



Reflections Of Modernism And Postmodernism In Doris Lessing's 'The Golden Notebook'

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Abstract:

This paper explores how modernism and postmodernism are projected in "The Golden Notebook." by Doris Lessing. It analyzes the 20th century multi-structured narrative style, mirroring the postmodern conditions. The paper first defines Modernism and its decline from 19th-century norms. It then discusses the changes in society and the intellectual ferment of the Modern Age, leading it to an Age of Anxiety. The influence of these shifts on literature of that time period, with a focus on impressionism and existentialism, is explored. The transition from Modernism to Postmodernism is outlined in the present paper. Then it delves into key features of postmodern literature, such as satire of the contemporary norms of society and resistance to coherence, offering multiple interpretations.

The postmodern era's breakdown is reflected through the analysis of "The Golden Notebook", showcases Doris Lessing's unconventional storytelling technique, with its fragmented structure. Lessing's dealing with the artists and art is also examined, focusing the integration of personal and social integrity as a complex process. The paper concludes by underlining the impact of World Wars on Doris Lessing's worldview and the ongoing relevance of her work in the understanding of the complexities of the postmodernism.

Keywords: Modernism, Postmodernism, Fragmentation, Meta-narratives, Societal Upheavals, Narrative Approach, Integration, Societal Integrity, Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook.

Introduction

Readers of 20th-century modern and postmodern fiction face a challenge: rather than passively enjoying it, they must comprehend it, express their own opinions, and consider their definitions of what constitutes fiction. Accepting this challenge, however, is what distinguishes postmodern literature from other forms and makes it intriguing to read and fruitful to analyze. Duplication, contradiction, confusion, fragmentation, and many more terms are frequently used to describe post-war or postmodern literature. As the humanist ideal of wholeness failed, the postmodern era came to recognize its fractured nature. This worry is expressed in many postmodern novels' forms as well as their thematic elements. By

using instances from the novel "The Golden Notebook," the current study aims to explore the multi-structure of the 20th century, which found its reflection in writers' narrative approaches as a natural conclusion and is also known as the postmodern condition. When discussing Doris Lessing's works, it is necessary to first go into great length on what Modernism, Postmodernism, and Experimental literature are. Studying the current events of the earlier and later decades of the 20th century in English history is also beneficial. It is also important to describe how Modernism gives way to Postmodernism, how these two are related, how Postmodernism develops from Modernism, and what experimental texts are.

Modernism-

Modernism has been defined and discussed in great detail by many authors and critics. Most of them define it as a departure from conventional concepts and paradigms of thought, particularly those of the 19th century. The definitions here can be used to analyze and examine various facets of modernism.

'Modernism' is described as: 'A generic term applied retrospectively to the vast spectrum of experimental and avant-garde developments in the literature and other arts of the early 20th century.' according to the 'Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms'. (Boldick: 160)"

As per 'Britannica Concise Encyclopedia', Modernism is:

"In the arts, modernism is the period of experimentalism from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. It involved a profound break with the past and concomitant search for new forms of expression. Modernists experienced an increasing sense of alienation in an era marked by industrialization, fast social change, and discoveries in the natural and social sciences (such as Darwinism and Freudian theory). This alienation was unmatched by Victorian morality, optimism, and convention. 2005 [Oxford] Wolfreys,"

Mary Klages describes Modernism in her article 'Postmodernism' as:

"Postmodernism can be understood in terms of both of modernism's two faces, or forms of definition. The aesthetic movement generally referred to as "modernism" provides the first aspect or definition of modernism. The trend largely corresponds to western notions about art in the 20th century. As you undoubtedly already know, modernism is the movement in the visual arts, music, literature, and theatre that rejected the outdated Victorian norms of how art should be created, appreciated, and understood.

[www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012]"

As a result, Modernism in England began as a reaction against the outdated Victorian ideals and conventions established by the Victorian authors and deepened as the century went on as a composite of various experiments in the writings of renowned Modernist authors like Eliot, Pound, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Samuel Becket. Writings from the 20th century were influenced by prevailing broad tendencies including social, political, religious, and economic changes, among others.

Age of Anxiety:

Due to the unsatisfactory and unpleasant disconnect between theory and reality, the Modern Age was dubbed an Age of Anxiety. Exactly the contrary of what modernity promised had been delivered. The situation that society was going through was unparalleled.

A G. George said, "Anxiety is the central experience of modern consciousness. It results not only from social crisis, but also from crisis in the theoretical approach to life, from confusion in intellectual matters, and from the absence of a sustaining faith." [George:1962: 15]

At the end of the 19th century, a new social and intellectual ferment emerged, leading to a backlash against traditional norms in religion, society, and domesticity. This rational mindset encouraged cynicism, disappointment, and exploration, causing unrest as abandoning norms frustrated older generations and alarmed everyone.

Dynamism and Progressiveness:

The modern era was a dynamic one marked by constant advancement and change. Everything was shifting quickly. The established pattern of life underwent a striking alteration as a result of scientific and technical breakthroughs. People were aware of life in a rapidly expanding globe.

Anthony Toyne had the following to say about how quickly English life was changing at the beginning of the 20th century: "England was hanging, and changing too fast for the people to grasp what was happening. Everywhere change was present. Motor-bicycles and "motor-bikes" came after bicycles or "bikes." Many homes now have telephones. The train bookstalls sold inexpensive books for no more than sixpence each. [Toyne: 1971:317]

David Lyon discusses the accomplishments, novelty, and discontents of the modern age and how the former contributed to the latter. "The modern world is marked by its unprecedented dynamism, its dismissal or marginalization of tradition, and by its global consequences," he writes. Space appeared to expand and time to speed up. Modernity's emphasis on development and the capacity of human reason to achieve freedom are closely related. But all of its issues stemmed from the same unfulfilled optimism and underlying uncertainty that post-traditional philosophy encouraged. These, combined with unforeseen consequences of categorizing, organizing, and rationalizing contemporary life, curtailed freedom. [Lyon: 2002:25]

The loss of customs and the excessive speeding up of life caused uneasiness in the older generation, while the younger generation fell victim to its own progressivism, dynamism,

and enthusiasm for new ideas. Frustration, restlessness, and worry were the outcomes in both instances.

Modernism in Literature:

The modern era was the Age of Anxiety, and modernist literature was influenced by modernism in the ways already mentioned. Along with the above mentioned points, below are some additional details about modern literature. Modernist literature was avant-garde and avant-garde. For instance, Samuel Becket's Theatre of the Absurd was an experiment in play, and the Stream of Consciousness novel was an experiment in the English novel.

Writings emphasized Existentialism, Impressionism, and objectivity. As in William Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying," the traditional third person narration in fiction was supplanted by first person or detached narration.

According to Walmsley, "Fragmentary impressions' rejecting the 'God's eye' steadiness of omniscient narration that had dominated the 'classic realism' of the Victorian age were favoured. [Walmsley:2006:410]

The fragmentary aspect of modernity, in the words of Modernist writers like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce, is painful.

Indifference to Romanticism is a defining characteristic of modernist writing. Pessimism and a blatant rejection of optimism are frequent themes in modernist writing.

Postmodernism:

There are intermittent adorations throughout time. For instance, romanticism was a wave that was never static; it became a stable idea through critical labelling. The same holds true for Victorianism, Modernism, and all other -isms. There is always and continuously change. What we mean when we refer to the postmodern era is that Modernism is no longer perceptible anywhere. We refer to the actual modern era we live in as postmodern.

It is not a derogatory title. It is distinct from modernism, and critics have been attempting to characterize it from a variety of angles. Postmodernism has given rise to differing viewpoints about both its existence and meaning, in contrast to Modernism age, which has had no debate about its meaning.

On the other hand, if we discuss the birth of postmodernism, Robert Ray lists fourteen possible defining years in his article "The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism" that can be considered the start of the movement. The most crucial aspect of postmodernism, according to him, is that, unlike impressionism, cubism, expressionism, and even modernism, it cannot be best understood as just another artistic movement. Because of this, it is difficult to identify postmodernism from its forebears using the conventional typological techniques of literary criticism. [Ray:2008:108].

'The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms' claims In its most basic and unsatisfactory form, postmodernism is "usually understood to refer to the period of 20th century Western culture that followed the reign of 'high' modernism, denoting products of the age of mass-television since the mid-1950s. Though more frequently used to describe a cultural situation characterized by an extreme overabundance of disjointed imagery and styles, most notably in television, advertising, commercial design, and pop video from the 1960s. [Baldick: 1998:201]

"A general and sometimes conventional term used to refer to changes, developments, and tendencies which have taken place in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy, etc. since the 1940s or 1950s," describes J. A. Cuddon about postmodernism. [Cuddon: 1979:733-734]

Wendell V. Harris defines postmodernism as "the complex of dominant cultural characteristics of the period from World War II to the present." Harriman, 291 They continue, "Postmodernism, a term used in various disciplines, is a literary and artistic movement that critiques and appropriates earlier works. It has been used to evaluate science and culture, and has evolved into a philosophical term rejecting the notion of an ultimate truth." [Edu.com]

According to these definitions, postmodernism is the name given to the circumstances, viewpoints, and behaviors that prevailed in the latter part of the 20th century.

Rejection of Authenticity, Totality:

Postmodernism emerged as a reaction against totality, characterized by fragmentation and discontinuity. It rejects absolute identity, totalizations, and absolute truth, arguing that no system is trustworthy or genuine. Postmodernists question the authenticity of systems and reject totalizing doctrines like Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Derrida contested Saussure's view of the signifier and signified, arguing that culture is made up of signs and language is a figment of reality.

Rejection of Meta Narratives:

Manin, a leading authority on postmodernism, characterizes it as "incredibility towards meta narratives." In his essay "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge," (Manin), All philosophies are categorically rejected by Manin as meta narratives with little connection to so-called objective reality. They reduce reality, existence, and history to words. We exist in a world of words, and beyond language, we are unable to communicate or think. This impression was regrettable to several modernists.

Postmodernism in Literature:

The modern social, economic, and cultural system has an impact on postmodern literature. Literature has also been impacted by the current mass culture. Literature loses its profundity and seriousness with the different rating criteria. Contrary to contemporary literature, it frequently focuses on the surface and stays away from addressing the difficult, existential aspects of life. It examines even weighty subjects in a lighthearted way. Finding a cogent meaning in a postmodern literature is essentially fruitless. Coherence is lost, meaning is resisted, and interpretation is resisted. Postmodern literature frequently has multiple meanings and multiple conclusions.

"Postmodern literature make fun of societal norms, customs, and genres....", says Wendell V. Harris (293).

The philosopher Jean Francois ManinG explained it. "I define postmodernism as skepticism of meta-narratives." Some authors purposefully undermine the narrative illusion via alienation techniques, such J. Fowles in "The French Lieutenant's Woman" (1969). Another option was to create several versions of reality, as J. Fowles and L. Durrell did in "The Collector" (1963) and "The Magus" (1966, revised 1977) respectively. The works of authors like G. Green, A. Wilson, and I maintained a strong, more expressionist hold on traditional fiction. Murdoch, when the meaning of the story is the primary concern. Even the friendliest authors tried their hand at the genre, including W. Golding in "Paper Man" (1983), Fowles in "Mantissa," and Doris Lessing in "The Golden Notebook" (1962, revised 1972). This genre provides the chance to explore novel facets of fiction and reality as well as the boundaries of narrative truth.

Doris Lessing, born in Persia (now Iran) in 1919, was the 2007 Noble Laureate and a well-known postwar English novelist. She has produced a number of plays, novellas, and short tales. 'The Grass is Singing', her debut book, was published in 1950. However, she said that it wasn't her first attempt at the book. The draughts of her prior two works were destroyed. The five volumes that came after "The Grass is Singing" were published in the 1950s and 1960s. Martha Quest (1952), A Proper Marriage (1954), A Ripple from the Storm (1958), Landlocked (1956), and The Four-Gated City (1969) were all part of the Children of Violence trilogy. She also penned the short story collections To Room Nineteen (1978) and Through the Tunnel (1990) and also wrote the plays such as 'Play with a Tiger' (1962).

Finding the fictional elements in Doris Lessing's works while attempting to follow a single element through their broad diversity would be against both the spirit and the stated intent of her writing. She may have compelled us to see the big picture and to integrate every facet of our human nature into a perfection that transcends human limitations. Doris Lessing views the two World Wars as having had the most influence on her life.

Although the wars had a significant impact on her, the pattern in her head might still have existed without them. Olive Schreiner's "The Story of an African Farm" is described by

Lessing in her Afterword as "that hybrid, the mixture of journalism, the Zeitgeist, and autobiography which comes out of a part of the human consciousness and that is always trying to understand itself, to come into the light."

'The Golden Notebook' of Doris Lessing

The postmodern authors as the philosophers usually describe: the work he writes; the text he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules. Those rules and regulations are what the piece of art itself is looking for. The author and the artist then are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. One of the unique examples of postmodern fiction demonstrating the above-said features is Doris Lessing's 'The Golden Notebook'. The Golden Notebook is one of the most appraised and best known of Lessing's novels, one that influence her readers to discover the postmodern society. When the writer and the protagonist, Anna Wulf says at the beginning of the novel that "everything is cracking up," it implies that chaos has an opportunity to emerge and the hope of unity has almost disappeared. Lessing mentions that theme is breakdown and fragmentation in the preface of 'The Golden Notebook'. The Enlightenment and industrialization shaped our contemporary cultural condition and literary scene that had started more than two centuries ago became the two important determinants. The outcomes of Enlightenment and industrialization was thanked by the process of rapid modernization, impact of which was deeply felt in economic, technological and social spheres of life, took place in the history of the world. As Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale agreed, postmodernity not only became intensifier of modernism, but also became an alternative rather than the successor of modernity. While the 20th century reflected dissolution, alienation, fragmentation, and breakdown, two different aspects of these themes stand in the Modernist and Postmodernist domains, the century be divided into two periods. The first perception is the sad one by the Modernist authors who felt unrest the loss of an order in society and who feared the chaos. The second approach which is called the postmodern, neither seeks nor desires for integrity, unity or wholeness. There is an acceptance of the part approach. Apart from it, postmodernism enjoys the fragmentation by welcoming localities, differences and it denies integration. Postmodern thought, which is well reflected in Doris Lessing novels, contrary to the project of modernity, criticizes, questions and deconstructs the big narratives and concludes that any attempt to create an order or integrity inevitably results in disorder, parts or dissolution.

In this novel, Lessing rejects to conventional story-telling, and tends to favour unconventional, new and innovative methods. It opens with a 'Free Women' section: 'Free Women' is a traditional short novel that is divided into five sections and separated in four notebooks; Red, Black, Yellow and Blue, with the Golden Notebook appearing near the book's end. Anna writes of the events in her life in these notebooks. 'The Black Notebook' is a detail of various aspects of Anna's bestselling first novel, 'Frontiers of War'; Red is related

to her experiences and dissatisfaction with the British Communist Party, Yellow notebook is about her romantic novel 'The Shadow of the Third'. In this notebook she describes about Ella, the mirror of her life and Blue is Anna's diary.

According to Doris Lessing's view of artists and art, no separation is there between the artist and the human being. Lessing believes that our human choices are clear we either destroy ourselves as species and as an individual, or we become whole individually and as a species. The achievement of personal integrity is difficult because integrity requires that the individual integrate within himself all the scattered fragments that make up both social disintegration and individual experience, not of the artist's special sensitivity or vision, nor because one happens to be an artist. The achievement of unity as well as integrity, as a society requires the teller of the dream and the dreamer, it also requires the pusher and the child who promises a future.

Conclusion

In 20th-century literature, the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism reflected a substantial change in the way fiction was conceived and presented. This update included not simply stylistic adjustments but also a fundamental reevaluation of storytelling conventions. The important work by Doris Lessing, "The Golden Notebook," served as the study's main point of reference in order to explore the subtleties of this literary development.

A variety of experimental and avant-garde innovations in the arts were included in modernism, which was distinguished by its departure from 19th-century standards, whereas postmodernism evolved as a response against preexisting ideas like authenticity, totality, and meta-narratives. Postmodern literature, as shown by Lessing's work, defies consistency and allows various interpretations since it thrives in a cultural environment with inconsistent imagery and styles.

The success of "The Golden Notebook" is evidence of Lessing's ability to challenge conventional narrative structures. Its multi-structured story reflects the postmodern era's disintegration and dissolution. Lessing creates a narrative that questions accepted ideas of wholeness and coherence through several sections and notebooks. The chaotic backdrop of the World Wars had a significant impact on Doris Lessing's perspective, which further shaped her investigation of society breakdown and individual identity.

In conclusion, the analysis of "The Golden Notebook" within the framework of Modernism and Postmodernism highlights the power of literature to transform. Lessing's work serves as a beacon of inspiration in the constantly changing environment of 20th-century fiction thanks to its inventive storytelling techniques and deep investigation of human existence.

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