosmos the world of women. Nor are they unique in choosing the novel form to record the phases of womanhood. The eighteenth century novelist, Maria Edgeworth, for example, consciously developed the kind of novel she thought especially relevant to women readers. "Nearly all her early tales . . . focus on the manners and morals of women," Marilyn Butler points out.<sup>5</sup> As literary historians such as J.M.S. Tompkins and Ian Watt note, between Scott and Sterne, most published works—good, bad and indifferent—were novels written by women.

Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* reminds us that in the nineteenth century women writers read and studied each other's works, producing thereby an "intimate kinship." This solitary instruction was a legacy from at least the mid-eighteenth century. Female auto-didactics—in the only language and lore readily available—created their own university halls, their own curricula, and their own university fellows and instructors by going to school to each other's novels.

What has been termed "the absence of a tradition of formal female education"<sup>6</sup> made aspiring women choose deliberately the novel as *the* form for entertainment and education alike. Unlike the traditional forms of poetry, the novel did not require of its new practitioners a classical education. A new *genre*, in the process of creating its own conventions and audience, it grew up in the time of an emerging middle class, in particular emerging middle class women, influencing the reading habits of the semi-educated, particularly women who were the chief novel readers.

More importantly, the novel offered a place for women writers to respond creatively—beyond protest at privation—to their generic concerns, their shared experience of being female. Eighteenth century radical and conservative women seized upon the novel, transforming an atraditional literary *genre* into a medium for female, and sometimes feminist, education. To examine the transformation of the early eighteenth century society novel (with the sentimental theme of the young girl's introduction to the fashionable world) through the didactic novel of female education, then into the nineteenth century domestic novel of marriage into the twentieth century novel of psychological realism, with its portrayal of the inner spaces of women's psyches, is to trace the recurrence of a pattern relevant to women's maturation: the need for self-education. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft's autobiographical investigation of the political and sexual vicissitudes of women's lives in *Mary, a Fiction* (1788) creates the prototype for the thinking heroine: Mary Hay's Emma Courtney; Jane Austen's Fanny Price; George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke; Olive Schreiner's Lyndall, and Doris Lessing's Anna Freeman Wulf.

When novels center on the *thinking* heroine, the critical action is not outward, but rather the inward progress to judgment whose intellectual, moral, and emotional terms are represented in the conflict between sense and sensibility. The common theme of *Emma Courtney*, *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Golden Notebook* is that women will not be ethically responsible until they teach themselves to submit their passions to the control of reason. As women, they must learn to educate themselves for responsible independent womanhood. We can detect a series of self-consciously female characters endowed with a female voice, and a precise mode of female expression, which I refer to as the confessional mode.<sup>7</sup> In such novels, the literary/sentimental world of love and romance is recast in ethical terms. The intensely sentimental heroine assailed by and reacting to her fate becomes the *perceiving* heroine, confessing to, yet confronting her

fate. The confessional heroine identifies the generic conflict between female dependence and female autonomy as the conflict between the warring demands of the heart and the head. Her *conscious* choice becomes that between sensibility—which as a system is the worship of self—and sense—which as a moral system represents the individual's right to responsible liberty.

Thus the plot's action follows the protagonist's developing consciousness of her condition; often the awareness comes from solitary self-scrutiny and leads the heroine to a confessional statement of creed, and sometimes feminist ideology. For men and women alike, subjective bathing in self is a form of self-interest wholly incompatible with living as morally committed individuals. For women, caught as a consequence of public privation too often in the snares of sensibility, the temptations to such self-indulgence are more pernicious. She must either be educated out of her self-interest, or educate herself into responsible autonomy.

#### INDIVIDUAL TALENT

In delineating the Heroine of Fiction, the Author attempts to develop a character different from those generally portrayed. This woman is neither a Clarissa, a Lady G—, nor a Sophie. In an artless tale, without episodes, the mind of a woman, who has thinking powers is displayed. The female organs had been thought too weak for this arduous employment . . . .

Mary Wollstonecraft  
*Mary, a Fiction, 1788*

Significant to the development of the confessional heroine is Wollstonecraft's explanation of her first novel; though obligatory to the eighteenth century novel, this "advertisement" contains several radical implications concerning the contemporary debate on the nature of man, the new fictional representation of aspiring woman, and the didactic purpose of her new literary genre. Further, it announces the first theoretical statement about the confessional heroine. Unlike the romantic creatures who *feel*, she will be a self-conscious female who *thinks*. Two centuries later in her portrait of womanhood, Doris Lessing claims the same rights of women to thought. In the *Preface to The Golden Notebook* (1971) she explains that it had never been her intention to write merely a liberation manifesto. ("The essence of the book, the organization of it, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly that we must not divide things off, we must not compartmentalize"). Nor had it occurred to

Lessing that it was inappropriate to examine social and philosophical problems from the perspective of an intelligent woman. "Of course," Lessing continues, "this attempt on my part assumed that the filter which is a woman's way of looking at life has the same validity as the filter which is a man's way."

Like Wollstonecraft, Lessing creates a confessional heroine who scrutinizes—for the most part in solitude, before her notebooks—the particular social, political, sexual and emotional features of being a woman in what is still defined as a man's world. "I am in the position of women in our time,"<sup>8</sup> Anna Freeman Wulf announces, her emblematic name suggesting (as does the "Free Women" title of the conventional novel which weaves through the four notebooks) that feminism is one of Lessing's subjects. *Mary, a Fiction* and *The Golden Notebook* share other features common to traditional feminism: the criticism of the institution of marriage, the demand for sexual equality in the public world, the rights of women to political dissent and the rights of women to sensual and intellectual fulfillment.

Obviously, over the two centuries, an historical shift in the ideological analysis of woman's place has occurred. In the eighteenth century, the specific area of generic taboo was learning. Freedom for women meant the cultivation of reason and its exercise over the sensibilities. When translated into fictional terms in women's novels which addressed the shared concerns of women, a common theme became the need for conscious self-restraint. So Wollstonecraft depicts her heroine as actively using her mind to struggle against the engulfing dangers of intense emotion:

I am not his—said she with fierceness—I am a wretch! and she heaved a sigh . . . while the big tears rolled down her cheeks; but still her exercised mind, accustomed to think, began to observe its operation, though the barrier of reason was almost carried away . . . I cannot live without loving—and love leads to madness. —Yet I will not weep.<sup>9</sup>

Positively insisting on the rational powers of the individual, Wollstonecraft here advocates critical analyses by the conscious mind as the means by which women will achieve a moral life.

Like the heroines of the eighteenth century novel, women are seen in the twentieth century novel in terms of the traditional conflict between intuitive feeling and analytical reasoning. In the twentieth century, however, the area of specific generic taboo has shifted from the public arena to the personal and now involves the ambiguities of

emotional commitment. Thus Anna Freeman in *The Golden Notebook* may appear to possess all the defining features of the emancipated feminist. She has broken free of social and marital conventions; she is a political dissenter, divorced and living alone with a child whom she supports. But the sexual affairs she has with men—who are often rootless on principle—indicate that she is neither emancipated nor free.

Women such as herself cannot achieve lasting emotional relationships with men. Requiring love as an essential element in their sexuality, these women find themselves betrayed by deficient men, who cannot undertake permanent commitments. Such emotional ambiguities are symptomatic of wider public and impersonal disruptions, according to Lessing. But for formal reasons *The Golden Notebook's* complex structure directs a variety of female perspectives upon a heroine (who remains the center of the novel) and, therefore, it is the female sense of privation which is stressed. In her *Blue Notebook*, for example, Anna puzzles over women's sense of ongoing emotional deprivation:

There is no doubt of the new note women strike, the note of being betrayed. It's in the books they write, in how they speak, everywhere all the time. It is the solemn, self-pitying organ note. It is in me, Anna betrayed, Anna unloved, Anna whose happiness is denied, and who says not: "Why do you deny me, but why do you deny life?" (596)

Ultimately all four of *The Golden Notebook* journal fragments agree that, in these twisted hurt love affairs, men measure out their emotions while women try (often unsuccessfully) to seal away their deepest impulses for tenderness and permanence. These emotions are, in some inexplicable way, now irrelevant to the times. Married, single, or divorced, women's emotions are "still fitted," Anna remarks, "for a kind of society that no longer exists." Passage after passage from all the journal fragments of *The Golden Notebook* addresses what could be defined as emotional inequity:

My deep emotions, my real ones, are to do with my relationship with a man. One man. But I don't live that kind of life, and I know few women who do. (314)

We are happy together most of the time then suddenly I have feelings of hatred and resentment for him. But always for the same reasons: . . . when he warns me he does not intend to marry me. He always



makes this warning after he has said he loves me and I am the most important thing in his life . . . that night I was frigid with him for the first time. (237)

Sex. The difficulty of writing about sex, for women, is that sex is best when not thought about, not analysed . . . Women deliberately choose not to think about technical sex . . . Sex is essentially emotional for women. (214)

In twentieth century terms, then, the eighteenth century conflict between sense and sensibility becomes the conflict between intellectual autonomy and emotional dependency. Yet unlike Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, or Dorothy Richardson, Lessing insists that the stress on feeling rather than reason, on fine sensation rather than activity, holds particular dangers for women. By encouraging passivity it leads easily to submission and eventually to moral nihilism. Again, passage after passage from the novel depicts the moral consequences of emotionalism:

Five lonely women going mad quietly by themselves, in spite of husbands or children or rather because of them. The quality they all had: self-doubt. A guilt because they were not happy. The phrase they all used: 'There must be something wrong with me'. (167)

The truth is I don't care a damn about politics or philosophy or anything else, all I care about is that Michael should turn in the dark and put his face against my breasts. (299)

As for Anna, she was thinking: If I join in now, in a what's-wrong with men session, then I won't go home . . . Molly and I will feel warm and friendly, all barriers gone. And when we part, there'll be a sudden resentment, a rancour—because after all, our real loyalties are always to men, and not to women . . . I want to be done with it all, finished with the men vs. women business, all the complaints and the reproaches and the betrayals. (48)

While the twentieth century process of developing understanding differs from that of the eighteenth century, again freedom for women (at least, in Lessing's view) means the cultivation of their reasoning powers.

In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing also makes use of the traditional pattern of the confessional heroine recasting the world of literary romance in order to educate herself consciously away from the moral dangers of sentimental emotionalism. This occurs in only one of the four journal fragments, *The Yellow Notebook*, which itself is

dominated by a novel within a novel—though the notebook dwindles into parodies and sketches for stories about the sexual dilemmas of emancipated women. In fact, *The Yellow Notebook* is written by Anna precisely because she needs to probe analytically the emotional wilderness she has entered, at the end of a five year affair with a married lover, Michael. Ella, Anna's fictional mirror in *The Yellow Notebook*, represents (when we, as readers, compare her to Anna) a fairly conventional heroine of a contemporary—and sentimental—romantic novel. Both the style and tone here give to Ella a deliberately cloying and coy quality: "Being with Paul Tanner that night," writes Anna of Ella, "was the deepest experience Ella had with a man." (199) As well, journal-writing Anna says of her two fictional portraits, Ella and Julia, that they "considered themselves very normal, not to say conventional women. Women, that is to say with conventional emotional reactions." (171) Divorced, a single mother, Ella works for "a 'woman's magazine' " which is " 'sensitive and feminine' ." Her preoccupations, like those of all sentimental heroines before her, are wholly focussed on romance. Since it is a contemporary inclination to construe love in terms of good and bad sex, a good deal of Ella's romantic theories revolve around female sexuality. Here, in fact, are those studied discussions about the superiority of vaginal to clitoral orgasms which have since irritated feminist readers of *The Golden Notebook*, jejune analyses such as the following: "For women like me," Ella ponders during one sexual adventure, "integrity isn't chastity, it isn't fidelity, it isn't any of the old words. Integrity is the orgasm. That is something I haven't any control over . . . Am I saying that I can never come except with a man I love?" (325-6). And like reactive sentimental heroines before her, Ella submits to pleasure and pain alike in her troubled quest for meaningful love:

For some time she sat listless . . . She went to bed. She was unable to sleep. She put herself to sleep, as always, by thinking of Paul. She had never, since he had left her, been able to achieve a vaginal orgasm; she was able to reach the sharp violence of the exterior orgasm, her hand becoming Paul's hand, mourning as she did so, the loss of her real self. (307-8)

In Ella's doomed affairs we (and Anna) recognize the traditional conflict between head and heart. Slowly Anna of the Yellow and Blue Notebooks begins to understand that Ella's critical intelligence has—"with her willing connivance"—been put to sleep.

Ella's sensibility then is a form of passivity and the real theme of the Ella-novel, *The Shadow of the Third*, like the real patterns of Anna's affair with Michael, is the theme of submissive naivety. As she writes *The Shadow of the Third* novel in her Yellow Journal and analyzes Ella, her fictional mirror, Anna discovers that she can apply this lesson to herself:

Any intelligent person could have foreseen the end of this affair from its beginning. And yet I, Anna, like Ella with Paul, refused to see it. Paul gave birth to Ella, the naive Ella. He destroyed in her the knowing, doubting, sophisticated Ella and again and again he put her intelligence to sleep . . . . And when his own distrust . . . destroyed this woman-in-love, so that she began thinking, she would fight to return to naivety. (211)

The portrayal of this learned lesson is dramatized in Anna's Blue Notebook, the diary which depicts Anna's reporting memory in the act of scrutinizing itself. So powerful is the confessional core of the Blue Notebook that it diminishes (and ultimately cancels) the three other fictive notebooks in *The Golden Notebook*. Its central purpose is the heroine's confession to and exploration of herself. The eighteenth century theme of education, self-command, and self-control is transformed here into an active pursuit of self-knowledge whose dramatic process no longer involves (as in the eighteenth century novel) the flight from the irrational, but rather the willed descent into the irrational.

It is difficult to summarize the contents of the confession here in The Blue Notebook since Anna exists in the forefront both as participant and observer. Tentative resolutions keep being dissolved as the heroine descends into instability, moving farther and farther away from the comparative order represented early in the notebook when Anna strives to arrest the flux of self by keeping a record of everything which had happened on one day. ("I expected a terse record of facts to present some sort of pattern . . . but this sort of record is as false as the account of what happened on 15 September 1954, which I read now embarrassed because of its emotionalism.") Realistic reporting such as this gives way to a complex tapestry of a mind in the act of meditating upon itself. Replays of her psychiatric sessions, dreams as they appear to the interpreting eye, the despair and emotional paralysis which overwhelm her upon Michael's departure, the complete disintegration of her personality when, in the affair with Saul, she is infected by his madness; each step downward into the layers of

herself brings Anna closer to the violent emotionalism she loathes intellectually. The walls of the self, which earlier—like the covered windows of her flat—kept violence on the outside, become so battered in this descent that ultimately they vanish. And all the humiliating historical, social, biological, atavistic roles Anna has refused to adopt in daily life, she experiences in her sleep.

It was a night of dreams. I was playing roles, one after another, against Saul, who was playing roles. It was like being in a play, whose words kept changing as if the playwright had written the same play again and again, but slightly different each time. We played against each other every man-woman role imaginable. As each cycle of the dream came to an end, I said: 'Well, I've experienced that, have I, well it was time that I did.' (604)

Finally, on a dark cold day, with the curtains drawn, in a dark cold room, Anna grips the roots of her self-loathing. When, despite her most ingrained habits of submissiveness to men, she refuses to give Saul her new Golden Notebook,<sup>10</sup> she knows she has cut "the sadomasochistic" cycle of their relationship. To overcome this need to placate is a tremendous effort, but the simple word No delivers her into self-command. She then resolves to start a new journal, "all of myself in one book," and The Blue Notebook closes on this confessional statement of autonomy. In choosing to regulate her own life, Anna (like confessional heroines before her) deliberately attempts to transcend subjective egoism, romantic narcissism, and female dependence. Thus the last encounter between Saul and Anna, with its grotesque sexual parody of a mother/son embrace, shows Anna struggling successfully against emotions which betray them both. She achieves self-governance by opening herself to experience which she strives to *understand* actively. In the responsible consciousness Anna wins (which is dramatized in the inner section called The Golden Notebook), Lessing stresses the ascendancy of thought over feeling.

It is Doris Lessing's way of presenting the individual, more specifically her scepticism about female subjectivism, that distinguishes her from other twentieth century novelists and links her to the eighteenth century—female—tradition of moral didacticism in the novel. Like them, she is a critic of indulged feelings. Having inherited twentieth century theories about the subconscious, the significance of dreams and involuntary mental experiences, Lessing cannot deny their existence. Nevertheless, she disapproves of them unless they can be rationally mined.<sup>11</sup> Thus the unconscious becomes

in *The Four Gated City* a potentially useful supra-intelligence, a transmitter as *Memoirs of a Survivor* also illustrates, of a public, collective consciousness. As her novels have developed since *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing appears to have discarded some of the female concerns about sexuality. But two of Lessing's more recent novels, *The Summer Before the Dark* and *Memoirs of a Survivor*, whose plots trace the movement of two heroines from ignorance to knowledge, indicate just how committed Lessing is to moral education. And to the confessional heroine's capacity to embark on epic journeys of moral discovery.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to amplify, from a feminist perspective, Eliot's argument about tradition and the individual talent by showing the systematic connection between the novels by women of the eighteenth century and those of Doris Lessing. In the first case, the examination of the moral implications of female subjective experience is directed to giving women entry into the male literary community of educated minds. The novel as a widely communicating educative genre was created to provide a technical means of understanding the communities of women and their men through the lens of then current thought. Thus Lessing's appeal now is great precisely among those who are the beneficiaries of the opening of the educational world to women. That is, Lessing's work depends upon an avocation: the inspection of the moral aspect of the passions, and a device: the novel spiced with capacious confessionalism; both of which were developed by women to achieve for women a social victory. It is perhaps ironic that Lessing herself has since proceeded to question the importance of this victory.

She herself was self-educated, yet she has frequently demonstrated her suspicion of the very academy her novelistic forebears craved to enter.<sup>12</sup> She concludes in her novels that the passions are the stuff of life, to be carefully surveyed and hectored by reason. Yet she herself is suspicious of the facile and enthusiastic analyses of their experience produced by reason-educated people. So she turns the triumph of the eighteenth century women novelists on its head by betraying the very essence of the world of professional thought they sought to enter. In her own life she has apparently turned to the self-justifying redundancy of Sufiism--which I would argue is to thought as hash is to filet mignon. The extent of her betrayal of the intellectual catechism of her

readership is not yet adequately perceived if only because she has appeared to confront the catechism through a female lens and because the very length and monotonal intensity of her work appear to stand as a political standard by which women writers may be judged.

She has, in fact, disavowed the political, feminist standard and her own role in upholding it because of her fascination with the apolitical and now the mystical. But her novels are deeply committed to a classical formula for providing a structured moral guide for women's private experience. Given that the history of the novel is coterminous with women's use of it, and given her use of the novel, Lessing is as deeply traditional a novelist as it is possible to be. That her impact, influence and appeal have been defined variously as radical feminist, innovative, and volatile is, I suggest, a tribute to the power and historical strength of the art of the novel itself. And yet, because her individual *oeuvre* is undeniably part of the considerable literature of our own time, we can see how centrally established now is that once challenging and challenged approach by women to their own exclusion from the wider world peopled by men.

## NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf, Letter, *New Statesman and Nation*, 16 October 1920, pp. 45-46.
2. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press 1977), p. 42.
3. Mary Astell, for example, in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their true and greatest interest* (1694) argued against the contemporary attitude to the intellectual inferiority of females and proposed a secular college for young girls. Other educational thinkers, Catherine Macaulay, Darmaris Cudworth and the celebrated beauty and wit, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, derided the inactivity and disadvantages forced upon women by being excluded from the masculine means of acquiring knowledge. One way to ameliorate the lives of women would be to educate them beyond their idle sensibilities. A century later, Mary Wollstonecraft adopted their views on education in her provocative analysis of sexual inequalities, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Here she argued that women were ineffectual irrational "mistresses" precisely because they were denied the kind of education which would allow the cultivation and use of reason. See Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady 1650-1760* (New York: 1920; rpt. Gloucester: 1964), pp. 182-207.
4. Walter J. Ong, *The Barbarian Within and Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (New York: MacMillan, 1962), pp. 75-76. See here as well a study of the education of both male and female English authors in the period from 1800-1935: Richard Altick, "The Sociology of Authorship," *Bulletin of New York Public Library*, LXVI (1962), pp. 389-404.
5. Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 131. Consult as well J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Methuen, 1932). His data indicate that the majority of eighteenth century epistolary novels was written by women.
6. For a more detailed exposition of this argument see Virginia Tiger and G. Luria, "The Learned Lady," *EVERYWOMAN* (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 53-81.
7. Virginia Tiger, "Advertisements for Herself," *The Columbia Forum*, NS III (Spring 1974), 15-19. This article examines contemporary confessional novels in England and North

America written by women on the subject of womanhood.

8. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (London: Michael Joseph, 1962; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1963), p. 472. All parenthetical page references in the text will be to the later edition.
9. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, a Fiction* (London: 1788; photo facsimile rpt. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), pp. 169-170.
10. The Golden Notebook, the journal notebook which Lessing intends as the synthetic resolution of all the thematic fragments of the other four notebooks in *The Golden Notebook* is, of course, this book. Upon reaching responsible autonomy, Anna gives the book to Saul. He, in turn, (or so we are led to believe) uses it to write the first draft of his own novel.
11. Despite her shift from the social realism of the *Children of Violence* series to the fable form in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, *Memoirs of a Survivor*, and the most recent *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series, Lessing continues her major theme of insanity in a practical, impersonal, and moralistic way. For their views on this issue, consult: Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 136-172; Lynn Sukenick, "On Women and Fiction," *The Authority of Experience*, eds. Arlyn Diamond and L.R. Edwards (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1977), pp. 28-44.
12. Here I am recalling Lessing's response to questions from her academic audience during her lecture series at the New School for Social Research in New York in September, 1972. See as well Lessing's acerbic comments on formal education in her Preface to the 1971 reissue of the paperback edition of *The Golden Notebook* in a collection of some of Lessing's essays and book reviews, Doris Lessing, "Preface to *The Golden Notebook*," *A Small Personal Voice*, ed. Paul Schlueter (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), pp. 34-42.