The Golden Notebook

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DORIS LESSING

Born in what is now Iran to a British imperial clerk and the nurse who cared for him after he lost a leg in World War I, Doris Lessing grew up on a farm in the colony of Southern Rhodesia, which is now Zimbabwe. She went to a girls' school in the capital of Salisbury (now Harare) until dropping out at age 13—she never returned to school, but she pursued her education independently, reading extensively during her teen years. Lessing escaped her miserable home to become a nursemaid and telephone operator. During this time, she published a few stories in colonial magazines, and wrote and destroyed two novel manuscripts. After pursuing unfruitful relationships out of her self-described "fever of erotic longing," Lessing married at 19 and had two children. Dissatisfied, she soon left her new family to spend her free time in discussion with the Left Book Club, where she met her next husband, the German communist exile Gottfried Lessing. (In *The Golden Notebook*, protagonist Anna Wulf fictionalizes this portion of Lessing's life in her black notebook.) In 1949, Doris Lessing divorced Gottfried Lessing and brought their young son to London; soon thereafter, she published her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*. In the next decade, she continued to write fiction based on her upbringing in Africa and participate in left-wing politics; although she gave up communism in 1954, South Africa and her homeland of Southern Rhodesia both banned her from returning in 1956. Lessing's work took a psychological turn in the 1960s; in 1962, she published *The Golden Notebook*, which remains her most celebrated work. In the 1970s and 1980s Lessing began exploring science fiction and Sufi mystical themes, and in the following decades she expanded into other genres, writing opera libretti for composer Philip Glass and a two-volume autobiography. In 2007, Lessing won the Nobel Prize in Literature for her "skepticism, fire and visionary power" at the age of 88, although she was reportedly first considered for the Prize in the 1980s and responded to the news of her award by insisting that she "couldn't care less."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Set primarily in the 1950s (but with some flashbacks to the 1940s), *The Golden Notebook* echoes shifts in the global order as World War II gave way to the Cold War, and the colonized world began to pursue independence from Europe. Anna's relationships with the German exile Willi Rodde and the young British airmen Paul Blackenhurst, Jimmy McGrath, and Ted Brown during the 1940s are suffused with the sense of fear and displacement, both social and geographical, that characterized a generation of Europeans forced not only to fight in World War II but also to confront the similarities between their nations' treatment of colonized peoples and the Nazis' campaign of genocide and territorial expansion. Africans' growing movements for independence from European colonial powers also figure in the background in the novel: Anna both supports these movements (by, for instance, befriending the activist Tom Mathlong) and benefits from colonial racism, which gives her a relatively prominent position in the society of British-occupied Central Africa. Anna and her friends also frequently reference the National Liberation Front's successful war of independence against the French government, which was ongoing for the second half of the 1950s and ended the same year as *The Golden Notebook*'s publication in 1962. It served as an important vanguard for subsequent national liberation movements across the African continent, which won African nations independence from European colonizers in the 1960s and 1970s. The history of the Soviet Union is also crucial in *The Golden Notebook*, since the novel's protagonist spends a substantial portion of the book grappling with her conflicted feelings toward communism as both theory and practice. After authoritarian leader Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet Union was in turmoil with the growing global awareness about Stalin's violent repression of dissent. 1956, during which much of *The Golden Notebook* is set was a crucial turning point as the next Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, openly repudiated his predecessor, forcing Soviet citizens and communist organizations around the globe to reconsider their faith in Stalinism. Western parties like the British Communist Party lost vast numbers of supporters (including Doris Lessing herself). Finally, *The Golden Notebook* also foreshadowed and played a significant role in the second-wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s (often called the "Women's Liberation" movement). These movements were largely a response to the restrictive gender roles of the 1950s—after women's partial entry into the workforce during World War II, many were forced to return to the home, and work in the formal economy was often limited to supportive and administrative roles (like nurses and secretaries). Anna and Molly's decision to live as unmarried, working (though not working-class) mothers was accordingly as uncommon as it was bold, and Lessing's emphasis on writing about the subjective experiences of "free women" in this era—such as writing about sex from women's perspective—was groundbreaking. While she received significant backlash for her apparently "man-hating" protagonist, one of the most remarkable achievements of *The Golden Notebook* was that Lessing managed to dispel the notion that unmarried, independent, working women were jaded or unemotional: Anna and Molly break gender roles

without giving up on the prospect of healthy, equitable love.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although she did not publish her first novel until her early thirties, Doris Lessing ultimately published more than 50 books during her lifetime, most of them novels. While *The Golden Notebook* remains her best-known work, she is also well remembered for her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950), which chronicled a white Rhodesian colonist's racism toward, eventual friendship with, and ultimate murder by her black servant. *The Grass is Singing* also served as the model for the first novel written by *The Golden Notebook*'s protagonist, Anna Wulf. Lessing is also known for two five-novel series: *Children of Violence*, written in the 1950s and 1960s and set largely in colonial Rhodesia, and the science-fiction series *Canopus in Argus: Archives* (1979-1984), which tell unconnected stories set on different planets in the same fictional future and is particularly influenced by Lessing's study of Sufism. Other noteworthy novels of Lessing's include *The Good Terrorist* (1985), about a young woman in London who gets drawn into violent activism, and *Alfred and Emily* (2008), her last book, a fictionalized version of her parents' lives, which suggests how they might have lived had they never married. Although she is often celebrated for her striking originality, in *The Golden Notebook* Lessing does allude to the work of earlier authors, especially D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Wolf, and James Joyce. Her treatment of sex and criticism of labor under industrialized capitalism both recall and challenge Lawrence's treatment of these subjects in novels like *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *Women in Love* (1920), and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Lessing borrows Virginia Woolf's surname for her protagonist Anna Wulf and builds on Woolf's landmark depictions of mental illness, experiments in nonlinear form, representations of women's subjective experience in Western European society with novels like *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931). Lessing explicitly references James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), from which she also borrows her protagonists' names (Molly and Anna, respectively). Like Lessing, Nadine Gordimer was also a respected, Nobel prize-winning white woman writer from British Africa famous for her activism; she is best remembered for anti-apartheid novels like *The Conservationist* (1974) and *Burger's Daughter* (1979). Finally, Betty Friedan's landmark *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963, the year after *The Golden Notebook*—much like Lessing's novel, it considered women's dissatisfaction and sense of confinement in married life and played a prominent role in the second-wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Golden Notebook*
- **When Written:** 1950s-1960s
- **Where Written:** London, UK
- **When Published:** 1962
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Novel, Metafiction, Postmodernism
- **Setting:** London and Colonial Central Africa
- **Climax:** During her relationship with Saul Green, Anna slips into madness.
- **Antagonist:** The compartmentalization of life and fragmentation of society, unfulfilling relationships and rigid gender roles, communist and anti-communist orthodoxy
- **Point of View:** First-person (Anna's notebooks), third-person (*Free Women*)

EXTRA CREDIT

Reception and Response. Doris Lessing was famously unsatisfied with the early critical response to *The Golden Notebook*, which focused intensely on Anna and Molly's attitude toward men but neglected the novel's structural innovations and central theme of mental breakdown, as well as the book's eventual acclaim, which the author thought unfairly overshadowed the rest of her work.

Semi-Autobiographical. Not only does *The Golden Notebook* leave any serious reader uncertain as to what, precisely, is fact and fiction in the protagonist Anna Wulf's life, it also blurs the boundaries between the author and her subject. Anna is a loosely fictionalized version of Doris Lessing herself, just as Anna fictionalizes herself into the character Ella and the version of herself who appears in *Free Women*.

PLOT SUMMARY

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is a multilayered novel that centrally concerns the life, memories, and writings of Anna Wulf in the 1950s, during her late twenties and early thirties in London and colonial Africa. The novel alternates between a linear narrative entitled *Free Women*, which follows the lives of Anna and her friend Molly, and Anna's four private **notebooks**: in the black notebook she recalls the time she spent in Africa, the novel she fashioned out of her experience, and her difficulties coping with the novel's reception; in the red notebook she recounts her ambivalent membership in and disavowal of the British Communist Party; in the yellow notebook, she starts a novel that closely mirrors her own pattern of unfulfilling relationships in London; and the blue notebook serves as her inconsistent personal diary, full of self-doubt and contradiction.

Free Women begins, "The two women were alone in the London flat." Anna, a talented but sheepish writer, tells Molly, the

boisterous and "worldly-wise" actress that "everything's cracking up" in the world. Molly's ex-husband Richard, a wealthy businessman who now violently disdains the leftist politics that brought them together, visits to talk about finding a job for their son Tommy, who has spent the last few months brooding in his room. He also wants advice about his current wife, Marion, who has become an alcoholic due to his numerous affairs. Overhearing all of this, Tommy comes downstairs to refuse his father's offer. Anna tells Molly about her waning interest in writing another novel, Richard's attempts to have an affair with her, the state of their communist friends, and her inability to get over her married ex-lover, Michael.

The narrative cuts to Anna's four notebooks, into which she has "divided herself." The black notebook begins with a synopsis of her successful first novel, *Frontiers of War*, which she still considers inadequate and naïve, before delving into the experiences that provided the novel's raw material. Deciding to stay in colonized Central Africa during World War II, Anna falls into an eclectic group of white socialists, passing her weekends drinking with them at the Mashopi Hotel and ending up in a long, sexless relationship with the German exile Willi Rodde. The illicit relationship between a white roadsman, George Hounslow, and the African hotel cook's wife, Marie, formed the basis for her novel, but she replaced George with a version of the charming, arrogant, Oxford-educated pilot Paul Blackenhurst, with whom she eventually elopes on their last day at the hotel, the day before he dies in an accident on the airstrip.

The red notebook begins with Anna's invitation to the British Communist Party, of which Molly was already an active, if critical, member. Anna recalls her discomfort with the party's ideology and the mounting evidence of the Soviet Union's horrific crimes against political dissidents, the contradictions she encountered visiting East Berlin with Michael, and meeting miserable housewives while canvassing in North London.

The yellow notebook, entitled *The Shadow of the Third*, begins as the manuscript for a novel based on Anna's life. Its protagonist, Ella, works at a women's magazine responding to reader letters that her boss, Dr West, deems insufficient for his advice column. She is also secretly writing a novel about a man who makes all the requisite arrangements for death before committing suicide, as he realizes that "that's what I've been meaning to do." Ella begins an intense affair with the psychiatrist Paul Tanner, who starts spending every night at her house but pursuing affairs with other women, all the while neglecting his wife. He gradually loses interest in Ella's work and makes it clear that she is just a fling. When Paul abruptly moves to Nigeria, Ella is devastated.

The blue notebook follows Anna's sessions with her psychoanalyst Mrs Marks. When Mrs Marks asks whether Anna writes about their sessions in her diary, Anna's entries about them stop for four years—instead, she compiles newspaper clippings. When she resumes writing about analysis, she feels unable to write because of the violence in the world and believes Michael is about to leave her; when Mrs Marks again mentions Anna's diary, she decides to stop going.

In the next section of *Free Women*, a malicious and sullen Tommy visits Anna, contemplates the differences between her creative work and his father's career, and then starts reading her notebooks, bringing her to "an extraordinary tumult of sensations." He wonders why she compartmentalizes and brackets her thoughts, accusing her of irresponsibility and dishonesty for hiding herself from the world. After he returns home to Molly's house, he shoots himself in the head and is "expected to die before morning."

The black notebook covers meetings with film and television executives who want to buy the rights to *Frontiers of War*, but erase racism from the story and move it from Africa to England. In the red notebook, Anna contemplates the myths that sustain communists' faith in the Soviet Union. In the yellow notebook, Ella's story continues: hopelessly fixated on Paul more than a year after they split, Ella meets an attractive but unrefined American leucotomy doctor. Their mechanical, brief sex makes him realizes his degree of dissatisfaction with his marriage, but Ella feels no better about Paul. In the blue notebook, Michael ends his affair with Anna, and she decides to "write down, as truthfully as I can, every stage of a day. Tomorrow." Her day is full of tension: she must cater to Michael and her daughter Janet's every need and spends all day working at the Party headquarters for no pay, reporting on bad novels she knows her boss John will publish anyway and responding to letters from mediocre writers. Realizing that she is powerless and her work is meaningless, she quits. She puts Janet to sleep and takes great pleasure in cooking dinner for Michael—who never comes, proving that their affair is over. This whole entry is crossed out; she rewrites it in brief, calling it "a normal day."

In the third section of *Free Women*, Tommy miraculously survives his suicide attempt, but is left blind. He moves back into Molly's house, which his presence begins to dominate as he spends all his time reading, writing, and visiting with Marion. Anna visits Richard, who goes on one of his usual misogynistic rants, and feels she is beginning to "crack up" on her train ride home, where she has to deal with the new friendship between her boarder Ivor, her daughter Janet, and Ivor's lover Ronnie, who pays no rent and Anna soon kicks out of the house.

In the black notebook, Anna remembers a pigeon-hunting trip in Africa and describes her relationship with James Schafter, an American who egregiously parodied his way to the top of the literary world. In the red notebook, Anna recounts a year of "frenzied political activity" after Stalin's death, at the end of which her fellow communists concluded that the party was irreparably corrupt. In the yellow notebook's *The Shadow of the Third*, Ella begins receiving endless, unwanted attention from arrogant men who assume she will happily become their

mistress. She decides not to let men "contain" her desire, and begins planning out short stories to make sense of her frustrations. The blue notebook returns to a lengthy reflection on psychoanalysis. Anna thinks the blue book's "record of facts" feels like a false representation of her experience and feels herself losing the ability to convey meaning through words—she recounts a recurring nightmare in which a figure takes "joy in spite."

In the fourth section of *Free Women*, Anna tells Marion, who has been arrested at a protest, about the old revolutionaries she befriended in Africa. The black notebook ends with a single entry: Anna has a **dream** about a film being made at the Mashopi Hotel, which makes her realize that all her memories of Africa were "probably untrue." The red notebook ends with a story about a teacher dedicated to communism who visits the Soviet Union and realizes his recommendations will not be taken seriously. The yellow notebook breaks with Ella's narrative to list nineteen ideas for short stories or novels, mostly about women taken advantage of by men.

The blue notebook picks up with Janet going off to boarding school and Anna finding herself with nothing to do. She takes on a boarder, Saul Green, an American writer who proves as sensitive and intelligent as he can be narcissistic and brutish—Anna develops extreme anxiety, which is connected to Saul. Their relationship swings unpredictably between serenity and hatred, political conversations over coffee and explosive arguments in the bedroom, compounded by Anna's jealousy about the other women Saul visits and decision to start reading his diaries. They both accuse the other, and themselves, of insanity. Not only does Anna realize there are multiple Sauls and multiple Annas, but she starts to see versions of him in her and her in him. Anna begins to see the floor and walls moving, and she cycles through various dreams and personas. One day, Saul suggests she resume writing and she admits her writer's block. She buys a beautiful, golden notebook, although Saul does his best to claim it for himself.

Anna switches to the golden notebook alone. She has a dream about Saul as a tiger and starts moving through her past, but realizes that an "invisible projectionist" is playing it all back for her—of course, this is also Saul, and they realize that they have each "become a sort of inner conscience or critic" for the other. In the morning, she plans a new story about "free women" and Saul insists that she start writing. In their last days together, they offer one another opening lines: Anna gives Saul the image of an Algerian soldier on a hill that becomes the first sentence of his successful novel, and he gives her the altogether dull sentence "The two women were alone in the London flat," the opening line of *Free Women*, which turns out to be not an objective account the life Anna recounted subjectively in her notebooks but rather her second novel, her fictionalization of the notebooks' reality: the multiple, conflicting voices Lessing offers in *The Golden Notebook* all turn out to be Anna's.

The last section of *Free Women* offers a markedly different version of the last two sections: Janet goes off to boarding school, and Anna goes insane pasting newspaper clippings around her room. An American named Milt moves in, makes her feel "protected and cared for," but also insists that he is "a feeder on women." After five days together, he leaves. Ultimately, some time later after Janet returns from school, Anna decides to work at a marriage counseling center, Molly marries a "progressive businessman," and Tommy ends up "all set to follow in Richard's footsteps."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Anna Wulf – The protagonist of *The Golden Notebook* is a novelist and occasional activist in her early thirties, living in London after spending a portion of her life in colonial Africa. Anna's successful first novel, *Frontiers of War*, was based on her time in Africa, where she fell in with a group of socialists, including Willi Rodde, her first husband and the father of her daughter Janet. Some years after returning to London, Anna begins a long-term affair with the first man she ever loves, a married psychiatrist named Michael, who leaves her after five years, leaving her devastated and unable to write. Anna records her life in the four colored **notebooks** that make up the bulk of *The Golden Notebook*, rigidly compartmentalizing different elements of her life into their corresponding notebooks. After an exiled American writer named Saul Green moves into the spare room in Anna's house, the pair begin an affair that leads them both to madness; as their relationship becomes increasingly tumultuous, alternating between painful tension and affectionate understanding, Anna seeks to integrate the disparate aspects of herself by combining the four colored journals into a single golden notebook. Although Saul ends up taking this notebook just before he leaves her, he also gives her the first sentence for what becomes her second novel, *Free Women*, which is also the frame story around which *The Golden Notebook* is organized. Because Anna's notebooks contradict one another—and the reader learns at the end of the novel that the seemingly objective picture of Anna's life offered in *Free Women* is actually the protagonist's own fiction—it ultimately becomes difficult to determine which parts of *The Golden Notebook*, if any, describe Anna's actual experience and personality, and which parts merely reflect her own self-image or imagination.

Janet Wulf – Janet is Anna and Willi Rodde's young daughter, who is born in 1947 and grows up during the course of Anna's **notebooks** and *Free Women*. Unlike Anna, Janet is utterly happy and conventional; she is seemingly unscarred by her mother's emotional difficulties and tumultuous relationships. Without a father figure, Janet becomes close to Tommy and Ivor, but Anna

always wonders what would happen if she remarried—when she was seeing Michael, he and Janet always competed for her attention. Janet becomes Anna's source of identity and daily motivation—Anna frequently has to summon a happier version of herself so as to not let Janet down, and when Janet insists on going to boarding school (and even wearing the optional uniform, which Anna never would have done), Anna finds herself devastated, with nothing to do and no clear sense of time or purpose. Anna is anxious about Janet's future—she hopes that men will treat Janet better than she has been treated and that Janet will not turn out emotionally broken like Anna did.

Molly Jacobs – Molly is Anna's closest (and perhaps only) friend, whom she sees as a sister or even, emotionally and psychologically speaking, lesbian partner. Whereas Anna is shy, small, and artistically talented, Molly is boisterous, imposing, emotionally expressive, and "worldly-wise," comfortable in any room and skilled at dressing to create an impression. Still, many people see the two women as "interchangeable" because they are both unmarried. Molly is a relatively unsuccessful actress and, in the 1930s, was briefly married to Richard Portmain, whom she now openly disdains for his elitism and obsession with money and status, even though he still frequently asks her for advice about his current wife Marion and his and Molly's son, Tommy. Molly and Anna talk frequently even after Anna moves out of Molly's apartment, and she often punctuates their gossip by proclaiming, "it's all very odd, isn't it Anna?" Molly spent much of the 1950s as an enthusiastic communist organizer, holding meetings at her house and often lacking the time or energy to have serious conversations with Anna during her busier periods. Nevertheless, she tends to alternate between parroting communist platitudes and declaring her frustration with the Party. She also introduces Anna to many of her friends, including De Silva and Saul Green. At the beginning of *Free Women*, she has just returned from a year traveling Europe and, at the story's end, she marries a "progressive businessman." But she plays a much less central role in Anna's notebooks, and in both narratives Anna increasingly distances herself from Molly as she builds a relationship with Saul Green or Milt—although they ultimately returns to their previous intimacy at the end of *Free Women*.

Tommy – Tommy is Molly and Richard's son. He plays a central role in *Free Women* but only appears in passing, as a rather different character, in Anna's **notebooks**. In *Free Women*, he is judgmental and malicious, spending most of his time brooding in his room. While Tommy admires Anna's sensitivity, sense of moral purpose, and refusal to define herself through an occupation, he thinks she is dishonest and hypocritical for compartmentalizing her life in the notebooks out of her fear of chaos, rather than putting forth an authentic and integrated, if messy, version of herself. Anna feels partially responsible for Tommy's suicide attempt, which she thinks relates to what he read in her notebooks earlier that day. He survives but is blinded and becomes an ominous presence in Molly's house, where his mother feels increasingly uneasy and confined. He soon befriends Marion, who comes over to discuss politics with him for hours at a time. Tommy ends up joining his father's company, although only because he comes to believe capitalism can change the world for the better. In contrast, in the notebooks, Tommy was a conscientious objector who worked in the coal mines rather than serve in World War II. A few years older than in *Free Women*, Tommy dates a sociology student who converts him to a political ideology Molly considers insufficiently radical. By the end of the blue notebooks, he gets married, gives lectures about coal miners' issues, and considers joining independence fighters in Cuba or Algeria. The two radically different versions of Tommy point both to the questionable facticity of *Free Women* (which is ultimately revealed to be Anna's second novel), but their commonality is that in both versions, Tommy overcomes a state of existential crisis and self-doubt by learning to take concrete actions that balance his moral concerns with practical opportunities.

Richard Portmain – Richard is Molly's ex-husband, Marion's current husband, and Tommy's father. He is an arrogant, impatient, power-hungry, and well-respected businessman who looks down on Anna and Molly for their left-wing political beliefs (even though he met Molly during a brief socialist phase of his own in the 1930s) and their indifference to marriage and work. He tries to control the lives of everyone in his family, especially Tommy, whom he tries to dissuade from writing and encourage to enter the business world. Richard cheats constantly and openly on Marion with a series of seemingly interchangeable younger mistresses who are often one his secretaries—he even tries to sleep with Anna and, after she refuses, becomes even more furious and aggressive toward her whenever she dismisses his attempts to control his family. At the end of *Free Women*, he amicably divorces Marion and moves his new mistress into his house. He scarcely appears in the **notebooks**, but when he does, he appears to have three daughters rather than three sons, as in *Free Women*. He represents not only the prototypical bumbling, cheating husband but also the classic conservative businessman, who feeds the cycle of accelerating social inequality under capitalism by prioritizing profit above people, happiness, and character.

Marion – In *Free Women*, Richard's second wife, Marion, starts the book as a miserable, pathetic alcoholic, presumably driven to drink by Richard's unabashed affairs and her relative confinement at home with her three children. Richard spends much of the book trying to figure out what to do about Marion—of course, he never considers being faithful or attentive to her—and, in her misery, Marion turns to Molly and Anna for advice, since she admires their "freedom." Marion's greatest transformation comes after Tommy's suicide attempt,

when she befriends him, stops drinking, and resolves to become an activist. She ends up enthusiastically divorcing Richard and, at the end of the book, running her own dress shop. Since she does not appear in **Anna's notebooks**, it is unclear whether she is a fictional construction or a real person that Anna knows. Regardless, she exemplifies the plight of married women confined to the domestic sphere by unloving and emotionally insensitive husbands, but also the possibility of reclaiming one's independence and happiness.

Mrs Marks / Mother Sugar – Mrs Marks is the psychoanalyst that both Anna and Molly visit and call "Mother Sugar" as a play on her "traditional, rooted, conservative" mindset. Anna initially seeks out psychoanalysis to address her "lack of feeling" and inability to write, but ends up spending most of her sessions with Mrs Marks talking about her peculiar **dreams**. These sessions comprise a significant portion of the blue **notebook**, which Anna began keeping at Mrs Marks's request. "Mother Sugar" leads psychoanalysis sessions with brief questions and a "conducting smile," ceding space for Anna to explore and confront her doubts and insecurities. She becomes an important source of psychological strength for Anna and pushes her to write. However, Anna also critiques Mrs Marks, most of all for seeming to prefer that feelings and experiences get "named" in terms of easily-recognizable archetypes or myths. Mrs Marks's name is an ironic play on Karl Marx, both because she represents the opposite theoretical tendency in the book (Freud, rather than Marx) and because she is decidedly antirevolutionary—she implores Anna to make do with her own unsatisfying conditions rather than try to change her life.

Willi Rodde – Appearing in the black **notebook**, Anna's boyfriend in Africa, Willi Rodde, is a German exile who is the same person as Max Wulf in the blue and red notebooks. Willi is an unemotional, dedicated socialist and the oldest member of the group that includes Paul Blackenhurst, Jimmy, Ted, Maryrose, Anna and himself (and less consistently, Stanley, Johnnie, Mrs Lattimer, and George Hounslow). He has a deeply conservative sense of social mores that often contradicts comically with his leftist political beliefs. His relationship with Anna is transactional and "almost asexual"—the only time they had sex "with any conviction" was after she spent the night with Paul. While some (especially George) see Willi as an erudite, brilliant theorist, others (especially Paul) see him as too serious and disconnected from the social reality of colonial Africa. Despite his commitment to social change, Willi only thinks about revolution on a national scale and has no interest in the way interpersonal dynamics reflect or reproduce inequality, which leads him to celebrate Jackson's firing and encourage George Hounslow to forget the fate of the mixed-race son he has with Marie. After the war and his breakup with Anna, Willi eventually becomes a bureaucrat in East Germany.

Paul Blackenhurst – In the black **notebook**, along with Jimmy and Ted, Paul Blackenhurst is one of the three (ex-)homosexual Oxford-educated airmen who join the socialist group with Anna and Willi Rodde. While Anna is dating Willi, she is secretly in love with Paul, and they elope to the veld on their final night at the Mashopi Hotel. Paul becomes the model for the protagonist of Anna's first novel, *Frontiers of War*. He comes from a wealthy and powerful English family; he is charming but heartless and enjoys mocking and insulting people around him (especially those who have lived their whole lives in the Colonies). He spends most of his days arguing about politics with Willi—Paul's socialism, like his homosexuality, is feigned, and he loves making fun of Willi's serious commitment to the revolution. Partially out of jest and partially to make a point about British racism, Paul starts a friendship with the Boothbys' cook Jackson, which eventually leads to a drawn-out feud between the socialists and Mrs Boothby. The day he is supposed to deploy to India, Paul goes to the airfield drunk and, blinded by the sun, walks into an active airplane propeller that dismembers and kills him.

Jimmy McGrath – In the black **notebook**, Jimmy is one of the Oxford airmen, who was born to a middle-class Scottish family but adopts "an elaborately affected Oxford drawl." Unlike Paul Blackenhurst and Ted Brown, who were only homosexual as a form of fashionable protest, Jimmy's homosexuality is genuine and leads him to a near-constant state of anxiety and insecurity that is only compounded by his fear of dying in the war. He drinks heavily and often gets lost, injures himself, or embarrasses all of the socialists at the Mashopi Hotel. He is completely in love with Paul, who resents and insults him in return. Jimmy ultimately survives the war and ends up in a sexless marriage in England.

Ted Brown – In the black **notebook**, Ted Brown is "the most original" of the Oxford airmen who party at the Mashopi Hotel and "the only genuine socialist of the three," as well as the only one from the working class. He is energetic, passionate, and selfless, which leads him to give his possessions and time to help those around them—especially the younger men he mentors, like Stanley Lett, whose resistance to Ted's advice leads Ted to invest more and more in him. While he is saddened by the group's infighting, Ted gets along with none of its members in particular. After the war, he intentionally fails his military exams to be with Stanley, which does not go over well, and eventually ends up married, teaching English in Germany.

Maryrose – Maryrose is a young white woman and former model, born and raised in the British Cape Colony in present-day South Africa, and the only woman in the socialists' group besides Anna. Most of the men she encounters, including Paul Blackenhurst and Willi Rodde, obsess over her beauty while ignoring her formidable intellect. Maryrose is sensitive, non-confrontational, and more sympathetic to the situation of white settlers than the others in the group. During her time at the Mashopi Hotel, she is heartbroken over the death of her

brother (with whom she possibly had an incestuous relationship) and feels ambivalent about the prospect of a relationship with George Hounslow, whom she considers the only man capable of fulfilling her romantically.

George Hounslow – In the black **notebook**, George Hounslow is an intense, humble, and romantic road repairman who has an affair with (among others) the Mashopi Hotel cook Jackson's wife, Marie, while he is away from his wife and family for work. This relationship plays a central role in Anna's plot for *Frontiers of War*; George agonizes over Marie's fate and especially that of the son he has with her, whom he cannot acknowledge to the world because of colonial Africa's strict racial segregation. He lives miserably in cramped quarters with his wife, children, parents, and wife's parents, but loves and works tirelessly to provide for them all. He is also strongly dedicated to socialist organizing, which leads him to idolize and spend as much time as possible talking to Willi Rodde, the only other person at the Mashopi Hotel who truly believes in socialism. Unlike the rest of the socialists, George insists on living out his principles, which leads Willi and Paul Blackenhurst to mock and look down on him. His emotional depth and impassioned pursuit of women make both Anna and Maryrose (who are much younger) feel that he is their only legitimate chance at romance and regret turning him down. After Mrs Boothby fires Jackson, sending him, Marie, and their children (including George's son) back to Nyasaland, George is devastated; he eventually manages to contact them and send them money. As one of the only working-class, honest, and emotionally self-aware men in *The Golden Notebook*, George is both an anomaly and perhaps an exemplar of the "real man" Anna seeks.

Michael – Michael is a married psychiatrist with whom Anna has a lengthy, heartbreaking affair during roughly the first half of the 1950s. He is a Jewish ex-communist—much of his family died in the Holocaust, and many of his communist dissenter friends were murdered by the Soviets. Their relationship is mostly referenced in passing and through the fictional character Ella's relationship with the fictional doctor Paul Tanner in the yellow **notebook**, but it is clearly the central reason for Anna's emotional devastation throughout the novel. In the third section of the blue notebook, Anna recounts the end of their relationship; on September 16, 1954, which Anna describes in detail, she spends much of her day at home catering to Michael's every desire—sex, food, emotional reassurance—but gains nothing in return; after she lovingly makes him a veal dinner, he never shows up and she ends up throwing it in the trash. While Michael was the only man Anna ever loved, he never saw her as anything more than a diversion and never would have married her; this disconnect between men's apparent affection for women and their lack of emotional investment in them is the central obstacle to Anna's satisfaction with her romantic relationships.

Saul Green – Saul Green is a blacklisted American communist writer who moves into Anna's flat and eventually starts an intense relationship with her. At first, he is brutish and inconsiderate; however, when he also proves an "extraordinarily acute" observer of her personality and experience, Anna begins falling in love with him. He is incapable of sexual or emotional commitment until the very end of their relationship. Anna finds Saul's lengthy rants about "I, I, I, I" and perpetual infidelity agonizing, in part because it leads her to question whether he truly cares about her. He also quite literally lacks a sense of time and writes sparsely and unemotionally about women, including Anna, in his own notebook. Anna feels her body tense up whenever Saul approaches but cherishes chatting and listening to jazz with the best version of him—she realizes that there are numerous versions of Saul, and she never knows which one she will face at any given time. Eventually, they begin to meld psychically and emotionally, losing their senses of self: Saul begins feeling controlled by Anna and too guilty to sleep with other women; in her **dreams**, Anna sees Saul play her memories back as films. She guides their relationship to a mutual understanding by mothering him; eventually, he encourages her to write, but insists on taking the golden **notebook** from her in exchange for the first line of what becomes *Free Women*. He leaves her, and Anna dramatizes their entire romance in the closing pages of *Free Women*, replacing him with a similar character named Milt who also saves her from madness. However, Anna and Milt are only together for five days before Milt realizes he must leave because he is incapable of mixing sex and emotional attachment.

Nelson – Nelson is an outspoken American communist entertainer, blacklisted from Hollywood during McCarthyism, who moves to England and has a brief affair with Anna in the last section of the blue **notebook**. She meets him when, at a British Communist Party meeting, he openly criticizes the Party's efforts to hide stories of Soviet repression from its members and the public. She finds Nelson enthralling and passionate but soon learns about his "mortal terror of sex"—he becomes hysterical before bed, goes on misogynist rants after sleeping with her, and mysteriously disappears for weeks before Anna goes to his house for a party, where he and his paranoid, beautiful wife try to hide their obvious tension by drinking excessively and laughing publicly about their hatred for one another. He later calls Anna to propose marriage, then spitefully denigrates women on the phone before hanging up and calling later to demand that she tell him he had not hurt her. Like De Silva, Nelson appears in Anna's nightmare about "joyful spite" and represents the paradox of men unable to reconcile their desire to objectify and need for emotional support from women; he insists that Anna lie to validate his skewed image of their relationship, which demonstrates how men unable to face their own contradictions instead push those contradictions and their emotional consequences onto the women in their lives.

Ella – Ella is Anna's alter ego and the protagonist of her novel in the yellow **notebook**, *The Shadow of the Third*. Like Anna, Ella is single and dissatisfied, with a child from a previous, short-lived, and ill-conceived marriage. Also like Anna, Ella is a novelist (her first book is about a man who commits suicide) and spends her days answering letters at the magazine *Women at Home* (like Anna at the Communist Party). Furthermore, her affair with the psychiatrist Paul Tanner reflects Anna's long and intimate affair with Michael; both women later have a series of affairs with juvenile, emotionally distant married men. By projecting her own personality and frustrations onto Ella, Anna is able to process her mistreatment by men and frustrations with her creative and romantic failures. However, after Ella meets her father in the third section of the yellow notebook and Anna begins her relationship with Saul Green in the blue notebook, Anna abandons the story and instead begins writing *Free Women*, the novel's frame story, replacing Ella with a different fictionalized version of herself. The fact that she uses her own name and finishes *Free Women* suggests that Anna's relationship with Saul, while short-lived, allows her to develop a coherent sense of her identity and overcome her writer's block.

Julia – Julia is Molly's equivalent in Anna's novel manuscript *The Shadow of the Third*, which appears in the yellow **notebook**. Like Molly, she is an unsuccessful, unmarried Jewish actress with communist leanings (unlike Molly, Julia is not a member of the Party). She plays a much smaller role in the yellow notebook than Molly does in *Free Women*, although Ella reveals her close attachment to Julia when she moves out into her own apartment. Julia has more contempt for men than Molly; she is an astute, if pessimistic, critic of sex and relationships, and perhaps reflects the responses Anna wishes Molly would offer her in their conversations about men.

Max Wulf – Willi Rodde (in the black **notebook**) and George (in the yellow notebook) appears as Max Wulf in the blue notebook. Max is Anna's ex-husband and Janet's father. According to the blue notebook, Max and Anna met in Africa and never loved each other. The discrepancy in his name reveals that the black notebook may not be the accurate recollection it initially appears to be.

George – In the yellow **notebook**, George is Ella's ex-husband, as well as the equivalent of Max Wulf (in the blue notebook) and Willi Rodde (in the black notebook) for Anna. Ella never found George attractive and married him "almost out of exhaustion"; she was relieved when he left her for another woman, but feels uncomfortable moving past him when she meets Paul Tanner.

Dr West – In the yellow **notebook**, Dr West writes the medical advice column at *Women at Home* magazine. Ella manages his overflow, responding to letters that are insufficiently "medical" for his taste. At the beginning of Anna's manuscript of *The Shadow of the Third*, Ella goes to a party at Dr West's house, which is a slightly improved version of the dreary, identical, working-class houses that surround it. He later informs Ella that Paul Tanner went to Nigeria in order to get away from his mistress, who was a "flighty piece" (and, of course, was Ella herself). Dr West later tries to start an affair with Ella (she refuses) and ends up with Patricia Brent instead. A prototypical career-minded and emotionally tone-deaf man, Dr West is interested entirely in his own pleasure and does not care about how he affects the women in his life.

Patricia Brent – In the yellow **notebook**, Patricia Brent is the conservative "editress" at the *Women at Home* magazine where Ella works. Brent worked at "one of the big smart woman's magazines" but had to leave because she had no concept of fashion or culture. She takes pride in treating people she disagrees with fairly, and since her husband left her 11 years before, she consistently speaks about men with a "gallant, good-natured, wisecracking cynicism." She eventually becomes Dr West's mistress, and Ella fears becoming like her: at once resigned to never finding love and exceedingly reverential to men who end up mistreating her. Patricia Brent demonstrates the self-punishing resignation of women who are left behind by men but cannot conceive themselves as valuable outside their romantic relationships.

Paul Tanner – A fictionalized version of Michael in the yellow **notebook**, Paul Tanner is a married psychiatrist who becomes Ella's central love interest. They meet at a party at Dr West's house and spend many of the next few days together, eventually having sex on a rug in a field in the country. He begins to spend every night at Ella's flat. Although he compares them to an old married couple, Paul also insists that he does not love Ella, criticizes her novel, tries to change her clothing and personality, and continues having affairs with other women. When he realizes that Ella is in love with him, he moves with his family to Nigeria and never sees her again. He exemplifies how married men take advantage of their unmarried mistresses, seeing them as sources of pleasure and diversion but never taking responsibility for the consequences of having relationships with them.

Ella's Father – In the yellow **notebook**, Ella's father is an aging, exceedingly introverted, ex-military man who lives in splendid isolation in Cornwall, passing his days reading philosophy and writing poetry. When Ella asks him about their family, he professes that he never cared much for other people or had an active sex life with her mother. He loves Ella in the abstract but has no interest in learning about her life; he believes that people cannot change and are better off alone than trying to form relationships with people unlike them. His pessimism about relationships is a more extreme version of what Ella and Anna already feel about their inability to meaningfully connect with men.

Robert Brun – In the yellow notebook, Robert Brun is the stereotypically pretentious, well-dressed, and adulterous

French editor of the magazine *Femme et Foyer* (meaning Woman and Home, a near-translation of Ella's magazine *Women at Home*). Ella meets with him in Paris to try and buy a story for her "editress," Patricia Brent, but it soon becomes clear that the story is not appropriate for a British audience. Ella spends the rest of the meeting watching Brun gawk at women who pass by until his "captive" fiancée Elise arrives. Ella sees Brun's relationship with Elise as a failed marriage in the making, since Brun is clearly incapable of respecting or matching Elise's loyalty.

Cy Maitland – Cy Maitland is an American leucotomy surgeon who has an affair with Ella in the yellow **notebook**. He is energetic and boyish, attractive and proudly uncultured; Ella meets him on their rickety flight from Paris, and they sleep together a handful of times during his stay in London. Cy is sexually inept and unsatisfying, but impressed by Ella's experience and emotional depth, which leads him to wonder what it would be like to marry "someone like you" instead of his wife. He disapproves of Ella's communism, affairs, and independence, but feels that he learned from their time together. The tension between Cy's professional success and juvenile personality reflects the pattern of men's emotional and interpersonal underdevelopment in this book.

Jack – In the red **notebook**, Jack is a historian of the Soviet communist movement and Anna's closest confidant at the British Communist Party, who often helps mediate her meetings with Comrade John Butte. Anna and Jack agree that their organization has lost sight of its purpose and become a Stalinist propaganda machine, and they also have fascinating conversations about their problems with the Party and the Soviet Union. Unlike Anna, Jack has spent so much of his life intertwined in the Party that he feels he cannot leave, and after she quits, they appear to drift apart. Torn between his beliefs and his organizational commitment, Jack represents the tragedy of dedicated political activism that is also the tragedy of politics: the conflict of individual values with the collective interest (the values of a party versus the interests of society, but also the values of an individual versus the values of a party). A version of Jack also appears in Anna's novel *The Shadow of the Third* in the yellow notebook, as an editor at Ella's magazine who collaborates on a series of articles with her, and later sleeps with her before pontificating about his conflicting feelings for his wife.

Ivor – Ivor is a gay Welsh student who rents out the extra room in Anna's flat. He is reclusive until after Tommy's suicide attempt, when he becomes something of a surrogate father to Janet, and his lover Ronnie moves into the apartment. While Anna appreciates his help with Janet, she worries that his influence is harmful because he is not "a real man." Although he returns to his previous isolation after Ronnie leaves, Anna eventually evicts him, too, hitting him in the face with the flowers he offers her. Anna's attitudes toward Ivor reveal her contradictory sense that "real" heterosexual love requires tension and conflict, and that masculinity is about the kind of insensitivity and power that she loves in Michael and Saul.

Ronnie – Ivor's theatrical lover, Ronnie, moves into Anna's flat without warning in the third section of *Free Women*. Anna hates his vanity and effeminacy, which she sees as a parody of women and "'normal' love." Despite her fears that nobody else would take him in and his attempts to ingratiate her, Anna kicks Ronnie out of the apartment at the end of the section, but he briefly returns in the following portion of *Free Women*.

James Schafter – James Schafter is a young American writer and friend of Anna's who embraces and parodies the excesses of the literary world, befriending a critic who gave him a scathing review and publishing satirical fake journals and short stories that lampoon Western writers' self-indulgence and racial insensitivity. He convinces Anna to publish a fake journal of her own, but she cannot bear to see it come out in her own name.

De Silva – De Silva is an old friend of Molly's, who moved from his native Ceylon to London and married a British woman before moving back home after failing in his journalism career. Later, he moves back to London on a whim, borrowing the money for his travel and leaving his wife and children penniless in Ceylon. Near the end of the novel, in the last part of the blue **notebook**, Anna sleeps with him "because it didn't matter to me." She cannot stand his arrogance and misanthropy—he tells her about convincing a girl to let him pretend to be in love with her, only to fall out of his fantasy when she actually responded to his romantic gestures, and later about ruining his friend's marriage by revealing an affair, just "to see what will happen." After Anna refuses to sleep with him again, he tries to sleep with a prostitute in the room above her to make her jealous—but when she finds him out, he cries pathetically to her and asks for forgiveness. Like Nelson, he represents men's bifurcated consciousness and "the principle of joy-in-giving-pain": he hurts and neglects women but expects Anna to care for him and forgive his cruelty.

Tom Mathlong – Tom Mathlong is a charismatic and powerful African revolutionary leader, ostensibly an old friend of Anna's, who is referenced in passing by characters at various points in the book. When Marion befriends Tommy and decides to become an activist, she asks Anna to help her contact Mr Mathlong, who is imprisoned and unlikely to get their messages. He represents the sort of unflinching, impactful, action-oriented political activism that Anna struggles to find for herself in the book.

Charlie Themba – Charlie Themba is a revolutionary and friend of Mr Mathlong's, who apparently went insane years into his activism and began accusing his allies of plotting against him. When Anna begins having her own mental breakdown, she briefly decides that Mr Mathlong and Charlie Themba are the

same person—but their real relationship, and their existence at all, is left uncertain.

Mrs Boothby – Mr Boothby's caring and naïve but closed-minded wife. She does most of the work maintaining the Mashopi Hotel and initially develops a close relationship to the socialists before retaliating against them for their kindness toward her black cook, Jackson. The socialists, especially Willi Rodde and Paul Blackenhurst, enjoy berating, mocking, and embarrassing her before winning back her sympathies by feigning kindness. She repeatedly kicks Paul and Anna out of the kitchen when she finds them talking to Jackson and is disgusted by Jimmy's love for Paul; when she finds Jimmy drunkenly kissing Jackson, she fires her cook after 15 years. She represents the prototypical British settler in Africa, who is not wealthy or educated by European standards but ends up enforcing a regime of racial terror and exploitation in an attempt to advance her own economic condition.

Jackson / The Cook – Jackson is the amiable and hardworking African cook at the Mashopi Hotel, whose budding friendship with Paul Blackenhurst during the black **notebook** draws Mrs Boothby's ire. After Mrs Boothby catches Jackson helping the drunk, homosexual Jimmy McGrath get up off the kitchen floor, she sends him, his wife Marie, and his family back to Nyasaland, even though she has employed him for 15 years. The tension between his personality and his fate demonstrates the tragedy of colonial racism.

Marie – Marie is Jackson's wife, who lives with him and their children in their cottage on Mr Boothby and Mrs Boothby's property. She has an affair and child with George Hounslow, which forms the basis for Anna's plot in her first novel, *Frontiers of War*. Mrs Boothby sends Marie and Jackson back to Nyasaland at the end of the first section of the black **notebook**.

Comrade John Butte – A prominent leader in the British Communist Party and committed defender of the Soviet Union. Although he used to be an energetic and compassionate organizer, he has since become jaded and authoritarian, invariably ignoring Anna's recommendations that the Party avoid publishing mediocre books. His authoritarianism demonstrates the pitfalls of long-term political commitments that put dogma over independent critical thought.

Stanley Lett – Stanley is Ted Brown's "protégé," a manipulative, lawbreaking young man who spends much of his time at the Mashopi Hotel sleeping with Mrs Lattimer and partying with Johnnie, his friend and "passport to a good time." Although he hangs around Anna's group of socialists, Stanley does not care about politics; Ted ultimately decides to fail his military exams to stay close to Stanley, who considers this move foolish and continues to ignore Ted's advice.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Milt – Milt, the dramatized version of Saul Green, also saves Anna from madness. Unlike her relationship with Saul, Anna and Milt are together for a mere five days before Milt realizes he must leave because he is incapable of combining sex and emotional attachment.

Ella's Son – Ella's son in the yellow **notebook**, Michael, is the equivalent of Janet, fictionalized as a boy and named after Anna's real life ex-lover, Michael. Like the real Michael around Janet, Paul Tanner is uncomfortable around this Ella's son Michael, and they both compete for Ella's attention.

Mr Boothby – The proprietor and bartender at the Mashopi Hotel, Mr Boothby is an opportunistic alcoholic who disapproves of the socialists' beliefs and manners but appreciates their generous spending.

Mrs Lattimer – Another frequent guest at the Mashopi Hotel, Mrs Lattimer is married to the violent Mr Lattimer and has an affair with the much younger Stanley Lett. Mrs Lattimer and Stanley are often seen "publicly playing the mother-and-son roles" before running off to bed.

Mr Lattimer – Mrs Lattimer's abusive, alcoholic husband.

Comrade Bill – A hardened, suspicious, and dismissive bureaucrat in the Communist Party who is in charge of the Party's capital-C "Culture" and skeptical of Anna's writing. Nevertheless, he is an excellent organizer and at one point in the red **notebook** coordinates a canvassing campaign in his working-class neighborhood.

June Boothby – June is Mr Boothby and Mrs Boothby's dull, sexually frustrated teenaged daughter, who helps them at the Mashopi Hotel. She marries an unnamed hotel guest and eventually moves across the country to live with him.

Johnnie – In the black **notebook**, Johnnie is a jazz pianist and friend of Stanley Lett's who hangs out at the Mashopi Hotel. He seldom speaks and eventually starts an affair with a farmer's wife.

Jane Bond – A friend of Molly's who sleeps and falls hopelessly in love with Saul Green before and during his relationship with Anna.

TERMS

Ceylon – The British colonial name for the island that is now Sri Lanka.

Nyasaland – The British colonial territory that is now Malawi.

Veld – Borrowed from Dutch, a term for wide expanses of grassland in southern Africa.

Kopje – A small hill in the veld.

McCarthyism – The campaign of anti-communist purges and persecution in the United States in the decade after World War II, sometimes also known as the Second Red Scare. Senator Joseph McCarthy and other officials identified and investigated

alleged communists, with or without substantial evidence. Hundreds of people were imprisoned, thousands lost their jobs, numerous suspected spies (like the Rosenbergs) were executed, and hundreds of prominent entertainers and artists were blacklisted from the public eye.

The Rosenbergs – Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were an American couple convicted of spying for the Soviet Union and executed in 1953.

Joseph Stalin – The Soviet revolutionary and leader who took control of the Soviet Union after Vladimir Lenin's death in 1924 and transformed it into an industrialized, authoritarian nation. He developed a strong cult of personality and famously presided over widespread, organized campaigns of political repression, murdering and imprisoning millions of people deemed enemies of the state.

National Service – The post-World War II peacetime conscription program in the United Kingdom. All men aged 17-21 were required to serve for 18 months unless they were conscientious objectors or worked in "essential services": coal mining, farming, or the navy.

Conscientious Objector – Someone who refuses to join or continue participating in military service because of political, religious, or moral opposition.

Quemoy – An island in the Taiwan Strait, over which a brief war was fought in 1954-1955 between Communist and Nationalist groups (the People's Republic of China and Republic of China that now govern China and Taiwan, respectively).

The Kremlin – The enormous fortified citadel in the center of Moscow that has served as the seat of Russian monarchies and governments for centuries.

Leucotomy – Also known as a lobotomy, a neurosurgical procedure that cuts the prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain largely responsible for what psychologists call "executive function," which includes decision-making, complex cognition and self-control, and personality. The procedure, exceptionally popular in the 1940s and 1950s, effectively incapacitated patients, the vast majority of whom were women deemed hysterical or unruly by their families. One of its most famous advocates, the American doctor Walter Freeman, even called it "surgically induced childhood" because it gave people an "infantile personality." The Soviet Union banned lobotomies in 1950, but they were common in Western capitalist countries through the 1970s.

Trotskyism – A strain of Marxism started by the Soviet leader and dissident Leon Trotsky, who was explicitly and vehemently critical of Joseph Stalin.

Chekhov's "The Darling" – An 1899 short story about a woman, seemingly incapable of independent thought, who latches onto the opinions and personalities of the various men she falls in love with throughout her life.

Soho – A fashionable neighborhood of London and the center of the city's sex industry until the 1980s.

F.L.N. – The Algerian National Liberation Front, the main organization that fought the French in the Algerian War of Independence from 1954 until 1962.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FRAGMENTATION, BREAKDOWN, AND UNITY

From the very beginning of *The Golden Notebook*, when protagonist Anna Wulf tells her closest friend and confidant Molly Jacobs that "everything's cracking up," the fragmentation of world and mind emerge as driving forces in the novel. Its plot revolves around Anna's own gradual mental breakdown, or "crack up." Throughout the novel, she writes endlessly about her deep fear of insanity in four different **notebooks** in different colors that cover four different aspects of her life—her past (black), her politics (red), her fiction (yellow), and her present (blue)—but realizes that none of them captures the real "truth" of her identity and experience. When she gives up the four books and begins writing everything in the single, titular golden notebook, Anna descends into madness, but she emerges whole, healthy, and able to write. Instead of blocking out parts of her identity to find a single, consistent truth, Anna only achieves a sense of unity and purpose by confronting the chaos within herself and refusing to partition her mind into different books. For Lessing, identity is never simple or coherent, but rather results from the varied, often contradictory experiences and attitudes that make up any life; anyone who tries to define themselves by one thing (like their job, their family role, their belief system) is far more delusional than someone like Anna, who finally refuses to compartmentalize herself and finds sanity by embracing, not rejecting, the contradictions in her identity.

At the beginning of the novel, Anna's identity is completely fragmented: she cannot integrate her four separate notebooks into a single story (the novel she wishes to write), and she feels that society has split up into groups that no longer understand one another and have resorted to a "blind grasping out for their own wholeness." Just like Anna's mind, the novel itself is fragmented, as the reader must constantly switch between Anna's four notebooks and disjointed thoughts within each of them. She feels that she has become multiple people and, at times, struggles to remain herself, like when she repeats, "Anna,

Anna, I am Anna" on the train ride home, after noticing the palpable misery and detachment of the commuters that surround her (a symptom of the capitalist division of labor that reduces each worker to just one function). Meanwhile, other characters in the novel are "multiplied": in different notebooks, many characters have two different names, and many of the same names refer to different characters—the implication is that nobody can ever be a single thing. Similarly, during her tumultuous relationship with the exiled American screenwriter Saul Green, Anna finds herself unable to predict which version of herself or Saul will show up in any given situation or argument. When she begins to confront her madness, she **dreams** about "alien personalities" "invading" her body and then entering others' bodies herself to gain their perspective—which hints that these "invasions" might not be sinister, but rather a metaphorical solution for society's fragmentation. Just as she tries to hold herself together here, Saul frequently seems to be fighting to control his own body, and during his lengthy rants, he repeats "I, I, I, I," as though shouting his identity aloud in order to pin it down. And yet words, Anna notes repeatedly, inevitably fail to capture reality: not only do her notebooks never reach the truth of who she is or what she feels, but she realizes in agony that she is "cracking up" because words stop meaning what they are supposed to and language begins to break down.

Anna both desperately seeks to be whole—to recognize herself in her writing and decisions, to feel consistent from day to day, to banish her contradictory beliefs—and deeply fears the mental breakdown she knows is inevitable. She sees two paths from her initial fragmentation to her goal of wholeness. The first is to deny and repress her contradictions (like her simultaneous resentment toward marriage and desire to marry, her belief in communist theory and her disdain for the Communist Party, or her nostalgia for her time in Africa but disgust at the novel she wrote about it). Her second alternative is paradoxical: she can dissolve her fragments, embracing chaos, contradiction, and heterogeneity. Late in the novel, she realizes that her four notebooks have represented the first solution to fragmentation: she has kept herself apart to hold herself together, compartmentalized her contradictory thoughts to avoid ever reading them in the same place. However, when the notebooks begin bleeding into one another (like when Anna realizes her reflections in the yellow notebook should actually belong in the blue notebook), she understands that she must heed the advice Molly's son Tommy gives her: Anna must stop dividing up her chaos and keeping it to herself, but rather confront it head-on by writing all her thoughts together, in one place, and revealing them to the world.

Lessing shows that everyone is multiple and chaotic from the outset, suggesting that breakdown is not the opposite of wholeness, but rather a means to it. When Anna lets her fragments dissolve into a unified self, she finally "cracks up"—she gives up her four notebooks and writes everything in the single golden notebook, which symbolizes the unification of her identity. But the golden notebook tells a story of madness: Anna hallucinates, dreams that she and Saul have entered one another's minds, but also finally admits that she has writer's block and was "buttoning up" her fears and emotional pain the whole time she kept separate notebooks. It is often impossible to tell whether Anna or Saul wrote different parts of the golden notebook, and they only break apart by merging one final time, exchanging opening lines for their next novels. Saul walks away with the golden notebook, which becomes his successful novel, and Anna walks away ready to write the novel *Free Women*, which has been *The Golden Notebook*'s frame story the whole time.

Ultimately, Anna's madness does not result from the multiplicity of her character—everyone is multiple, Lessing insists, and it is strange and unhealthy for anyone to let themselves be defined by a single thing. Rather, Lessing separates madness from delusion: by insisting on dividing her multiple identities into different notebooks, Anna lives in delusion, much like anyone who insists they are only one thing. Anna's madness—her insistence on embracing contradiction and combining her fragments—is actually a way of healing her delusion. The chaos she finally experiences is precisely what forces her to reconcile the contradictory and seemingly-separate dimensions of herself into a unified and healthy whole that is, nevertheless, not simply one thing. The very existence of *Free Women*, Anna's second novel, is proof that she has healed.

GENDER, LABOR, AND POWER

When Anna and Molly describe themselves as "free women," they are being consciously ironic—they do not feel "free," they are not "free" from social pressures and attitudes that constrain their potential and define them in terms of their relations to men, and because they are unmarried, men see them as sexual objects, "free" for the taking. Yet Lessing's early readers were right to see these characters' ability to recognize and reject oppressive gender roles as an important, progressive, if not entirely revolutionary step in the second wave of Western feminism. Anna and Molly recognize that, in the traditional marriages that predominate among their peers, men's economic labor is valued while women's emotional and domestic labor is made invisible—and those women who have begun to enter the workforce in limited ways also find their economic labor ignored. Under this system, women end up isolated, miserable, and unappreciated, living a sort of life Molly and Anna firmly believe they should not be forced to live; while they claim their "freedom" by refusing to do so, their true innovation is not merely their decision to live as single mothers, but their deeper recognition that this "freedom" is also limited and inadequate without a broader transformation in gender relations.

This book shows how men's labor is construed as valuable, even though it is invisibly supported everywhere by women's, which is not. Molly's pompous, arrogant, dominating ex-husband Richard denigrates Molly and Anna for ostensibly not working hard enough, but never acknowledges his wife Marion for taking care of the kids and spends his days at the office surrounded by secretaries and assistants who do most of the day-to-day work for which he takes credit. Anna, too, supports the men she dates not only materially, by cooking and cleaning for them, but also emotionally, by protecting their egos. In the blue notebook, she chronicles one day of frantically switching from one task to another, caring for her daughter Janet and lover Michael in the morning, working at the Communist Party without pay all day (further showing how her labor is undervalued), and making Janet and Michael a special dinner all night—but Michael never shows up and she ends up alone, in a dress she chose just for him, throwing out the veal she obsessed over making perfectly to please him.

This unequal division of labor transforms marriage into an emotional and economic cage: women have no choice but to do domestic work yet are compensated neither formally or informally, and in fact they lose their husbands' romantic interest precisely for doing what society demands of them. Marion's relationship with Richard speaks to this: he has completely ignored her for years yet blames her for her alcohol abuse, which leaves her incoherent for much of the first half of the book. She is miserable and tells Anna and Molly how much she wishes she could be "free" like them. However, when she finally grows close to Tommy, the first person to ever offer her serious attention and affection, she stops drinking, finds a passion for politics, and declares herself "free," to Richard's chagrin. Meanwhile, Anna's fictional alter ego Ella works at *Women at Home* magazine, the extraordinarily limited scope and style of which depresses her—her job is to write letters to neurotic housewives, who are driven mad by their confinement but not mad enough to be deemed properly "medical" by the womanizing Dr West, who (absurdly enough) runs the women's advice column. The magazine's self-help angle is designed to help women accept their subordinate role rather than challenge it. When Ella visits her lover Paul Tanner's house, she finds that his wife—with whom he has scarcely spent a night in years—is an avid reader of the magazine. Paul is proud that his wife so openly embraces the role of a traditional housewife, but both he and Ella recognize that she is clearly miserable because he has essentially abandoned her. So, even when Anna and Ella's affairs with men fail, they do not seek out marriage for their own sake, because they know that their relative "freedom" saves them from the suffering of women like Marion and Paul's wife.

Ultimately, while Anna and Molly recognize that they are in no way "free" from patriarchy, by choosing divorce over unhappy marriages, they still avoid being held "prisoner." They also offer an important example for women like Marion, who decides to follow their path and finds herself perhaps the book's happiest character by its end. And, of course, Anna's relationship with Molly also serves a function similar to marriage (she even describes Ella and Julia, fictionalized versions of herself and Molly, as "Lesbian, psychologically if not physically"). The last time Anna describes a psychoanalysis session with Mrs Marks, she decides to refuse others' expectations and "walk off, by myself, Anna Freeman." Crucially, in this moment she uses her maiden name "Freeman," both literally referencing her previous freedom from marriage and playing on the title *Free Women*, which she soon reveals is actually her second novel, proof of her eventual ability to create and freedom from emotional paralysis. While Mrs Marks insists that women have always been able to, and will always be able to, live freely, Anna points out that claiming this freedom usually requires women to live like men—to become "Freeman" rather than *Free Women*—which does nothing to resolve the broader problem of women's subordination to men. This explains Anna's ultimate decision to become a marriage counselor at the end of *Free Women*, suggesting that solidarity among women can offer them the chance to live their own, fulfilling lives, with or without men.

While many (mostly anxious male) critics complained that Lessing's characters hated, rejected, and dominated men, switching the gender hierarchy to put themselves on top, in fact Lessing deliberately chose to show the opposite: Anna and Molly's freedom from marriage does not free them from patriarchy. Men continue to treat them as disposable and subordinate, and they remain stuck in unpaid domestic labor (Anna continues to organize her life around caring for her daughter Janet and serve as a metaphorical "welfare worker" for those around her, like Tommy). Lessing's feminism, while in many ways archaic and essentialist by today's standards, is most radical in her recognition that women cannot simply achieve "freedom" by turning away from men, but must rather work to change the entire set of social relations that render their work, love, and humanity invisible to the men with power over them.

LOVE AND SEX

While Anna Wulf's rich internal life and deep understanding of the way patriarchy conditions her world have given Lessing's novel a canonical place among classics of Western feminist literature, some readers also note the brutal irony of Anna and Molly's situation: while they are perfectly capable of supporting themselves without men, they nevertheless long to get married; they seek love and define themselves by their quest for it, even while men treat them as disposable sexual objects. And they fully understand this paradox. While Lessing focuses on Anna and Molly's search for satisfying romance, she does not reinforce or defend the

traditional picture of women as emotional love-seekers destined to define themselves through men; rather, she shows how love can play a central role in everyone's personal, emotional, and collective development, but men are trained to turn away from it by putting sex before love and rejecting the kind of healthy relationships, founded on genuine equality and vulnerability, that can spur personal growth, satisfy the need for understanding and companionship, and heal people's wounds.

Women's quest for love in the novel is not abstract or fantastical, but rather grounded in their particular needs and experiences—no man sweeps a woman off their feet in this book. In the yellow **notebook**, Anna argues that love can lead to "spontaneous creative faith," or "*the power to create through naivety*." In other words, by immersing themselves in relationships, people can become radically open to future possibilities. Anna presents love as a means for personal development, which may explain why she often falls out of "love" with men she is initially drawn to, while she grows to love Michael and Saul Green, whom she did not originally find attractive. There exists a tension between lust and love, between attraction for the sake of self-gratification and attraction for the sake of mutual growth. Yet many of the book's men see love as simply about pleasure or security, rather than as an enduring commitment to this shared sense of personal development. In his relationship with Anna's alter ego Ella, for example, Paul Tanner can only see two kinds of relationships, neither of which involves genuine love: his marital relationship, which creates security and respectability, and his extramarital relationship, which is about pleasure. He cannot imagine combining them both, which is why he abruptly leaves Ella without so much as a formal breakup.

Paul's case is representative, for this novel's men are generally emotionally frigid: they substitute sex for love and are uncomfortable with equal relationships with women. Men repeatedly tell Anna (and Ella) she is lucky to be single, which really means that they are lucky to be able to have sex with her without having to love or commit to her. These men value Anna only insofar as they can "claim" her as a conquest; they want to own her, not take her seriously as an equal, and certainly not open up emotionally to her. In fact, Paul uses "love" as an excuse for cheating on Ella, claiming that "if you love a woman sleeping with another woman means nothing." Of course, not only does he not love Ella, but he is also talking about how little sleeping with her means when he already has a wife whom he loves (but still treats horribly).

Men's disproportionate focus on sex doesn't mean that women don't care about physical intimacy. Anna, for instance, suggests that the quality of sex reflects the emotional connection underlying a relationship, especially for women, and has Ella chart her relationship with Paul by tracking her orgasms. Meanwhile, Anna recognizes that she does not truly care about Willi (or Max, as he is known in other notebooks) precisely because they never have sex. Yet, when she sleeps with the brutish and sexually inexperienced American surgeon Cy Maitland, Ella learns to distinguish between the previous sex she has had and "giving pleasure," taking an active or passive role; while "giving pleasure" to Cy is empowering, Ella knows it will never satisfy her. She later realizes that she need not have her sexuality "contain[ed]" by men; instead of offering men sex in exchange for love, she can use it to pursue her freedom and test out different relationships, just like men do with her. Her friend Julia (a fictionalized version of Molly Jacobs) insists that, contrary to popular belief, men cannot simply get aroused with anyone—sex is not merely mechanical for them, but they do repress and avoid its emotional implications. Men's attitude toward sex (and especially affairs), Ella and Julia realize, is driven fundamentally by their fear of attachment.

Ultimately, the relationship that saves Anna from her loneliness and creative block—her brief fling with Saul Green—is remarkable because she finds him as emotionally invested in her as she is in him, even if it takes him a long time to admit it and this investment manifests in radically different ways. At first, Saul mirrors other men's attitudes, trying to maintain power over Anna: he sleeps with other women constantly and literally runs away when she points out his behavior. Yet he and Anna eventually become mutually dependent and vulnerable, to the point that their identities begin to merge and their personalities become indistinguishable in the golden notebook, which they both seem to write. Although Anna suffers from Saul's instability more than he does from hers, he eventually feels immense guilt about his infidelity and even claims that Anna is imprisoning him, just as she sees so many men imprison their wives and mistresses. After mutually tormenting one another for a few weeks, Anna and Saul reach a point of relative equality by the end of the book, symbolized by their one-for-one exchange of their next novels' first lines: they both recognize that they have grown close enough to one another to gain a new understanding of themselves, and that it is therefore time for them to move on and overcome their creative blocks. This love, the novel suggests, promises to break Saul's pattern of abuse toward women, Anna's pattern of unfulfilling relationships, and both their patterns of creative impotence. Ultimately, Anna's great achievement is not a stable, long-term relationship but rather merely the "spontaneous creative faith" she had lost so long ago: the ability to write and overcome her emotional dependence on Michael. While Lessing's characters often approach romance through their own needs and anxieties, when they do find serious love, they manage to heal themselves in a way they could not have done alone: by finding, as Tommy puts it, "just one other person I could really talk to, who could really understand me, who'd be kind to me."

COMMUNISM AND DISILLUSIONMENT

The red **notebook** focuses primarily on Anna's ambivalent relationship to communism, which she agrees with in theory but finds difficult to support in practice, because she finds the British Communist Party unnecessarily dogmatic, stuck in the past, and unable to cope with communism's transformation into authoritarian terror in the Soviet Union. Many of the novel's communists blindly defend the Party and others become so disillusioned that they lose faith in politics altogether. Anna herself tends to oscillate between these two extremes until she finds a way to toe the line between participating in and critiquing the Party; by the end of the book, she manages to understand the limits of leftist institutions while continuing to believe in the values underlying leftist politics, and her gradual transformation toward a less radical, but more practical, political orientation mirrors the predicament and trajectory of the Western left at the crucial turning point when this novel is set, the mid-1950s.

Anna becomes disillusioned with politics simply because communism has begun to fail her: it has become obviously untenable in England and openly authoritarianism in the Soviet Union. From the 1930s through the 1950s, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin ruthlessly persecuted his political enemies, including many inside his own Communist Party, executing hundreds of thousands of people and sending millions to prison camps in Siberia. As rumors of these crimes reach England, Anna notices that most of her fellow Communists simply deny them, insisting that the Soviet Union could not have possibly been responsible for such atrocities. When these rumors are openly confirmed after Stalin's death, Communist Parties break down throughout the West, where it is already clear that revolution would never occur. Most of all, even in England, Anna notices that communism proclaims a belief in egalitarianism, but communist institutions actually end up completely anti-egalitarian because of their demand for consensus and centralized power. She and Molly criticize the Party's orthodox support for the Soviets, air of secrecy, strict hierarchy, low editorial standards, and suspicion toward intellectuals. Most of all, there is no remaining space for dissent—everyone who agrees with the Party's ends but disagrees with its means gets shunned, which makes it difficult to reform a political project gone awry. Because Anna and Molly believe that the Communist Party has become anti-Communist, they end up "bored" with it and mired in conflicting feelings: they know they should celebrate when Stalin dies because the Party will have to change its thinking, but instead they agonize because they recognize that his death threatens the end of Communism everywhere; Anna realizes that it is illogical for her to feel more incensed about the Rosenbergs' execution that the executions of dissidents within the Party in Eastern Europe, but cannot bring herself to feel differently.

Because they feel stuck to a party line they do not agree with, many of the book's communists actually do nothing political—they dream of a better future but so completely lament the failures of the present that they lose all faith in political action. Most of Anna's socialist friends in Africa gradually move from planning meetings and protests to mocking their own previous revolutionary zeal. They realize that they can do nothing about colonial racism, and the Oxford-educated airmen in the group make fun of Willi's deep commitment to socialist theory—Paul Blackenhurst even openly brags about his future in the business world. Party meetings in London also inevitably lead to internal divisions and ambiguous conclusions—like when the reading group concludes that Stalin's writings on linguistics make no sense, or when the canvassing group uses humor to deflect their question about whether it is better to advance their own candidate or support the Labour Party candidate who is more likely to win the election. Anna notes that such discussions are generally fruitful when limited to two people, but usually stale and mechanical when any larger, because people fear breaking from political dogma.

While Lessing believes that blind faith can be a self-sabotaging political attitude, given that reality inevitably fails to live up to leftists' expectations, she also seems to show that a more measured, realistic kind of faith—one that recognizes the improbability of its own fulfillment—can both encourage people to pursue incremental progress and make radical social transformation more possible. Anna realizes that the Party "is largely composed of people who aren't really political at all, but who have a powerful sense of service," or who are lonely and seeking community. The happiest Party members are not satisfied because of society's progress, but rather because of their everyday personal contributions to the movement. It is accordingly unsurprising that, having been motivated by service rather than community, Anna decides at the end of *Free Women* to campaign for Labour (a progressive mainstream party) and teach children, prioritizing practical, tangible acts of service above the endless, circular discussions and blind hope she finds in the Party. In the golden notebook, Anna and Saul come up with a metaphor from the Greek myth of Sisyphus: the great majority of leftists are busy pushing a boulder up a "great black mountain" toward the "few great men" at the top, who have already figured out what it means to live in freedom. More practical, less idealistic politics might perhaps achieve only an inch of progress, an incremental advancement in collective knowledge, but it is progress nonetheless. While Anna leaves the Party and Molly marries a businessman, they never stop fighting for justice—regardless of whether they believe in communist revolution or not, they do not confuse radical faith with realistic expectations; they recognize that socialism is fragile and unlikely but still do what is in their power to improve the world.

In the years after she published *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing

insisted that she sought to be descriptive, not prescriptive: she wanted to capture the spirit of a time when communists were realizing their project would not be viable in the West, well before it started to seem impossible in the whole world. While she recognizes that the left had to scale down its expectations out of historical necessity, she laments communists' tendency to give up a notion of the common good altogether because their particular hopes were dashed. Anna and Molly's final, ambivalent political stances in *Free Women* suggest that they were still disappointed by the death of the communist hope for a radically transformed society, but still managed to find more realistic, limited ways to effect change.

ACTION, FREEDOM, AND MORAL COURAGE

Throughout *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf's central feeling is what Tommy describes as "paralysis of the will." Anna is unable to write, love, or commit to politics, even though she knows what she wants and what she must do to achieve it. For Anna, thought and action are not merely disconnected; they are actually opposites: the more Anna reflects, the less she feels able to act, and when she does act, it is often out of impulsivity and convenience, based on others' expectations for her rather than the principles in which she so strongly believes. Her search for freedom is in large part a struggle to define herself rather than letting predetermined roles, myths, and chance define her fate, and she finally succeeds through a series of epiphanies at the end of the book, during her madness, when she realizes the fundamental value of the "small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life, because injustice and cruelty is at the root of life." This palpable moral courage—the drive to act on principles—is what allows Anna to heal, at once overcoming her romantic fixation on the past, sense of political disillusionment, and inability to write.

Anna's paralysis stems largely from her sense that her ethical principles are unachievable; she repeatedly talks about her "moral exhaustion" or lack of "moral energy" and often feels as though her thinking is so developed that no action could ever live up to her political, romantic, or ethical vision for the world. After spending years obsessively reading newspapers, Anna tells Mrs Marks, her psychoanalyst, that "nothing I could write would seem to have any point at all" in comparison with the horrible events unfolding in the world. She feels that art has lost its meaning, and that action is the only thing that can heal the world. However, she also feels that she cannot act, as she lacks the power to change the capitalist division of labor, entrenched gender roles, and elitist art world that confine her life and work. Anna's moral vision of an equal society is so distant from the reality she sees that she simply gives up.

As a result of her "moral exhaustion," whenever Anna does take decisive actions in her life, she does so out of impulse and convenience, rather than out of commitment to her principles. In the black **notebook**, Anna reveals that she moved to Africa on a whim and chose to stay after leaving the farmer she had moved there to be with, simply because she could not think of anything better to do and even though she was the only member of her socialist group who could have legally moved back to London. When she decides to have a daughter with Willi Rodde (or Max Wulf, depending on the notebook), she does so only because he proposes it, and she thinks, "why not?" Anna fills the roles that are predetermined for her by her relationships, social status, and political affiliation. Later, she realizes that her entire life has been conditioned by role-play: she and Molly frequently comment on the way Party members and ex-Party members end up defending whatever their role dictates, and when her daughter Janet leaves for boarding school, Anna finds herself with nothing to do and nobody grounding her in what used to be her normal reality. But from the very start of the book, Anna agrees with Molly and Tommy that people like Richard (Molly's ex-husband and Tommy's father, a successful but brutish businessman) lose all sense of moral vision and turn entirely into their jobs; people fit themselves into roles and become examples of a type rather than the full, self-aware, morally-conscious people who would occupy a just society.

Near the end of the book, Anna develops the capacity for moral courage that allows her to achieve multiple kinds of freedom: the freedom from emotional dependence on men, the freedom from writer's block, the freedom to publicly disagree with the Communist Party, and most of all the freedom to define her future. She goes to psychoanalysis in an attempt to address her creative block, and after years of discussing her deepest emotions, realizes that she has learned to feel but not become any morally better; this is because her analysis focused on interpreting her feelings through archetypes, universal stories that she feels deny her own creative agency and force her into yet another "role." After this epiphany, she quits psychoanalysis and decides that it is time "I leave the safety of myth and Anna Wulf walks forward alone." This is perhaps Anna's first moment of moral courage, though she discovers many others in her relationship with Saul Green: she calls him out for his hostility and cruelty in a way she did with no man before him, and ultimately this leads them to the close, if codependent, relationship that in turn leads her to give up her four notebooks and combine them into the golden notebook. During a conversation with Saul, she realizes that "a free society dies or cannot be born" unless people have the "guts" to express political dissent, and during one of her **dreams** about him she sees that she has written the line about the "small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life." Together, these realizations lead Anna to take her ultimate moral stand: writing and publishing her second novel, *Free Women*, in which she fictionalizes her internal conflict between courage and resignation through the character of Tommy, who repeatedly

asks Anna about the relationship between their values and their actions and insists that it is cowardly, dishonest, and irresponsible of Anna to keep her notebooks private.

Lessing's numerous portraits of well-intentioned but practically impotent people show that it is not enough to understand the world's injustices and envision a better society; rather, people must sustain this kind of moral vision without losing themselves in fantasies of it and simultaneously develop a critical, realistic perspective on the world's failures without becoming completely distraught. The Anna in the notebooks recovers from her initial paralysis and cycle of creative failure by learning to bridge her values and actions through moral courage. Meanwhile, the Anna from *Free Women* seems to start and end in the same place—with Molly in the flat, gossiping about their peers, and leaving to take care of Janet—but with the one crucial difference that, by the end, she has learned to act on her principles (by becoming a marriage counselor and teaching children) rather than trying to define herself by fulfilling established roles in the Communist Party or literary world.

FACT, FICTION, AND AUTHORSHIP

In writing a novel about a novelist and her novels, Doris Lessing comments extensively on the relationship between "fact" and "fiction," the artist and her work. The protagonist Anna Wulf has long ago published her first novel, *Frontiers of War*, to commercial success. In Anna's black **notebook**, the reader encounters the supposed "facts" that Anna folded into *Frontiers of War*; and in her yellow notebook, the reader sees her next attempt at fiction, a novel that initially appears to be a fictionalized version of her own life, as presented in the frame story *Free Women*. However, at the end of the book, the reader learns that it is closer to the opposite: Lessing reveals that the *Free Women* sections are not an objective version of events; they do not present the "real" Anna through which the reader must interpret Anna's subjective and fictional reflections on her past. Rather, *Free Women* is actually Anna's second novel, and what initially looks like fact is revealed as fiction; the novel in the yellow notebook, then, is not a reflection of the facts in *Free Women* but something of a preparatory sketch for it. Ultimately, to prioritize and seek out the "facts" of Anna's life and experience is to entirely miss Lessing's point: that fact and fiction are inevitably muddled and influence one another, and that the boundary between text and world, author and reader, is never absolute.

Anna's depression revolves largely around her inability to write, or her creative block. Although Anna denies this, Molly, Saul Green and most of all the psychoanalyst Mrs Marks relentlessly point it out to her. Mrs Marks (whom Anna and Molly jokingly call "Mother Sugar") asks continually about Anna's creative process, and in their final conversation Anna realizes that she can create something new out of her personal experience rather than recycling the myths that Mother Sugar feeds her. Instead of seeing her life as examples of universal stories about "the wolves and the castle and the forests and the priests," Anna decides that she must narrate it for herself, which is her first step toward overcoming her "creative block." Once she can finally admit her block for the first time in the last iteration of the blue notebook, Anna almost immediately buys the golden notebook in which she consolidates her identity and gets the first line of *Free Women* from Saul. Her great achievement in the novel is her ability to write again, to reconcile the facts of her life with her writerly imagination.

Anna overcomes her block precisely by producing fiction out of facts—her novels are not imaginary stories to be contrasted against "reality," but are adaptations of that reality. *Frontiers of War*, Anna admits, is an adaptation of her time in Africa—she focuses on a relatively minor dimension of her actual experience (George Hounslow's relationship with the cook Jackson's wife, Marie). Yet Anna worries endlessly about production companies that try to adapt *Frontiers of War* into a film, erasing its central political truth—the evil of British colonial racism—while pretending to preserve its other, more banal "truths" by keeping the love story the same. Meanwhile, Anna's yellow notebook is her attempt to make sense of her romantic past by translating it into fiction. Indeed, the reader learns as much about this past from Ella's story as through Anna's own memories or admissions. The end of the yellow notebook also comprises ideas for short stories gleaned from Anna's relationship with Saul.

Not only are Anna's stories drawn from life, but her life also begins to imitate stories in the book. This can be seen, for example, when the story at the Party meeting about Comrade Ted visiting Stalin—which Anna insists one can "read as parody, irony, or seriously"—foreshadows the supposedly true story of Harry Mathews doing the same (even though Ted becomes enamored with the Soviets and Harry basically gives up on them).

Structurally, the status of the *Free Women* sections proves to the reader that it is impossible to precisely know what is fact, what is fiction, and what version of Anna is the "author" of the other versions. In the golden notebook, when Saul gives Anna the opening line "The two women were alone in the London flat," it becomes clear that *Free Women* is Anna's second novel rather than an "objective" picture of her life told from an omniscient point of view. At first, *Free Women* seems like the "truth" of Anna's life, behind which the notebooks reveal her subjective feelings about her life. However, by the end of the book, it becomes clear that *Free Women* is actually Anna's own fiction, built out of her own experiences, which are recounted most transparently in her notebooks—but never objectively, anywhere in the novel. *Free Women* and the notebooks reach incompatible endings: Anna's relationship with Saul is far more

tumultuous than hers with the fictional Milt; her madness is caused by Saul but merely resolved by Milt; and Anna ends the notebooks able to write *Free Women*, but ends *Free Women* deciding to become a marriage counselor rather than write. And Anna does not continue writing the notebooks after Saul leaves, so it is unclear what she did in his absence—besides, obviously, write *Free Women*. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide who the real Anna Wulf is and where she ends up when the novel is over.

Furthermore, the question of how the reader gains access to Anna's private notebooks in the first place underlies the whole novel. Anna continually worries about anyone reading them, and in *Free Women*, she fears that Tommy's suicide attempt is somehow related to reading them in secret. The golden notebook ends up in Saul Green's hands, not Anna's, leaving the questions of authorship and access unanswered: did Anna publish the notebooks alongside *Free Women*? If so, what did she include and leave out? Did she intentionally include all these ambiguities about authorship to reflect her sense that she has multiple identities? Is the reader Tommy himself, blinded to the story of *Free Women* by the material in the notebooks? Are the notebooks real at all, or perhaps simply merely the ones Tommy sees in *Free Women*, a fictional flourish by the Anna Wulf the novelist?

Lessing is not necessarily suggesting that the subjective reality of the notebooks is more "true" than the seemingly objective one of *Free Women*; rather, her layers of fiction show how readers' instinctual faith in stories that sound factual can undermine their ability to see that remembered truth is a creative projection of experience and, in this novel's case, the reader can reach the truth of Anna's experience as much through her fiction as through her memories. Of course, it goes without saying that, just as Anna adapts her own experience to the yellow notebook and *Free Women*, Anna's character is an adaptation of Lessing herself; the boundaries between author and character, reality and fiction, remain porous.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ANNA'S NOTEBOOKS

The majority of *The Golden Notebook* consists of the four colored notebooks in which Anna Wulf records her life, which symbolize her disjointed and compartmentalized identity. At least two of these colors have obvious significance: the black notebook is about Anna's time organizing with socialist, antiracist activists in Africa as well as the publication of her first novel, which was about the barbarity of the color line, and the red notebook records her work in the Communist Party. In the yellow notebook, Anna begins a new novel, *The Shadow of the Third*, and works through her real-life relationships by imagining fictional "third" versions of herself and the people she knows; in the blue notebook, Anna records her everyday life and her experience in psychoanalysis. Through her confrontations with Tommy in *Free Women*, Anna learns that she separates her life into these notebooks in an attempt to compartmentalize her identity; she recognizes its multifaceted character but tries to artificially partition the different components of herself into the notebooks, which are themselves fragmented as they are narratively and temporally nonlinear. She fears that writing in only one notebook would be "such a mess," opening her to chaos. She also wants her notebooks to stay private—she feels "terribly exposed" when Tommy goes through them and worries about spreading her negative feelings in the world. However, Tommy thinks that Anna must choose between dividing her inner turmoil in the notebooks, so that she can spare herself from seeing the totality of her pain, and revealing her thoughts to the world, which he sees as an act of social responsibility: telling the ugly truth others are afraid to hear.

When Anna finally combines her thinking into the golden notebook, she symbolically makes herself whole, overcoming the sense of alienation and creative paralysis that has plagued her as she failed to find love, independence, or another novel within herself. Indeed, just before the golden notebook, Anna's four notebooks begin to mix, as she often realizes she is slipping into the wrong kind of content. As she begins writing in the singular golden notebook, Anna loses not only the rigid distinctions between the different parts of herself, which mix in the dreams she describes in the golden notebook, but also the distinction between herself and Saul, who seems to invade her consciousness and dreams. Furthermore, when she eventually writes *Free Women*, the novel's frame story, Anna not only dissolves the artificial divisions she has created in her identity but also makes the totality of her experience public in the form of fiction, breaking her cycle of creative failure and fulfilling the hopes Tommy had in mind when he promised he would give her "another chance" to honestly address and create from her suffering.

ANNA'S DREAMS

Anna's blue **notebook** records her conversations with her psychoanalyst, Mrs Marks, which largely focus on Anna's peculiar dreams. Whereas she feels emotionally blunted in real life, Anna notes that "all my creativity is going into my dreams"; in dreams, she experiences a tremendous depth of feeling, and they become her main source of insight into her fears, suffering, and emotional needs. Anna's dreams contain their own individual significance as well. Her first dream is about failing to perform, which represents her "lack of feeling"; the next few dreams represent "false art,"

which reflects her fear that her writing does not adequately represent the truth of her experience. Mrs Marks's ability to dictate when Anna stops and starts dreaming, as well as her eventual appearance as a benevolent figure in Anna's dreams, represents her powerful (if underappreciated) role in helping Anna restore her creativity by processing her emotions, moving them from the unconscious to the conscious mind.

Anna's most important dreams are her nightmare about "joy in spite," and those about Saul as the projectionist replaying her memories in the golden notebook; both of these dreams represent her struggle to overcome contradictions, not necessarily by resolving them to one side or the other (picking joy or spite, herself or Saul as the true driving force of her identity) but rather by holding both sides of the contradiction in herself at once. Mrs Marks teaches Anna to dream the "joy in spite" dream "positively," and to awake "filled with joy and peace." The projectionist dreams allow Anna to see her plurality of perspectives on her life and the world, which begin to meld into words on a page that represent her ultimate achievement in the novel: the creative energy to write *Free Women*. Throughout the novel, Anna's dreams (much like the golden notebook) integrate the divisions Anna creates for herself in her life, incorporating material from her four notebooks and offering her the self-knowledge (and sometimes foresight) that she can only gain when she unconsciously sees herself as whole rather than fragmented.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon and Schuster edition of *The Golden Notebook* published in 1962.

Free Women: 1 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."

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Molly Jacobs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

At the very beginning of the novel, when Molly returns to London after a yearlong trip around Europe, Anna announces one of the book's central motifs: "everything's cracking up." First, this anticipates Anna's own protracted descent into madness throughout the novel, which is visible most of all through her sense of internal division—her feeling that multiple people are fighting for control of her body and mind. Secondly, she gestures to the novel's form: the narration is split between the *Free Women* sections and Anna's four notebooks, each of which only offers the reader a partial view of Lessing's protagonist; the story is "cracked up" and the reader can only try to understand the Anna Wulf behind these writings by reading between the lines of the notebooks—or, as it were, looking through the cracks in and among them. Finally and most literally, Anna is talking about the "cracking up" of the global political order—specifically the Soviet Union and Western Communism. After Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's death and the public acknowledgement of the myriad crimes committed under his rule, Anna and Molly (who are reflections of Lessing herself) have to reconsider their allegiance to a Communist Party that continues to defend him and, it is becoming increasingly clear, has no shot at winning political power in the UK. So the Communist Party is "cracking up" as its members alternatingly choose to abandon it and forget the truth, and Anna and Molly are left without anywhere to turn politically in a world that seems to have lost all moral direction.

Anna laughed. "Men. Women. Bound. Free. Good. Bad. Yes. No. Capitalism. Socialism. Sex. Love …"

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Molly Jacobs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

While discussing Anna's newfound propensity for profanity (which she considers a way to claim the freedom of a man), Anna's responds to Molly's insistence that women and men are not the same by laughing at this series of opposites. She refuses to let the binary oppositions between men and women's ways of being and living define her life, and she refuses to think about the world in terms of these false dilemmas, which are far too simple to describe the messy realities of experience, uncertainty, and individuals' creative pursuit of their own goals. Compartmentalization, Lessing insists, leads to madness—Anna spends much of the book (in her four, compartmentalized notebooks) trying to choose between a man's freedom and a woman's emotional intelligence, the safety of being bound to a man and the independence of being free from any, the search for sex and the search for love, and so on. She ultimately realizes that

she need not be forced to choose, but instead have both options, for the choice between them is false.

The Notebooks: 1 Quotes

Most novels, if they are successful at all, are original in the sense that they report the existence of an area of society, a type of person, not yet admitted to the general literate consciousness. The novel has become a function of the fragmented society, the fragmented consciousness. 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 inside their own country, let alone about groups in other countries. It is a blind grasping out for their own wholeness, and the novel-report is a means towards it. Inside this country, Britain, the middle-class have no knowledge of the lives of the working-people, and vice-versa; and reports and articles and novels are sold across the frontiers, are read as if savage tribes were being investigated. Those fishermen in Scotland were a different species from the coalminers I stayed with in Yorkshire; and both come from a different world than the housing estate outside London.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Near the beginning of Anna's black notebook, she reflects on publishing her own novel during a few months she spends reviewing other books. She grows convinced that the novel has changed: it is now closer to journalism than philosophy. Readers no longer seek wholeness in themselves through ideas, but rather in humankind by knowing about others, and novels become about their subjects, not their messages. Of course, this book aims to offer both philosophy (through its formal innovations and explorations of Anna's psyche) and journalism (in reporting the perspective of women and leftist intellectuals in the 1950s).

Anna's portrait of this shift suggests that people's fragmentation along lines of class and occupation is relatively new, a product of the division of labor under modern capitalism, and that it makes people run up against the limits of their imagination: they are so stuck being one thing, living in one box, that they lose track of what the rest of humankind is doing. The problem Anna diagnoses is a lack of mobility—social, interpersonal, and even geographical—that prevents people from making genuine connections and truly understanding one another.

George said: "No, it's the responsibility. It's the gap between what I believe in and what I do."

Related Characters: George Hounslow (speaker), Marie , Willi Rodde , Anna Wulf

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

George and Willi are having a heated argument about George's illegitimate son with Marie, the wife of the Mashopi Hotel's black cook. Because George is white and Marie is black, if George acknowledged his paternity or reached out to his son, it would be not only socially taboo but also illegal, a threat to his safety and the primary family for whom he works endlessly to provide. Willi rightly points out this danger, but declares that feelings like George's are distractions from the important work of organizing for social change. George, on the other hand, clearly recognizes that his agony is precisely a reaction to the social injustices that make impossible for him to take care of his son. Willi, the bourgeois communist bureaucrat, has no interest in living out his beliefs and simply waits for the revolution to happen; he severs thought from action, clinging to the same idealism that Anna eventually deems untenable in the red notebook. Meanwhile, George cannot imagine believing in something and failing to act on it. The other subtext to this argument is Anna's stale relationship with Willi and deep love for George, which stems from her disdain for Willi's resignation and emotional distance but captivation by George's genuine passion and reckoning with his place in the world.

I was filled with such a dangerous delicious intoxication that I could have walked straight off the steps into the air, climbing on the strength of my own drunkenness into the stars. And the intoxication, as I knew even then, was the recklessness of infinite possibility, of danger, the secret ugly frightening pulse of war itself, of the death that we all wanted, for each other and for ourselves.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Paul Blackenhurst

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

After Anna finally leaves Willi to elope into the wilderness with Paul, she describes this overwhelming feeling that is central to the book: most memorably, she calls it the freedom of dissolution. This is the thrill that accompanies structural change—the breakdown of an existing order that makes way for something new. Here, the thrill is that Anna has rejected an unsatisfying relationship to make way for a truly fulfilling experience with Paul. She has also dissolved the existing order of her group of friends, which was organized around her relationship with Willi but based on everyone's desire for them to break up, so they could all be with the people they really wanted as romantic partners.

Dissolution is simultaneously liberating and dangerous because it destroys order, which is both restraining and a source of security; "infinite possibility" can mean radical happiness or absolute misery. This is the same feeling that engulfs Anna during her eventual mental breakdown and relationship with Saul Green. It also forms the basis for communists' emotional investment in the fantasy of society's transformation through a revolution, and—crucially—underlies both war and suicide, the two varieties of death that play important roles in Anna's notebooks (which rely on the dissolution of life and account for Anna's exclamation that she desired death here). It is no coincidence that Paul dies in a reckless, stupid accident with a plane propeller the next day—Anna remembers the events as though their indulgence in the freedom of dissolution led directly to Paul's tragic death.

> Five lonely women going mad quietly by themselves, in spite of husband and 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." Back in the campaign HQ I mentioned these women to the woman in charge for the afternoon. She said: "Yes, wherever I go canvassing, I get the heeby-jeebies. This country's full of women going mad all by themselves." A pause, then she added, with a slight aggressiveness, the other side of the self-doubt, the guilt shown by the women I'd talked to: "Well, I used to be the same until I joined the Party and got myself a purpose in life." I've been thinking about this — the truth is, these women interest me much more than the election campaign.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Marion

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

When she goes canvassing for the Communist Party in London, Anna meets a series of distraught housewives who exemplify her discomfort with marriage. All five of the women's husbands have busy work lives outside the home, do not value their wives' labor at home, and likely pursue other women on the side. Meanwhile, the wives are stuck at home alone or with small children, without strong relationships of any sort, and often bored out of their minds.

According to normative gender roles and pictures of marriage, this is supposed to be the ideal life for all women—and yet in reality it looks far more like imprisonment. The women Anna meets, much like Marion, cannot reconcile their misery with the fact that they are living out this idealized script, so they assume that they are deficient as women; in reality, the social norms are deficient, which is why Anna consciously rejects them and chooses to live as a "free woman"—even though she remains dissatisfied with her relationships and scarcely finds a sense of purpose (which, unlike the woman at the headquarters, she also fails to find through the Communist Party). Indeed, her interest in these miserable housewives points to the sense of purpose she does find: writing out her novel about them (which eventually becomes *Free Women*).

> "How can you separate love-making off from everything else? It doesn't make sense."

Related Characters: Ella (speaker), George, Michael, Anna Wulf, Paul Tanner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

In the yellow notebook, Ella (a fictionalized version of Anna) meets the psychiatrist Paul Tanner (a fictionalized version of Michael) at a work function. Anna's narration then jumps ahead to the end of their relationship, when Paul criticizes Anna for only falling in love with him after sleeping with him, and Anna replies with this line. She points to a nearly universal pattern in the men she meets: they are invested in sex but not in love; they view sex and love as two separate spheres and cannot bring themselves to understand how the women they sleep with fall in love with them; and, through infidelity, they even use sex as a tool to avoid love.

Anna also points to the neurotic function of compartmentalization: by thinking of sex and love in isolation from one another, men refuse to take moral responsibility for their actions and impact on the mistresses they abandon emotionally and the wives they abandon sexually (but often emotionally, too). Finally, Anna's mode of narration is significant here: by flashing forward to the end of Ella and Paul's relationship, she both reveals her fixation on her own relationship (clearly, her motive for writing *The Shadow of the Third* was her desire to make sense of it) and shows the retrospective patterning that she later uses as a lens to understand her writing: she constantly narrates Paul and Ella's relationship in terms their breakup, which is a done deal from the outset.

> *What Ella lost during those five years was the power to create through naivety.*

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Mrs Marks / Mother Sugar, Michael, Paul Tanner, Ella

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

In a digression from the main story of the yellow notebook, Anna realizes one of the central themes she had not previously acknowledged in her novel *The Shadow of the Third*: the relationship between naivety and creativity. She sees this naivety in Ella's faith that her affair with Paul would turn into something (and, by extension, in her own faith that her relationship with Michael would succeed). Anna declares that naivety is the same thing as "spontaneous creative faith"—the combination of trust and inspiration that can lead people to make art, or remake their lives in a frenzy—and that this is the measure of a relationship.

However, because their relationships failed, Anna and Ella have lost this naivety—and Anna arguably never recovers it, even in her relationship with Saul. In fact, she already realizes that she needs to find another path to creativity, because she is so dissatisfied with *Frontiers of War*: she considers it irresponsible art both because she wrote it out of the thrill in dissolution and because she centered it on a fictional relationship, rather than her own experience. Instead, Anna learns to create art not out of naivety but out of a hardened moral courage: she writes out of reflection and wisdom rather than impulsivity and passion.

> Literature is analysis after the event.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Ella

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

In another digression in the yellow notebook, Anna recognizes and regrets the fact that she narrates Ella and Paul's affair through its ultimate failure, by latching onto the patterns of misinterpretation and emotional distance that eventually become their undoing. She wonders how she could narrate the story as it felt, without an apparent foreknowledge of its end; she concludes that only film can do so, because it emphasizes patterns of feeling in the moment rather than analyzing them from a distance. This statement about medium becomes important much later in the book, when Anna's dreams start taking the form of movies.

Anna also imagines telling the story differently, alternating between one day early in their relationship and one day near their end, and concludes that this would turn to "chaos," because the clear signs of their relationship's impossibility would be "swallowed in the happiness." One interpretation or another would have to dominate; she

could not, she feels, write a story about happiness and pain at the same time. Literature requires patterns to function, but these patterns are also constraining because they reduce a story to a definite idea or set of ideas.

Anna's struggle with form also points to the novel's structure and the reader's challenging task in interpreting it: the book seems to be structured around a central story, *Free Women*, that tells the story of a woman named Anna, with her notebooks serving as supplementary material to help the reader interpret the personal experience behind Anna's more objective portrayal in *Free Women*. Yet this configuration of fact and fiction later changes—it turns out that the reader does not get the information necessary to interpret *Free Women* until very late in the text and therefore has to rethink it in retrospect. In other words, the reader must analyze it "after the event," but also experiences the book for the first time as fragmented and subjective, somewhere between the filmic mode of storytelling and the novelistic one.

Free Women: 2 Quotes

"It seems to me like this. It's not a terrible thing — I mean, it may be terrible, but it's not damaging, it's not poisoning, to do without something one wants. It's not bad to say: My work is not what I really want, I'm capable of doing something bigger. Or I'm a person who needs love, and I'm doing without it. What's terrible is to pretend that the second-rate is first-rate. To pretend that you don't need love when you do; or you like your work when you know quite well you're capable of better. It would be very bad if I said, out of guilt or something: I loved Janet's father, when I know quite well I didn't. Or for your mother to say: I loved Richard. Or I'm doing work I love …"

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Richard Portmain, Molly Jacobs, Willi Rodde , Max Wulf, Tommy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

After Tommy asks Anna about her relationship with Max Wulf, Anna explains that the marriage's failure did not much affect her. Like Tommy, she is far more invested in maintaining her moral principles than she is in successfully achieving them; she would rather settle for dissatisfaction than pretend to be satisfied. Naturally, Anna's two examples cover her two main domains of aspiration and failure—writing and love—and her attitude of clear-minded acceptance (a willingness to fail and refusal to lose sight of what one really desires) is what leads her to say that she and Tommy are like "latter-day stoic[s]," resiliently tied to principles in a world increasingly disconnected from them (like Communists who parrot the party line, miserable women who pretend to be happy, or artists who give up on self-improvement). Nevertheless, at this stage in the book Anna seems to think that there is little she can do to spread or work for her principles in the world: the Communist Party is corrupt, she cannot write, and her personal relationships are relatively stagnant. Accordingly, her challenge in the rest of the book is to find a way to translate these principles into action without compromising them.

"It's because I keep trying to write the truth and realising it's not true."

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Tommy

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

As Tommy peruses Anna's notebooks (which absolutely frightens her), he notices that the blue notebook primarily contains three kinds of content: newspaper clippings, crossed-out "flash[es] of madness" (in Anna's words), and records of banal, daily activities. He asks why she separates the madness from the rest in brackets, and this is her reply. Noticeably, these bracketed, insane thoughts are completely absent from the blue notebook, even though other material Anna has consciously excluded (like the long story of September 15 in the next section) does make it into the novel. This reminds the reader how much of Anna's notebooks they never get to see, and also suggests that her madness may have started earlier than is otherwise apparent—unless the reader gets to see not fragments of Anna's complete notebooks (as presented in *Free Women*) but rather different notebooks altogether.

Before Anna's ultimate breakdown at the end of the novel, her inability to find a unified truth about herself or her experience through any of her four notebooks is a constant red flag—the problem isn't that she's not writing genuinely in the moment, but that she can't decide what part of her counts as the "truth" after the fact. She obviously doesn't want to admit that her true self could be her madness; yet

the objective records of her day are too bare to capture her experience, which is much more the truth of who she is than the facts of what she has done. She tries to access truth through fiction in the yellow notebook and by dredging up the patterns of her past in the black notebook. Arguably, she never manages to "write the truth" about herself, even as her golden notebook brings the compartmentalized aspects of herself together and she manages to turn them into art that expresses her experience in *Free Women*.

Yet Anna ultimately heals herself without declaring a single truth or putting forward a single version of herself to the reader, which shows that she is formulating her problem wrong here, and getting caught in a destructive cycle: she lays out different ideas of herself in different notebooks, different kinds of entries, and even different handwriting in the hope that one of them will suddenly be her true, whole self; but she cannot get to her true, whole self precisely because she has divided herself up into the notebooks.

The Notebooks: 2 Quotes

❝ What is terrible is that after every one of the phases of my life is finished, I am left with no more than some banal commonplace that everyone knows: in this case, that women's emotions are all still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists. 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. So what I feel is irrelevant and silly … I am always coming to the conclusion that my real emotions are foolish, I am always having, as it were, to cancel myself out. I ought to be like a man, caring more for my work than for people; I ought to put my work first, and take men as they come, or find an ordinary comfortable man for bread and butter reasons — but I won't do it, I can't be like that …

Related Characters: Ella (speaker), Paul Tanner, Anna Wulf

Related Themes:

Page Number: 300

Explanation and Analysis

In the yellow notebook, Ella decides abruptly that she cannot stay in Paris and rushes to the airport, where she remarks on her breakup with Paul and inability to write her second novel while she waits for her flight. For one of the only times in *The Shadow of the Third*, Ella's voice comes through directly, and it is indistinguishable from Anna's. The point is not merely that Ella is based on Anna, but rather that Anna has started failing to keep Ella separate from herself; Ella is no longer merely *a version of* herself, but here *Ella is Anna*, in voice and feeling. The beginning of Ella's collapse into Anna, which Anna spends more time reflecting on at the end of the yellow notebook, suggests that Tommy is right about her notebooks in *Free Women*: they are a false attempt to separate the parts of herself, which will never truly stay separated, no matter how hard she tries.

With regards to this monologue's content, Anna/Ella sees the decline of "deep emotions" as the tragedy of a modern society founded on capitalist competition, in which work and material possessions ("bread and butter") come first and emotions and relationships are relegated to irrelevance. While Anna/Ella feels caught between her knowledge that humans are capable of deeper emotion than what this kind of society cultivates in them, she also feels the pressure to conform, but recognizes that only men can truly succeed in a society that degrades emotion.

Anna's fundamental problem, however, is that she cannot separate her work from her love because they're mutually dependent. This is also why she cannot simply adopt a man's role. While women are imprisoned by gender roles, according to Anna, part of their imprisonment stems from the fact that they often develop emotional capacities that men either never gain or are trained from birth to lose. She recognizes that men take advantage of women's love, but refuses to abandon her belief in love, even if she begins to lose hope that she will achieve it.

❝ (At this point, Ella detached herself from Ella, and stood to one side, watching and marvelling.)

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Cy Maitland, Ella

Related Themes:

Page Number: 309

Explanation and Analysis

While Ella is having sex with Cy Maitland—for the first time, actively "giving pleasure" rather than assuming a passive role—she watches herself as though from a third person perspective (perhaps as her own "shadow of the third"). Most directly, this comments on the way Anna multiplies herself in her notebooks, not only by creating the character of Ella but also by telling different, sometimes inconsistent stories about herself in different notebooks. Anna both is and is not Ella, who here both is and is not herself; in other words, Anna's alter ego gets an alter ego, continuing the

cycle of fragmented identity. This is also commentary on the workings of art—fiction is only possible because a writer can invent others in their mind, and after publishing work, writers must watch the products of their invention take on a new life and meaning that they cannot control (much as Anna did with *Frontiers of War* and Doris Lessing did with this novel). Finally, it is also crucial that "Ella detached herself from Ella" in this particular moment, because the detachment of her perspective reflects the fact that she has become emotionally detached from sex for the first time in her life.

> And so this is the paradox: I, Anna, reject my own "unhealthy" art; but reject "healthy" art when I see it.

The point is that this writing is essentially impersonal. Its banality is that of impersonality.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis

In the blue notebook, on the day of September 15, 1954, that Ella tries to describe in perfect detail, she goes to the Communist Party headquarters and spends much of the day reading reviews from Communist countries, looking for material that might be suitable for publication in England (and, as usual, finding none). She realizes that all these books seem to recapitulate the same clichés, telling different versions of the same story they seem to have already decided must be correct—there is no "genuine personal feeling" in them. She knows that while her first novel, *Frontiers of War*, came out of genuine feeling—it emerged from the thrill of dissolution, but Anna feels horrible to think that she turned such a violent impulse into art, which is why she considers it "unhealthy." And yet she does not want to be otherwise, to bring forth the same delight and false wholeness that defines so much banal art because it does not express or confront the contradictions and turmoil of an individual author. This also seems to be Lessing's justification for making her protagonist a fictionalized version of herself.

> 15th September, 1954

A normal day. During the course of a discussion with John Butte and Jack I decided to leave the Party. I must now be careful not to start hating the Party in the way we do hate stages of our life we have outgrown. Noted signs of it already: moments of disliking Jack which were quite irrational. Janet as usual, no problems. Molly worried, I think with reason, over Tommy. She has a hunch he will marry his new girl. Well, her hunches usually come off. I realized that Michael had finally decided to break it off. I must pull myself together.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Michael, Tommy, Molly Jacobs, Janet Wulf, Jack, Comrade John Butte

Related Themes:

Page Number: 352

Explanation and Analysis

After Anna attempts to record every event of her day on September 15, she ultimately crosses out her entire entry and offers this bare version of the day instead. The reader gets two perspectives on the same experience, one full of life and affect, the other a set of dead, empty facts. Beyond showing how Anna's often finicky authorial choices shape the reader's access to her "truth," this also implies that there is much in Anna's life the reader might not be privy to because her notebooks so often evacuate her experience of all detail.

Beyond revealing Anna's struggle to identify the true version of herself, this entry is also telling because it shows her attempts to distance herself from pain, but also how that distancing cuts off her ability to create the kind of art she has sought—her previous, extended version of events is the closest she ever gets to expressing her feelings and reactions with no retrospective filter, even though she still wrote it in retrospect. It is increasingly becoming clear that, in order to write again, Anna must allow herself to express her pain rather than discounting her feelings for being "irrational," as she does here.

Free Women: 3 Quotes

> "Isn't it odd, Anna? He's been hovering between life and death. Now he's going to live. It seems impossible he shouldn't. But if he had died, then I suppose we'd have felt that was inevitable too?"

Related Characters: Molly Jacobs (speaker), Tommy, Anna Wulf

Related Themes:

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis

After Tommy narrowly survives his suicide attempt and ends up blind instead of dead, his mother Molly tells Anna this, starting with her signature phrase: "Isn't it odd, Anna?" Notably, Molly's style of commentary is suited to what she says: her and Anna's gossip is usually observational and detached, about the "odd" things they see in the world that they can explain but could just as well not be the case. Here, she recognizes how their expectation about Tommy's fate—which feels necessary, set in stone—actually hinges on something entirely unpredictable and contingent: where the bullet went, how he recovered.

Of course, Molly is also offering a more general commentary on the way people decide what to believe and consider possible: she suggests that people sell themselves short by failing to imagine how things could be different from how they are. By considering the present inevitable, they end up cyclically reproducing what they already have: unsatisfied women end up in one unsatisfying relationship after another, disillusioned communists cannot see their power to act politically outside the confines of the Party's dogma, and as a writer, Anna remains stuck in a cycle of creative failure and moral paralysis, writing the same entries that feel false in the four notebooks that feel incomplete, because she sees it as inevitable that she will never create a novel that is both successful and genuine.

> She was thinking: If someone cracks up, what does that mean? At what point does a person about to fall to pieces say: I'm cracking up? And if I were to crack up, what form would it take? [...] Anna, Anna, I am Anna, she kept repeating; and anyway, I can't be ill or give way, because of Janet; I could vanish from the world tomorrow, and it wouldn't matter to anyone except to Janet. What then am I, Anna? — something that is necessary to Janet. But that's terrible, she thought, her fear becoming worse. That's bad for Janet. So try again: Who am I, Anna? Now she did not think of Janet, but shut her out. Instead she saw her room, long, white, subdued, with the coloured notebooks on the trestle table. She saw herself, Anna, seated on the music-stool, writing, writing; making an entry in one book, then ruling it off, or crossing it out; she saw the pages patterned with different kinds of writing; divided, bracketed, broken — she felt a swaying nausea; and then saw Tommy, not herself, standing with his lips pursed in concentration, turning the pages of her orderly notebooks.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Tommy, Janet Wulf

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 373

Explanation and Analysis

As she rides the train home from Richard's office, for the first time Anna genuinely feels a sense of encroaching madness—paradoxically, she is fully aware that she is losing her mind, but she cannot reconcile the knowledge that she is Anna with her overwhelming feeling that she is nothing at all. She recognizes that her identity has come to depend most of all on caring for her daughter, Janet, which is her only defined obligation. By "shut[ting] her out," Anna tries to find any other identity for herself and fails, instead seeing herself as Tommy, whose suicidal impulse—the desire for dissolution—she shares in wanting to "vanish from the world tomorrow." She describes her notebooks as at once disjointed ("divided, bracketed, broken") and as "orderly," for the madness in these notebooks follows a pattern, separating parts of herself into different books and different styles within each book. By internally dividing herself in the books, it seems, Anna gives up the chance to be whole, just like Tommy told her before his suicide attempt. In fact, the books' "orderl[iness]" is proof of her own disorder, her need to fit herself into patterns in order to avoid confronting the truths that patterns cannot capture.

The Notebooks: 3 Quotes

> From this point of the novel "the third," previously Paul's wife; then Ella's younger *alter ego* formed from fantasies about Paul's wife; then the memory of Paul; becomes Ella herself. As Ella cracks and disintegrates, she holds fast to the idea of Ella whole, healthy and happy. The link between the various "thirds" must be made very clear: the link is normality, but more than that — conventionality, attitudes or emotions proper to the "respectable" life which in fact Ella refuses to have anything to do with.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Michael, Paul Tanner, Ella

Related Themes:

Page Number: 429-30

Explanation and Analysis

Anna begins to explore the meaning of her novel's' title, *The Shadow of the Third*. The "third" in her title may be an obscure reference to the American philosopher C.S. Peirce, who argued that relationships between signs and the things to which they refer also require a third term, the set of rules and conventions on which reference is based—this makes it clear that Anna's "thirds" have two functions. First, as she suggests here, they show Ella the "normal" life she is missing out on: Paul's wife has the committed relationship with him that Ella wants for herself; after Ella breaks up with Paul, she imagines a younger version of herself who has the same relationship with him (keeping his house and waiting for him to return from Nigeria); then, when she has not heard from Paul for more than a year and goes to Paris, she can only keep herself feeling normal and healthy by remembering him obsessively; and finally, as she begins to descend into madness, Ella copes by focusing on "the idea of Ella whole, healthy and happy" and trying to become that whole version of herself. All these "thirds" lurk in the "shadow[s]" of everyday life, giving it its meaning from afar, just as (for example) the marriage between two people relies on the power of the official who married them, or buying groceries relies on the conventional power of money.

Ella is also a "third" for Anna's life. While Anna feels broken and dejected because of her relationship with Michael, she cannot fully articulate these feelings to herself or tell the story of her breakup in a coherent and patterned way; this is why she writes her novel, which turns the fragmentation she actually feels into a clean, organized story that represents how she feels in a more conventional and digestible package. Anna, of course, is also Ella's third—the author in virtue of which Ella's story has any meaning or form. But the reader is also a third: the third between Anna and Ella, the one who interprets and establishes the relationship between the protagonist and her fictionalized version of herself.

> "I'm going to make the obvious point that perhaps the word neurotic means the condition of being highly conscious and developed. The essence of neurosis is conflict. But the essence of living now, fully, not blocking off to what goes on, is conflict. 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."

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Mrs Marks / Mother Sugar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 449-50

Explanation and Analysis

In her conversation with Mrs Marks, Anna wonders whether madness might be an extreme version of sanity rather than its opposite: if anyone thinks hard enough about their identity and place in the world, she suggests, they will inevitably see deep contradictions and inconsistencies—like Anna's pride in her freedom from men and desire to commit herself to one, or her belief in the struggle for equality but inability to advance it through action. It is easy to simply forget one half of these contradictions in order to avoid internal conflict—for instance, Patricia Brent first gives up entirely on the love she wants and then completely forgets about her resentment for men after Dr West sleeps with her, and Comrade John Butte is so invested in the Communist Party's activities that he refuses to see how they no longer contribute to the development of a more just society. This kind of willful ignorance is a form of moral cowardice, people's choice to "stay sane [...] by limiting themselves." Choosing instead to confront one's conflicts and seek the truth can mean giving oneself up to madness, but Anna realizes that embracing madness can be the best way to achieve genuine sanity: instead of keeping one's contradictions hidden, madness lets one resolve them and form a new understanding that does not require sacrificing part of oneself.

> "But now I can feel. I'm open to everything. But no sooner do you accomplish that, than you say quickly — put it away, put the pain away where it can't hurt, turn it into a story or into history. But I don't want to put it away. Yes, I know what you want me to say — that because I've rescued so much private pain-material — because I'm damned if I'll call it anything else, and 'worked through it' and accepted it and made it general, because of that I'm free and strong. Well all right, I'll accept it and say it. And what now? I'm tired of the wolves and the castle and the forests and the priests. I can cope with them in any form they choose to present themselves. But I've told you, I want to walk off, by myself, Anna Freeman."

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Mrs Marks / Mother Sugar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 451

Explanation and Analysis

Anna discusses her "experience" in psychoanalysis with Mrs Marks and concludes that it has offered an extraordinary tool and an extraordinary danger. The tool is that it has forced her to confront her pain instead of repressing and avoiding it—she has gone from an inability to feel, before therapy, to now feeling so strongly that she can scarcely hold herself together. The danger in psychotherapy is that it insists on solving pain in the wrong way. Rather than investigating the unique personal circumstances behind pain, it tries to package pain into universal stories, myths about "the wolves and the castle and the forests and the priests." Anna sees this recourse to convenient stories as dishonest, but also an affront to the creative potential of individuals: by accepting old myths, Anna refuses to turn her experience into a story of her own; she lets the world define her rather than making herself define the world, which is the role of a writer in a society that refuses to confront reality.

Anna insists on "walk[ing] off by myself," feeling her pain more deeply rather than resolving it conveniently, and taking back her maiden name: "Freeman." This represents Anna freeing herself from Mrs Marks's narrow perspective on the world and reclaiming her power to name herself from men, but it is also an ironic play on the title of the frame story that the reader soon learns is actually written by Anna, *Free Women*.

❝ It occurs to me that what is happening is a breakdown of me, Anna, and this is how I am becoming aware of it. For words are form, and if I am at a pitch where shape, form, expression are nothing, then I am nothing, for it has become clear to me, reading the notebooks, that I remain Anna because of a certain kind of intelligence. This intelligence is dissolving and I am very frightened.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 456

Explanation and Analysis

After Anna reads through her notebooks for the first time and realizes that she barely recognizes the woman who wrote them, she decides to use the blue notebook as "nothing but a record of facts" but soon realizes that this, too, does not feel true, and that words are beginning to seem like "a series of meaningless sounds." Anna sees this erosion of meaning in language as tightly bound to her gradual mental breakdown. Like words, her own form is dissolving; she cannot recognize her old thoughts as her own, and she feels that there is no continuity between her past and present. This connects with language because words create form out of meaning and sound, "naming" amorphous experience to turn it into digestible chunks. Anna's breakdown parallels the breakdown in language, and especially her sense that her name no longer refers to her mind. If "Anna" is an intelligence—a set of memories, abilities, attitudes, and ideas—then the growing incoherence of that intelligence threatens to disintegrate her very identity.

Free Women: 4 Quotes

❝ He smiled, as dry as she, and said: "Yes, I know what you mean, but all the same it's true. 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."

Related Characters: Tommy (speaker), Marion, Anna Wulf

Related Themes:

Page Number: 498

Explanation and Analysis

As Anna and Tommy discuss his new friendship with Marion, growing interest in political activism, and reflections on his suicide attempt, he jokes that she thinks she must be a "bloody welfare worker" wasting her time on them, and then declares that her aid is no waste at all. Just afterwards, in this passage, he insists that the kind of deep individual connection that he has found with Marion, and that Molly and Anna have to a much more limited degree, is an essential part of a satisfying human life.

Tommy's statement also lays bare a truth Anna has known in various, incomplete ways for most of the book: sincere, loving human relationships seem to be on the decline in modern society, which has replaced them with transactional relationships based on the expectation that people play roles for one another—husband and wife, worker and

manager, Party member and anticommunist, and even the ones that embroil Anna: husband and mistress, mother and daughter. Anna's quest for love throughout the novel is largely about finding the sense of communion that Tommy describes, a loving relationship with another person "who could really understand me." But the increasing difficulty of finding such relationships in a fragmented world goes hand in hand with the increasing difficulty of simply admitting one's need for love, which is why Tommy's speech seems so revolutionary. At the same time, the second section of *Free Women* shows that it is not: in many ways, he is recapitulating Anna's statement that nobody should settle for the second-rate or "pretend that you don't need love when you do."

The Notebooks: 4 Quotes

❝ Very few people really care about freedom, about liberty, about the truth, very few. Very few people have guts, the kind of guts on which a real democracy has to depend. Without people with that sort of guts a free society dies or cannot be born.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Saul Green

Related Themes:

Page Number: 541

Explanation and Analysis

In one of their relationship's rare moments of peace and goodwill, Anna and Saul discuss politics. He tells her about getting fired for being a communist (even though he had already been expelled from the Party), and then his boss later apologizing to him as a "friend." Anna realizes not only that this man's contradiction between his public and private ideas reflected his lack of moral courage, but also that many communists—including Saul, judging by his evasive responses—act the same way, alternating between filling the "role" that others give them (following the accepted Party dogma) and occasionally thinking for themselves (but never translating those independent thoughts into action or dissent). Saul walks out as Anna proclaims that the British intellectual establishment has caved to anti-communist pressures just like the American one that blacklisted Saul caved to McCartthyism, and after describing this episode she writes this line in her journal.

Anna sees this lack of moral courage as the central problem with the Communist Party's dogmatism and, more broadly, people's refusal to publicly act out their private beliefs. Of course, this recalls Tommy's words to her in *Free Women* before his suicide attempt: Anna is cowardly and dishonest for keeping her writings quiet, when her job as a writer is precisely to speak uncomfortable truths. Now, she finally recognizes the value in speaking dissenting and unpopular beliefs, even when the world refuses to hear them, and this recognition demonstrates that Anna has begun to chart a pathway out of her creative paralysis by building the courage to make her beliefs public (that is, to publish them as *Free Women*).

❝ Then I remembered that when I read my notebooks I didn't recognize myself. Something strange happens when one writes about oneself. That is, one's self direct, not one's self projected. The result is cold, pitiless, judging. [...] If Saul said, about his diaries, or, summing his younger self up from his later self: I was a swine, the way I treated women. Or: I'm right to treat women the way I do. Or: I'm simply writing a record of what happened, I'm not making moral judgements about myself — well, whatever he said, it would be irrelevant. Because what is left out of his diaries is vitality, life, charm. "Willi allowed his spectacles to glitter across the room and said ..." "Saul, standing foursquare and solid, grinning slightly — grinning derisively at his own seducer's pose, drawled: Come'n baby, let's fuck, I like your style." I went on reading entries, first appalled by the cold ruthlessness of them; then translating them, from knowing Saul, into life. So I found myself continually shifting mood, from anger, a woman's anger, into the delight one feels at whatever is alive, the delight of recognition.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Willi Rodde , Saul Green

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 545-6

Explanation and Analysis

While reading Saul's diary, Anna finally combines her insight that "literature is analysis after the event" with her sense that she is not the same person who wrote her notebooks. She recognizes that personal writing can never capture "vitality, life, charm," no matter how hard it tries, and so again feels "the delight of recognition" through seeing herself in Saul and Saul in herself as she begins making a conscious effort to "translate" Saul's entries into his personality. Of course, this also points to the reader's

difficulty in understanding Anna's own subjective experience of the world through her journal entries, which are often too bare and factual to capture what she must truly experience (an important exception is her lengthy description of her day on September 15, 1954).

The other crucial feature here is Anna's reflection on Saul's attitudes toward sex. Not only does he generally oscillate between romantic zeal and flippant detachment, but here it is conditioned by the difference between his life and his writing after the fact. Anna's feelings about him are the same—at a distance, she realizes that he is ridiculous and mistreats her, but in the moment she is invariably captivated, which feeds the cycle of disappointment and bittersweet reconciliation.

"What's wrong with you?" he said. He came over, knelt beside me, turned my face to his, and said: "For Christ sake's, you must understand sex isn't important to me, it just isn't important."

I said: "You mean sex is important but who you have it with isn't."

Related Characters: Anna Wulf, Saul Green (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 554

Explanation and Analysis

After Saul comes back from a "walk"—and, presumably, sex with another woman (Dorothy)—he insists that Anna is jealous and trying to confine him. After a lengthy monologue that Anna tunes out, he suddenly turns tender and tells her this. Clearly, Anna sees, Saul spends enough time and energy pursuing sex with other women that it must matter to him; yet he also wrote in his diary that he enjoyed being around Anna but not having sex with her. This points to the central paradox in his attitude toward women: like so many other men in this book (including Nelson, De Silva, and even Michael), Saul not only separates love from sex, but sees them as opposites: he looks down on women who sleep with him and feels uncomfortable turning a sexual relationship into a romantic one. This is the main reason he ends up "split" with Anna, between the part of himself that sees her sexually and therefore brutalizes her and the part of himself that actually loves her. Although he ends up leaving her at the end of the golden notebook, Anna's great accomplishment is getting through to his sexual anxieties and showing him that sex and love can be combined and transformative for both of them, without their relationship turning into a loveless marriage.

The Golden Notebook Quotes

Whoever he be who looks in this
He shall be cursed.
That is my wish.
Saul Green, his *book. (!!!)*

Related Characters: Saul Green (speaker), Anna Wulf

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 583

Explanation and Analysis

Saul's "schoolboy curse" first appears in the blue notebook, as Anna recounts Saul's attempts to claim the golden notebook with it. Then, of course, it opens the golden notebook itself, but as content rather than a quote—part of the narrative voice rather than the action the narration reports. Accordingly, the "curse" establishes a change in authorship, already showing how Anna and Saul's voices merge in the golden notebook and it becomes impossible to tell precisely who has written what. The curse also directly addresses both Anna and the reader: it predicts (and perhaps causes) Anna's descent into complete madness in the coming pages, and it reminds the reader that they are gaining access to someone's private, guarded thoughts—but also forces them to wonder how, precisely, they gained access to the golden notebook (since Anna's other notebooks remained in her room, but Saul took the golden notebook when he left Anna). Indeed, since this notebook (like all of Anna's four colored notebooks) is written entirely about events that have passed, it is unclear how Anna could have written the passage in which Saul leaves her with the notebook—but the commentary in brackets reports that this passage is also in Anna's handwriting (it is contradictions like this that make it impossible to determine the golden notebook's authorship).

Still asleep, I read the words off a page I had written: That was about courage, but not the sort of courage I have ever understood. It's a small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life, because injustice and cruelty is at the root of life. And the reason why I have only given my attention to the heroic or the beautiful or the intelligent is because I won't accept that injustice and the cruelty and so won't accept the small endurance that is bigger than anything.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf (speaker), Saul Green, Mrs Marks / Mother Sugar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 606

Explanation and Analysis

In one of her dreams about the "projectionist," who is really Saul, playing back movies of her past, these movies all merge and Anna has this epiphany. She realizes for the first time that her refusal to settle—to accept the "second-rate" or give up on her desire for genuine love and art—comes from an unhealthy idealism. In the past, she has focused on "the heroic or the beautiful or the intelligent" in order to deny "the injustice and cruelty [that] is at the root of life." Now, she manages to hold both together, to recognize that the world lags far behind her vision of what it could be, but also that she cannot abandon that vision out of despair. Rather, she must clearly see the horrors around her while still working to create the heroic, beautiful, or intelligent world she can envision; she must have the moral courage to neither detach from reality (like so many dogmatic communists) or completely give up on improving the world (like Tommy, who attempted suicide). Rather, "small endurance" represents both a realistic perception of the world and a deep hope to better it, and is the only way to both stay grounded in one's principles and create meaningful change on the ground. Crucially, Anna's realization comes through her own words on a page, which suggests that continuing to write is her best opportunity to express this kind of courage.

"Write down: The two women were alone in the London flat." […] "On a dry hillside in Algeria, the soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle."

Related Characters: Anna Wulf, Saul Green (speaker), Molly Jacobs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 610

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the golden notebook, when Saul returns to find Anna laughing without him, they both realize that it is time for them to move on with their lives, bringing the newfound knowledge they have gained through their relationship into separate, independent futures. They trade opening lines for what become their next novels. First, Saul gives Anna "the two women were alone in the London flat," which becomes the opening sentence of *Free Women* (and reveals to unsuspecting readers that, all along, *Free Women* has actually been Anna's novel and not an objective third-person account of her real life). In return, Anna gives Saul the sentence about the Algerian soldier, fighting with the F.L.N. against the French colonial government, that becomes the first line of his novel (which takes up the remainder of the golden notebook and covers themes of creative freedom and political revolution in Africa, which are clearly also dear to Anna).

This final episode consummates Anna and Saul's relationship, as it were, preserving their memories of one another and psychological interconnection through the first exchange that genuinely benefits them both. It muddles authorship, since they jumpstart one another's creativity, but it also allows them to go on with their lives and careers as writers unto themselves. In short, it shows how Anna and Saul's tumultuous relationships—in which they both dissolve and reconfigure their identities—in fact allows them to achieve independence and sanity *precisely through* their dependence and insanity. This proves Anna's suspicion throughout the book that she needed to investigate and confront her contradictions in order to truly overcome them, or that "cracking up" can actually be a way to heal.

Free Women: 5 Quotes

"No, but let's preserve the forms, the *forms* at least of . . ." He was gone, with a wave of his hand.

Related Characters: Anna Wulf, Milt (speaker), Saul Green

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 633

Explanation and Analysis

When Anna fictionalizes her relationship with Saul in the last section of *Free Women*, which she has revealed is actually her own second novel rather than an objective story about the woman who wrote the notebooks, she gives Saul a new identity: he is now Milt, and their relationship, while it still heals both of their emotional wounds, scarcely lasts a week. When Milt leaves, this incomplete line is his final message to Anna. He is clearly referencing Anna's sense that her madness was connected to a breakdown in form—words losing their meaning and her notebooks failing to maintain their separate truths. Although he insists that they should "preserve the forms," he also trails off, breaking the form of his own sentence and revealing the paradox in his command: while he and Anna must keep their minds and work going in order to survive and hold onto their places in the world, sanity is never complete and language is never perfect; the forms are only idealized patterns, but living courageously might require following them while recognizing their limits. Milt is probably also referring to the forms of love and family life, which makes this line a concise summary of the end of the novel: he continues his "form" of love, having intense, brief affairs with women until he fears losing his independence and leaves, while Anna continues hers and ends up in the same place where the book began: chatting with Molly and taking care of Janet, but with her newfound knowledge that sincere love is possible and capacity to create, which of course leads her to write *Free Women* (and, arguably, *The Golden Notebook* as a whole).

Crucially, this line also cites a passage from the golden notebook, in which the writer (who appears to be Anna, but could also easily be Saul, or even some combination of them both) says that they have to acknowledge and live with the dissolution of "words, patterns, [and] order," treat it like "an ancient enemy" that will always exist as a counterpoint to the writer's attempt to create order. Indeed, in repeating this line, the novel not only brings back the question of how to separate Anna, Saul, and their fictional creations' voices, but also creates precisely the kind of pattern that art needs to thrive, while still recognizing the inevitable limits of all patterns.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

FREE WOMEN: 1

"*The two women were alone in the London flat*," and Anna tells Molly that "everything's cracking up." Molly reports that Richard is about to visit, probably to chat about "another crisis with Marion." In the past, Anna left whenever Richard was coming, for they did not like each other—but Molly now insists that "he rather likes you," or at least that "he's committed to liking me, on principle." Anna remarks that people see them as "practically interchangeable," and Molly wonders how her friend hadn't realized this earlier. But, in reality, they are quite different: Molly is the "worldly-wise" one, while Anna is the one with "a superiority of talent."

Although the beginning of Lessing's novel might seem innocuous enough at first, in fact its first two lines are central motifs in the book. Much later on, the introductory sentence becomes a central component of the novel's plot; Anna's declaration that things are "cracking up" points at once to her mental breakdown throughout the novel, the book's "cracked up" structure in its division between Free Women *and the notebooks, and the changing global order of the mid-1950s, especially in terms of the changing relationship between capitalist and communist countries.*

Molly suggests that, despite their differences, people tend to see them as the same because they are both unmarried. Anna angrily remarks that they are "free women," defined by the world in terms of their relationships with men. Molly suggests that they define others in the same way and decides that they are "a completely new type of woman." "There's nothing new under the sun," Anna responds in the German accent of their psychoanalyst, Mrs Marks. They call Mrs Marks "Mother Sugar" because of her "traditional, rooted, conservative" mindset.

Anna and Molly struggle to define their womanhood for themselves, rather than letting it be defined by others' stereotypes and assumptions. The "free" in "free women" immediately points in a number of contradictory directions: Anna and Molly's freedom from men, their freedom to choose men for themselves, and also their appearing "free" to men, as sexual objects with no strings attached. The fact that Anna and Molly share a psychoanalyst attests to their close, sister-like friendship, suggesting that they partake of one another's thoughts and minds.

Anna insists she cannot go back to Mrs Marks, with "all that damned art all over the place," but Molly wonders if this might explain why Anna had not written anything at all during Molly's yearlong absence. Anna is "throw[ing] that talent away," Molly insists. They both want to get married, although Molly thinks it would be wrong for Anna, who asks for a beer—Marion had been coming over to Anna's for beer, in fact, and Molly wants to know the whole story, and especially whether Richard had been coming over, too.

It becomes clear that Anna's creative and romantic blocks are in some way related, and that Molly to some extent buffers against her need for love from men; they recognize that wanting to marry seems to undermine their "freedom," but the beer they drink is also a clear sign of that freedom, which suggests that their struggle involves claiming their "freedom" without sacrificing the possibility of finding love.

Both the children of 1920s intellectuals, Richard and Molly had been married for a few months, years ago, and had one son, Tommy. Richard then remarried Marion and had three boys, and later they all became friends. During Molly's absence, Richard came to visit Anna to ask about Tommy's brooding—in fact, he came "about five or six times," Anna reports, and Molly grows furious. But he and Marion came of their own accord, Anna insists, simply because "we seem to play the same role for people." There is a much longer story, but she cannot tell it yet. She does mention that Marion has been drinking.

Richard and Marion's visits to Anna reveal their inability to resolve their own family problems—they outsource the emotional labor of communication and decision-making to Anna—which suggests that Anna's refusal to marry grants her a unique sort of wisdom and perspective. Marion's drinking also attests to her dissatisfaction in her marriage with Richard and points to the broader issues with women's treatment in traditional marriages that become crucial to the rest of the book.

Molly is "tallish" and "big-boned," but looks "slight, and even boyish" because of her clever fashion sense—she loves playing different characters in different social contexts. But Anna is happy being her "small, thin, dark, brittle" self, although she is shy and tends to take a back seat to Molly in public. Increasingly, though, Anna has begun taking the lead in their private friendship. Yet Molly thrives on arguments, which devastates Anna. They know from Mother Sugar "that they were both 'insecure' and 'unrooted,'" but Anna had started taking this as a point of pride—although now she worries she was deeply "scared of being alone in what I feel."

Anna and Molly are frustrated with others' sense that they are interchangeable because they see the immense differences between themselves as individuals, whereas others only see them in terms of their relationships with men. Surely, they are "insecure" and "unrooted"—in other words, "free"—in part because they lack meaningful relationships with men. Clearly marriage does not necessarily provide what Anna and Molly need, as reflected by Marion's drinking and her and Richard's dependence on Anna for emotional support.

Out of the first-floor window, Anna and Molly watch the milkman unload his bottles with his son, who has recently won a scholarship, securing a place in the middle class—the milkman is "one of those bloody working class tories," Molly explains, and criticizes her own son for not "see[ing] his way forward." Indeed, Tommy has spent the last three days sitting on his bed, thinking. Anna and Molly smile in envy at how the milkman and his son appear to work with a "perfect understanding," but Anna says they should be comfortable with the consequences of raising their children alone. Molly runs outside to buy strawberries from a cart-man; after a brief argument about the price, she invites him inside, but he refuses; Anna tells Molly that she "hurt his feelings," but Molly shrugs it off, and they have the strawberries with cream and red wine.

The milkman and his son's seemingly automatic agreement about work and success reflects the underlying values of the dominant culture but also the class dimensions of Anna and Molly's unhappiness; not only does the dominant culture define women in terms of their relationships to men, but it also defines men in terms of their work and economic status, which is also the reason for the strawberry seller's shame. If Anna and Molly were poorer, it seems, material success would be the obvious goal for themselves and their children. It is clear from this passage that Anna, Molly, and their families enjoy a relatively comfortable, upper-middle class existence, but their material comforts have not brought them happiness.

Richard comes to the door; Molly tosses down the key and he comes in, overdressed in sports clothes as always (even though he never plays sports). He remarks on Anna's presence and asks about Tommy, criticizing Molly's lack of discipline with him. There is an awkward pause, and the narrator summarizes Molly and Richard's history: while both were protesting the emerging Spanish dictatorship in 1935, Molly housed Richard after his family threw him out because of his political leanings and decision to become a writer. After a couple years, Richard disavowed leftist politics and met Marion, winning back the respect of his family, who then sent him to "a job in the city." Molly had tried her hand at dance, journalism, cultural work in the communist party, and acting, before accepting that "she was essentially a dilettante" and taking pride in her refusal to accept "a safe marriage."

Richard's clothes immediately point to his obsession with wealth and status, which in turn proves that his interest in politics was just a passing phase, more about rebellion and experimentation than genuine conviction. Meanwhile, Molly seems to have lived more authentically, in line with her abilities and beliefs, but failed to excel in anything in particular. Richard's willingness to throw away ethical commitments for the sake of material comforts also foreshadows the struggles that Tommy, Anna, Molly, and the British Communist Party will face.

Molly and Richard still argue about Tommy—especially after she left him at home for a year while she traveled around Europe. Anna says she supports Molly's decision to give Tommy space to grow, and Richard backs off slightly, but still laments Tommy's refusal to accept any of the help he offers. Molly has no objections, but notes that Tommy "knows all kinds" of people while Richard's children are destined to remain in the "little fishpond of the upper class." Anna tries to quell the argument, suggests that Tommy might hear them, and even threatens to leave as Molly accuses Richard of being anti-Semitic.

While Molly values Tommy's freedom, Richard wants social status for his son, and Tommy is clearly caught between these two influences, although he is clearly aligning more with his mother and Richard evidently cannot stand to lose. Like the milkman, Richard voices a dominant, masculine ideology of the individual in modern society: a person is as good as his work (or her husband's work).

Anna did get Molly and Richard to agree that he should give Tommy a job in "one of your things," but Molly insists that Tommy would have to agree to it, and implies that he wouldn't—Richard interjects, complaining that Tommy has "been surrounded half his life with communists," many of whom have left or are leaving the party. The argument swiftly turns to politics, as Richard and Molly deride one another's lifestyles (she is admittedly broke, but he is an "empty and stupid" businessman). Anna and Molly agree that Richard should find Tommy "something constructive" to do.

Molly and Richard's clash of values explodes and begins to echo broader political tensions in this moment, the mid-1950s, as Western capitalist nations (including the UK) increasingly viewed communism as the greatest threat to their own existence. Tommy's dilemma begins to look like a metaphor for global politics, and the author's way of answering the as-yet unresolved question of whether it is better to have *nothing or* be *nothing—to be broke or "empty and stupid."*

Richard calls Anna and Molly "extraordinarily naïve" and they joke about his business—Anna has learned he is much more of a bigshot than they had thought, but Molly scarcely cares. They are "a couple of savages," he retorts, "ignorant as monkeys about economics," which he thinks they are wrong to despise—but they do not despise economics, they imply, they despise *him*. Richard furiously tells Anna that, despite "the privilege of getting to know you better," he still has little sense that she knows what she wanted; she replies that he perhaps dislikes how she knows exactly what she wanted, and "when to refuse." This confirms Molly's suspicions, but she appreciates Anna's rudeness.

Richard has much thinner skin than Anna or Molly—while they seem to view him as an annoyance, he views them as a threat to his vision of the world and his ability to pass that vision down to his son. Richard's hostility betrays his vulnerability and the women's emotional strength; in fact, passages like this one earned Lessing the ire of male readers and critics, which suggests that, like Richard, they were unable to take criticism from women. While Molly notes the clear sexual tension between Anna and Richard, she has no hard feelings or sense of jealousy, an attitude quite different from that of the men who appear in this novel.

Molly asks about Marion—Anna reveals that Marion, too, had visited her, but Richard has nothing to say. Anna and Molly lament how Richard "makes [Marion] feel stupid," and how he started cheating on her as soon as she had their first child, thirteen years before—he had originally come to Molly, who refused him, but still found "a succession of girls ever since, and Marion has known about them all." However, when Marion found another man for herself, Richard "got all moral, rampaging like an Old Testament prophet" and then tried to seduce Marion until she gave up her other man for him. Once he won Marion over, Richard promptly lost interest in her again and went back to having flings with his secretaries.

In what becomes a consistent refrain for men, Richard sees his wife Marion more as property than as a human being—he wants to have her loyalty, but will not offer his loyalty or love, and cares neither about her well-being nor about the obvious double standard in his actions. Molly and Anna's frustrations with conventional marriage are increasingly clear: it seems to be imprisoning Marion, who (unlike them) is presumably too afraid to become a "free woman."

Anna reveals that Richard visited to ask whether he should "send Marion away to some home or something," because her drinking was affecting the children. He implores Molly to talk to Marion, to do "anything" to "stop her drinking," and Molly wonders why he does not do something himself. He took Marion to Italy, he remarked, and admittedly she didn't drink, but only because of their "bargain—I won't drink if you don't look at girls." With her "watching me like a jailor," Richard "couldn't get a hard on" during or after the trip, and now their efforts at politeness are undercut by suspicion. All the marriages he has seen have failed, he insists, and Anna and Molly have no right to judge from "the sidelines." His difficulty getting an erection is an emotional problem, they insist, not a purely "physical" one. "You should have loved her," Anna declares.

Marion's drinking is the most obvious symptom of her dissatisfaction with marriage, but Richard only cares about it because of its impact on his children, not because of Marion's own despair. Just as he sees life as a game of class and property while Anna and Molly value freedom, feeling, and the pursuit of a moral vision, Richard expects that he can fix his marriage with a contractual agreement. Richard seems completely incapable of understanding the notion that relationships should be about love, emotional connection, or a non-transactional commitment to another's well being.

Returning to their original topic of conversation, Richard suggests that Tommy stay with him and Marion, and then Tommy walks in, takes some strawberries, and asks, "And how *is* Marion?" He has been listening, and in fact he had coffee with Marion the previous day, when "she seemed in a pretty bad way." He looks like his father, but holds his anger and stubbornness inside instead of wearing it on his face. He sometimes tells his mother it was "bad luck" to have her personality and his father's looks, rather than the other way around. Everyone falls silent and watches Tommy eat his berries—Anna feels that he is bullying them and is soon convinced that he listened to the whole conversation through the door.

Whereas Richard's boorish insults do nothing to break Molly and Anna's self-assurance, Tommy's passive aggressive questions easily shake them; although Anna and his parents are trying to decide his life for him, he clearly holds power among them in this scenario—and knows how to use it, hinting that he was listening to their conversation by mentioning Marion and making it clear that he will refuse his father's offer by suggesting that he shares his mother's disposition.

Of course, Tommy has been listening, and he summarily turns down the offer of a job with his father. He cannot "live like them" and asks why his mother would suddenly think he should after bringing him up "to believe in certain things." He "wouldn't mind being like" Molly and Anna, even though they are often "in such a mess." At least they are not defined by what they do; they are "several things," and flexible people, whereas Richard could "never be different." They are all unhappy, but Anna and Molly are "much happier than my father. Let alone Marion." Anna mentions "how judged you make us feel," but Tommy affirms that he would "rather be a failure, like you, than succeed and all that sort of thing. But I'm not saying I'm choosing failure." He knows "what I don't want, but not what I do want."

Despite his cynicism, Tommy becomes the voice of conscience by directly confronting the question of what makes a good human life. He announces what Anna and Molly have been feeling all along: that Richard's perspective on life means selling out not only on moral values, but also on one's happiness and identity, which are predicated on said values. By pursuing the illusion that accumulation and social status are the proper goals of human life, Richard lets his job define his identity and gives up the chance to live meaningfully. Tommy's willingness to openly judge Anna and his parents attests to his insistence on putting principles above convenience.

Tommy suggests that he might become a writer, but does not have Anna's "complicated ideas" about it. He thinks her problem is either her loneliness—her fear of exposing her beliefs about the world—or else contempt. She complains about politicians who lie but writes whole books in secret. She is pained and ultimately admits that she does not want to spread her "awful feeling of disgust, of futility." Even though she laments how socialists "wouldn't take moral responsibility" anymore, Tommy insists that Anna would not, either. Anna jokes that spreading her negative emotions might be irresponsible, and Tommy gives up. He insists he would "like to go on doing nothing for a month or two," and Richard leaves, promising to "drop in one of these days." Tommy returns to his room, leaving Anna and Molly alone.

Tommy's argument with his parents begins to center on Anna, who is his best model for how one might take a moral stand even if she has been failing to do so. In this sense, Tommy indicates that Anna is the central figure of The Golden Notebook *and introduces the secret notebooks that become the core of the rest of the novel. While she worries that she will make the world worse by speaking her mind, Tommy apparently sees something valuable and courageous in the act of speaking up; authenticity appears to be his most important moral value.*

"It seems a lot of things have been going on while I was away," starts Molly. Anna explains that she is not having a mere "artistic problem," but that her **notebooks** are full of "chaos." Molly asks why Anna cannot write just another novel—she is angry that Anna can "fritter [herself] away" like so many others. Anna mentions a painter who declared he would "never paint again […] because the world is so chaotic art is irrelevant." Molly asks what Anna might do when the money from her first novel runs out—pained at the difficulty of every conversation, Anna admits that she might need to get a job.

Anna's chaotic notebooks are a metaphor for her chaotic mind, but she is not beginning to fall apart on her own—rather, she sees this as a symptom of a global disorder, pointing to the changing balance of power between capitalism and communism in the early days of the Cold War. While Anna's reluctance to get a job reflects her class status, her willingness to work points to the conflicted status of women in the 1950s, when (usually unfulfilling) work became an alternative, or supplement, to marriage. She is liberated in the sense that she is not unwilling to work because she is a woman, but she does recognize the limits of so-called "women's work."

Molly asks about the last year, which Anna admits was full of "complicated living," including a near-affair with Richard—he brought her to a tedious, terrifying dinner with other businesspeople and their "popsies." Afterward, she thought, "he's no worse than some of the morons I've slept with," feeling "that awkward moral exhaustion, what the hell does it matter?" Richard noticed, got up, and declared that he had to go home—three times, for he expected her to beg him to stay. She simply bid him goodnight, and he insulted her looks—of course, he would have complemented them had she invited him to bed. He reminded her that he was "a very virile man," but she called him "an awful bore" and sent him off. Laughing, Molly goes to the kitchen—Anna follows her, and they turn to gossip.

Richard's vulnerability to rejection from woman reveals his emotional fragility—he expects Anna to revere and beg for him, but she finds him as unremarkable as most other men. His emphasis on her appearance reflects how he views women: as accessories, "popsies," proof of his masculinity, but never equals capable of making their own informed decisions. Anna and Molly's friendship is clearly much stronger than their feelings for men, since Anna's near-tryst with Richard does not bother Molly in the least—but Anna's sense of "moral exhaustion" suggests that she wants a serious relationship, on equal terms, with a man.

"Everything's the same," Anna insists in the white kitchen, "crammed with order" and covered in steam from the roast in the oven. Molly remarks that England is "worse than usual," so utterly boring, that she wants to leave again at once. The men in England are stuck-up and self-conscious, unlike in Europe, where life is easier—Anna suggests that they just know England better, with all its faults, and wonders whether she should even stay for lunch, which would mean subjecting herself to a day-long "what's-wrong-with-men session" that would still end in "a sudden resentment, a rancor—because after all, our real loyalties are always to men, and not to women…"

While Anna and Molly's friendship is stronger than their current relationships with men, it is also something of a replacement for those relationships, a provisional marriage that allows them to pursue real love. Anna and Molly are caught up in a double-bind: they want love from men, but recognize that nearly all the men they meet (especially married men) are more inclined to treat them as sexual objects than to offer genuine love or commitment.

They decide to skip over "the comrades," except for a choice few, who wrote three nearly identical, angry letters complaining about Anna's criticism of the Soviets, on three separate occasions. Many Party members have quit—Molly scarcely cares about politics anymore, either. They chat briefly about the Americans in London, Tom Mathlong, and Molly's old friend De Silva, who went home to Ceylon, left his wife there, and returned to London (although "Anna found herself unable to tell what had happened" when she met him).

Gossip, it seems, is the core of Anna and Molly's relationship. While this passage might seem cryptic and vague at first, it introduces an important conflict (and two minor characters) that comes to play a significant role in Anna's notebooks. This is set in 1956 or 1957, when news of the repression and persecution committed in the Soviet Union under Stalin was reaching the West, and Western communists split among those who defended the Soviet Union blindly, those who criticized its deviations from the true path to a communist society, and those who gave up communist beliefs altogether.

Molly also asks about Anna herself—she had a visit from Michael, with whom she had broken up three years prior after living together for five years. He made a joke about their friend Dick deciding whether to bring his mistress with him to Ghana, before awkwardly remembering that Anna had been his own mistress. Anna asks whether "we made a mistake" by letting their marriages, relationships, and political commitments fail, then just saying, "we made a mistake, too bad." But she wonders whether "things can happen to us so bad that we don't ever get over them?" Anna and Molly never admit failure, but "it might be better for us if we did." Molly brushes her off, saying "this is simply because of Michael," and Anna decides to head home.

The reader will soon discover how central a role Michael plays in Anna's emotional life, but his clumsy joke shows how little Anna truly mattered to him—he seems to think abrupt breakups are harmless, even funny, but does not consider the asymmetry in the relationship between a married man and an unmarried mistress. Anna sees her and Molly's refusal to admit failure as reflecting their refusal to seriously pursue or take a stand for anything in the first place—of course, Molly's reaction shows that she would rather not take that possibility seriously, either.

Anna walks back to her five-room flat, where Michael persuaded her to live (instead of with Molly). She rents a room to two students (one has since moved out) and leaves one for her daughter Janet, who is in school. She and Michael occupied two more, until he left and she moved into the living room. She still makes irregular income from her best-selling novel *Frontiers of War*. "This was the framework of Anna's life," but she is only truly "herself" when she is alone in her room, which had books, papers, and typewriter piled around the bed, and her four **notebooks** in the drawer, which (after closing the curtains) she lays atop her trestle table and gazes upon from above.

Anna's apartment reflects her choice to put Michael above Molly in the past, but the now empty room where she used to sleep with him clearly symbolizes the emotional void he left her with. Ironically, despite Tommy's criticisms of Richard, Anna is also most authentically "herself" when accompanied by her work—her writing, the narrative implies, contains a truer version of Anna than her actions or relationship with Molly. "This was the framework of Anna's life" in terms of the people she lives among and space she occupies, but also in terms of the novel's narrative structure, for the linear story of Free Women *offers a framework for the reader to make sense of her notebooks, to which the novel now turns.*

THE NOTEBOOKS: 1

Anna's four **notebooks**, black, red, yellow, and blue, are otherwise identical—"order had not immediately imposed itself" when their covers are peeled back. Their first pages of each notebook consist of "broken and scribblings and half-sentences" before the titles. Anna has "divided herself into four, and then, from the nature of what she had written, named these divisions." The black notebook, after drawings of musical and money symbols, reads: "*black / dark, it is so dark / it is dark / there is a kind of darkness here.*"

In contrast to Free Women, *Anna's notebooks are disorderly and fragmented, a depiction of her internal life and turmoil; it is up to the reader to decide which offers the most authentic, or truest, version of Anna. The notebooks' four-part division clearly represents Anna's own psychic fragmentation, and the black notebook moves from the disorder of ambiguous symbols to preliminary attempts at conveying meaning through language.*

In the black **notebook**, two more journal entries precede the title. In the first, Anna writes about the terror and darkness that overcomes her whenever she tries to write, which she can only fight by trying "to deliberately think myself back into that hot light," like the sun on a hot rock. She also writes about how her agent's letters fill her with disgust and helplessness—Anna's novel has taken on a life of its own, and she will not let it become a film. Under that entry, Anna has scribbled, "1951." Below, she has written another short entry: in 1952, she cut short a meeting "with film man." Then comes the title: "THE DARK."

Anna's earliest entries in the black notebook are at once commentary about and evidence of the "darkness" she confronts as she tries to create meaning out of words and struggles to maintain the integrity of her art against others' efforts to distort it. These are not merely failed first attempts at describing the trouble of writing, but also an effective summary of what Anna does successfully write in the rest of the notebook.

The **notebook**'s pages are split, with the heading "*Source*" on the left and the heading "*Money*" on the right—the first is a record of correspondence, scenes, and sentences, which last only a few pages, while the latter lists the payments Anna received from *Frontiers of War*. After three years' worth of "*Money*," the left pages restart, and the right pages become a typed synopsis of the book, now called *Forbidden Love* for its movie version.

In lieu of truly writing*—generating a coherent text out of ideas—Anna instead merely* records *what she can muster. The "source" column also points to the relationship between* Free Women *and the notebooks. In one sense, Anna's apparently objective experiences in the former are the source material for her thinking in the notebooks; in another sense, the notebooks show the reader the source of the intentions, confusion, and struggles that Anna faces in* Free Women.

The synopsis is as follows: "dashing young Peter Carey," an Oxford student, goes to Central Africa for air force training during World War II. He joins a crew of leftists who spend their weeks criticizing racism and weekends having orgies at a hotel. The proprietor's wife and daughter both fall for Peter, but Peter falls for the wife of an African activist, the hotel's cook. The landlord's wife reports Peter's love and yells at her daughter, "he preferred the dirty black girl to you." The cook kicks his wife out, and she goes to live on the streets, encountering Peter by chance during his last night before he gets kicked out of the Colony. Of course, "their innocent and pure love, broken by the harsh inhuman laws of this country and by the jealousies of the corrupt, will know no future," and they part.

The reader will soon encounter a different, lengthier version of this story, based on Anna's own recollections (both extrapolate from Doris Lessing's own upbringing in Africa and first novel, The Grass is Singing*). Anna's novel merges two different love stories from her past and centers a male perspective instead of her own. Also, the reader only learns about Anna's first novel through this indirect synopsis, rather than by reading it directly. This synopsis, which through its brevity inevitably distorts the meaning of Anna's original text, is in turn created for the purposes of people who wish to distort Anna's novel by turning it into a film. Beyond sharing the initials FW,* Frontiers of War *concerns the same thematic questions as* Free Women*: how love can be possible in a corrupt world structured to prohibit it and whether white, Western, affluent communist activists truly do anything to advance the struggle for justice.*

On the opposite page, Anna writes that "the man at the synopsis desk was pleased" but wants to make the story "'less upsetting' to the moneybags." She did not budge, returned home in disgust, and read her book through for the first time, feeling "as if it had been written by someone else." If she reviewed it upon its publication in 1951, she would have written that it relies on "an unoriginal theme, scantily developed," that "the simplicity of Anna Wulf's style is her strength," whether it is conscious or merely a result of the "strong emotion" that drives her writing. After 1954, however, she would say that the book has "a considerable vigour of insight into the more melodramatic sexual relationships" but nothing new to say about racism—and that it is strange that the art world takes so long to respond to such obvious injustice.

Anna not only recognizes that the reception of her novel depends on and changes with the times, but also that her own reactions to it would do the same: she initially focuses on the quality of her plot and writing but later focuses on the book's political messages. This points to two differing ways of evaluating fiction and predicts The Golden Notebook*'s changing reception in reverse: at first, to Doris Lessing's disappointment, readers focused on her political messages but ignored her structural and technical innovations. Yet "the moneybags" threaten Anna's art precisely because they want to sanitize and depoliticize it, so it does not threaten their own financial power by promoting communism; it seems that readers must not separate an artist's talent from her message, but rather recognize form and content.*

Anna writes that, during her three months writing reviews, she has realized that "the function of the novel seems to be changing." The genre is abandoning its previous connection to philosophy and building one with journalism by seeking to "report the existence of an area of society" to readers who, living in an increasingly fragmented society, desperately reach out to learn about others—"it is a blind grasping out for their own wholeness."

Similarly, as the world begins to "crack up," Anna thinks art is coming to be defined by a social rather than individual perspective. Whereas philosophy is a way to find "wholeness" in oneself (by developing a system of beliefs and aligning one's actions with those beliefs), journalism is a way to make society "whole" (by bridging communities that do not yet understand one another). Implicitly, Lessing seems to be considering whether it is possible to do both at once—and offering The Golden Notebook *as an attempt to do so.*

However, Anna finds herself "incapable of writing the only kind of novel which interests me: a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life." She is too scattered, with too many ideas and only one writerly quality: curiosity. Anna resents her inability to enter new domains of the world, but also Mother Sugar's "small nod of satisfaction" in reaction to the obvious truth "that the artist writes out of an incapacity to live" and the fact that she could say something so banal.

Like philosophy and journalism, Passion and curiosity are opposing forces: passion consolidates, pushing a single idea or vision, while curiosity disperses and fragments, leading people to pursue various, disconnected interests. Just as a writer must turn these opposite forces into complementary ones, Lessing offers a new "order" or "way of looking at life" through a fragmented novel.

Anna has always hated and still hates *Frontiers of War*. She remembers writing the novel and that the story did not matter—only that it was a way for her to express a truth she could not state directly. Now, she feels sick about the dissonance between the novel's subject—racism—and "the emotion it came out of," the dizzying quest for freedom as dissolution, "one of the strongest reasons why wars continue." World War II was characterized by an ironic "double-feeling" because it jumpstarted the colonial African economy and also because the same people fighting the Nazis were enforcing racial oppression in Africa.

Anna seems to hate that, by using the provocative and timely subject of British racism in Africa as a vehicle to convey her own feelings about romance and freedom, she has belittled Africans' struggle for equality. The British "double-feeling" about the war reflects the simultaneous dangers and benefits of dissolution, or the breakdown of ordered parts into a disordered whole: it at once leads to chaos and frees people from the existing divisions that disintegrate (whether social or psychological).

Anna remembers the war in terms of Russia's changing involvement in it. A communist movement developed in the small African town where she was living, but the white revolutionaries failed to engage the black masses and then split into two groups "after a terrible fight." Among Anna's "small sub-group," she was the only one who could freely leave the colony—which she would have done, since she hated it so much, and had only moved there to marry a tobacco farmer named Steven. When she arrived, she immediately realized she "could never stand the life" but went to the nearest city instead of returning to London. Yet she always felt uncomfortable in the Colonies.

Anna introduces her own experiences in reverse chronology; she seemed to stumble into her place in Africa and involvement in politics, making decisions out of convenience and impulse rather than principles and careful reflection. She sees a direct connection between her own lack of clarity and her suspicion that her novel's message, "order," or vision is fundamentally flimsy or contradictory.

The black notebook starts following Anna's involvement in her political "sub-group." She meets Willi Rodde, who helps her get involved in politics, even though they do not get along or "even enjoy sleeping together." Willi is full of contradictions—Anna draws up lists of contradictory words about him, but this is the wrong way to describe people's personalities. Willi is the core of the group, and everyone reveres him even while he grows more dogmatic—but his most interesting trait is that he always carefully plans things years in advance. He clings to "order, correctness, and conservation of what existed," feels little sympathy for others' emotions, and "had the most conventional upper-middle-class upbringing imaginable" in Berlin's "decadent" 1920s and 1930s. He dresses almost as sharply as he speaks and is now a powerful government official in East Germany, since he could not secure a business position in London.

Willi's main contradiction is the opposition between his leftist politics and his conservative personality: he wants the world to change and the masses to seize power but refuses to change, accept change, or relinquish control, despite his relative privilege. He has strong principles but does not live them out; he acts with his personality, not his beliefs, as evidenced by his decision to pursue business (the failure of which ironically leads him to become a communist bureaucrat). Yet, unlike Anna and Molly, Willi does not seem to lose his faith in communism, precisely because he views the world in terms of theory. Anna's feeling that she cannot describe personality with a list of words indicates language's limited ability to capture the true depth of experience; this paradox is at the heart of Anna's struggle to write and define herself as a writer.

The other three men in their group did not particularly like one another, but had been part of the same homosexual group at Oxford many years before—mostly as a means to social protest, of course. The most interesting of them is Paul Blackenhurst, the model for the pilot character in Anna's novel—he is so charming that people scarcely realize his coldness, or that he is mocking them—unlike Willi, Paul had "an upper-class arrogance" (he came from a powerful family of English gentry). He and Willi get along, chatting about history and sharing an interest in Anna—as Paul put it, it is "obligatory in the times we live in to be in love with as many people as possible." Yet he never worries about dying in the war.

As with Willi, there is a total contradiction between Paul's apparent communist beliefs, on the one hand, and his class background and condescension toward virtually everyone else, on the other. While Willi seems to faithfully believe in his political principles but never translate them into action, Paul simply does not treat principles seriously at all, instead taking pride in his ability to get away with deceiving people into thinking he is a principled man. Paul exemplifies the contradiction of dissolution that Anna wrote about some pages before: he appears liberated and impassioned, but also power-hungry and perilously fearless.

Jimmy McGrath, on the other hand, "suffer[s] a hell of fear." He ends up surviving the war, but Paul Blackenhurst dies the day before he is supposed to leave for India—still drunk during a blinding sunrise on the airstrip, he walks into a plane's propeller. Jimmy is middle-class and Scottish but speaks with "an elaborately affected Oxford drawl." Like Paul, he is only temporarily invested in socialism, and he is stodgy and brutish—but he is actually gay and in love with Paul, although they hate one another. After the war, he marries, and after his wife's pregnancy, he stops having to pretend to enjoy sex ("in short, a not uncommon English marriage").

At the end, Paul's death is a parody of war, which is perhaps a fitting end for someone who structured his life around parodying others. Jimmy is virtually the opposite of Paul, with his crippling anxiety and lack of elegance. His love for Paul is tragic because it is impossible, but encouraged by Paul's pretensions at homosexuality; in both these senses, Paul earns others' affection by mocking Jimmy's reality.

"The most original" is the working-class Ted Brown, who went to Oxford on scholarship and is "the only genuine socialist of the three." Thin and zealous, he tends to give away his money, clothes, and time. He also loves music, literature, and helping others—especially by mentoring younger men. He ends up moving to Germany, marrying a German woman, and becoming an English teacher. He is also disappointed by the fractures within the group—in fact, to think about it as a group would be wrong, as Ted and Willi never get along, Ted has no connection to Paul Blackenhurst, and Anna is just "the leader's girl friend."

It is revealing that Ted's benevolence and "genuine social[ism]" are grounded in his class status and personal generosity—he is clearly the only one of the group who lives out his beliefs, and Anna seems to implicitly recognize that her disillusionment with leftist politics relates to the sense in which socialism is an abstract ideal for her, with no actual impact on her life, rather than a project necessary to transform her socioeconomic circumstances.

Paul Blackenhurst and Willi hold the group together, with their arguments in the Gainsborough Hotel—which is "really a boarding-house," and where Willi quickly earns "special privileges" even though he is a German. He does this by teaching the hotel's "obese, harried, sweating and incompetent" proprietor how to run her establishment.

Paul and Willi are united not only by their arguments about politics, but also by their conflict over Anna; Willi's excellent business advice again reveals the contrast between his politics and his personality.

After Paul Blackenhurst stumbles on the Mashopi Hotel at lunchtime during flight drills one day, the group follows his suggestion and decides to spend time there instead. When they arrive, Paul follows up on the fanciful story he had told the proprietor, Mr Boothby, about getting stuck in a tree, and Willi convinces him to open the dining room. Paul has already won the affection of a farmer's daughter and managed to further alienate Ted, who is already frustrated with him. The "full-bodied" and polite Mrs Boothby brings them to dinner; they eat hearty "English pub food, cooked with care." Willi and Paul boss the waiter around, but Ted is kind to him, and Jimmy gets drunk immediately—the rest follow suit, and they decided to return the following weekend.

The group's center of power shifts from Willi to Paul as they follow Paul's suggestion to move to the Mashopi Hotel; despite their theoretical reverence for the working classes and belief in equality, the socialists eagerly take advantage of the Boothbys' hospitality and the labor of those who work at the hotel: the cook, who is not yet visible, and Mrs Boothby, who notably runs the show while her husband (who technically owns the hotel) sits around and drinks. This episode shows the inequality that leads the socialists to their beliefs but also the utter insincerity of those beliefs.

They return after a lengthy but unproductive "party discussion" on Friday night, which continues in the car ride over—they determine that the antiracist class struggle in Africa needs to be led by black and white trade unions. But, alas, the former do not exist, and the latter are horribly racist. (Anna interjects in the black notebook's narrative, remarking again that she is breaking into a "self-punishing, cynical tone" that comforts the pain of remembering her political activities in Africa.) Maryrose, as usual, silences the argument—the men never take her seriously, even though she is a formidable political mind. It is a tiring time, between work and meetings and reading, plus helping the disadvantaged and proselytizing about "the gloriousness of life."

The communists' sensibilities are so out of touch with actual political possibilities in Africa that they propose class struggle on behalf of institutions that do not yet exist; their meetings are mostly limited to white colonists, and the question remains whether their influence is necessary or even wanted in African people's struggles for liberation, which the socialists insist on reducing to the terms of class struggle. Maryrose's position in the group exemplifies how even avowed leftists reproduce gender hierarchies that relegate women to irrelevance.

That night, "slightly mad out of sheer exhaustion" after two years of this lifestyle, Paul Blackenhurst recounts a "whimsical fantasy" of black revolt against the colonial government—perhaps the masses would be suppressed, or perhaps they would win and decide to "strengthen nationalist feeling and develop industry," which as progressives the socialist group would have to support! Years later, Anna has come to think "that in all those years of endless analytical discussion," this was the only time any of them was "anywhere near the truth."

Paul observes that race, and not class, will be the basis of anticolonial revolt, which shows the limits of the group's Marxist theory and also shows that they would become the targets of such a revolt. In other words, Paul recognizes that the socialists' moral project is practically impossible and even self-defeating.

They take their rooms at the Mashopi Hotel. All weekend they sleep late, then eat and sleep again, before returning to the city for another tiresome month. They then return for a long weekend with "Ted's new protégé, Stanley Lett" and his friend, a jazz pianist named Johnnie, to find the hotel packed, with a full calendar of social events. They are greeted by the Boothby's plain, teenaged daughter June, whose sexual frustration is apparent to the women but invisible to the men—to Mrs Boothby's relief, June soon meets someone. Just as he had once shocked and subdued Maryrose's mother with a few harsh words, Willi loves to bully Mrs Boothby. That night, they lead her to leave the dining room in embarrassment by mocking racist colonial clichés, over Maryrose's objections.

Paul and the other socialists recognize how Mrs Boothby embodies clichés of British colonial racism, but not how they do, too: they spend their days in military training, their free time interacting only with white people, and spend their weekends relaxing by celebrating at a hotel full of British settlers. Stanley offers Ted something of a surrogate relationship, and June Boothby is clearly a foil for Anna and Maryrose's own romantic dissatisfaction.

Maryrose is "a tiny slender girl," born and raised in the Colonies, and a former model. Later, as everyone sits outside, drinking into the night, she gets her revenge. She mentions her broken heart—after her brother died suddenly while she was modeling in the Cape, she fell in love with a man who looked just like him. They had a brief affair, and he decided not to marry her (just like the series of men after him, until Maryrose ended up in a loveless marriage with a middle-aged father of three). Paul Blackenhurst makes a joke about incest, and Maryrose says it certainly was, commenting vaguely on her relations with her actual brother prior to his death—everyone is astonished. When Paul propositions her, she replies that, like her "boy-friend from the Cape," Paul would "never marry me, I wouldn't be good enough."

Although Maryrose's appearance leads the men to patronize her, in fact she is clearly the most self-aware and honest of the group—she recognizes how losing her brother scarred her and constrained her future relationships, even if it remains ambiguous whether her relationship with her brother was literally or just metaphorically incestuous. Unlike virtually everyone else, she does not let Paul get away with his jokes, but calls him out on them—while they both recognize the tragedy of their situation in Africa, Paul mocks it while Maryrose confronts it seriously.

Then the roadsman George Hounslow arrives in his caravan—he kisses Maryrose and Anna, leading them to exchange pained smiles they prefer not to think about, before asking Willi about politics. George underestimates his own intelligence and attractiveness, and he is always frustrated with his family, whom he treats exceedingly well (he cheats on his wife but has a "fierce loyal compassion for her"). He is also "spontaneously irresistibly funny." He is much older than the rest of the group, who are "the first real friends he had in years"; they adore him, even if he is too humble to realize it. He especially defers to Willi, which is strange because George is one of the "good" ones and Willi is not (Anna realizes that "good" is scarcely a specific or literary word, but everyone save Willi, Stanley, and Paul Blackenhurst was clearly *good*).

Passionate, humble, and sincere, George embodies a sort of masculinity just as attractive as Paul's but opposite (and much more genuinely socialist) in character. He represents Anna and Maryrose's grave mistake: their failure to pursue genuine love in the moment, largely out of fear and instinctual attraction to "bad" men. In this passage, Anna again confronts writing's failure to fully capture reality: she can instinctively tell the "good" from the "bad" but cannot translate this into literary language or justify her instinct.

This brings Anna back to "this question of 'personality.'" While some refuse the concept "under pressure of all our knowledge," it is undeniable that Maryrose will always be Maryrose; even if she has a breakdown, "she would break down into her components." Is this certainty proper subject matter for the visual arts and not the novel, which is a progressively disintegrating form? Yet Anna would never have been able to write without this certainty.

Anna finds herself caught between the certainties of experience and the fragility of language: even though each person seems to have a distinct, inalienable essence, all attempts to capture or describe personality inevitably fall short. However, literature must still attempt to express personality, knowing it will fail—of course, this is also Lessing's dilemma in trying to depict Anna Wulf from five different angles (Free Women *and the four notebooks).*

That night, Willi explains his views on the area's leftist groups to George Hounslow, but Paul Blackenhurst and Ted take over, proposing in jest that they start a revolution from the Mashopi Hotel and leaving George feeling deeply lonely, as the only remaining true believer in socialism. George decides to engage Johnnie, who, as usual, barely speaks, and Stanley, who refuses George's offer of wine and insists he does not care about politics. Willi is busy humming to himself, reminiscing about his days in Berlin, and Paul simply admits that the crew has become quite demoralized.

As Paul and Ted divert the conversation to humor, they reveal not only everyone's lack of faith in the politics they claim to believe but also their lack of commitment to the future of British Africa, which they expect to leave very soon. Politics is more a way to pass time than a genuine commitment, which is further proven by Johnnie and Stanley's presence in the group.

Stanley and Johnnie go off to bed, and George Hounslow asks what they are doing there—Paul Blackenhurst decides that the Boothbys' cook will be "the obvious key man" in their revolutionary plans, and George is furious at them all. Ted and Paul try convincing George to go, but he refuses, and they drunkenly stumble away to his caravan with Jimmy. George chases after them and grabs them—Jimmy falls and bloodies his forehead on the ground, and Willi reveals that "the reason why George didn't want anyone near his caravan was because there was a woman in it." Anna wonders who it might be, and why she has rejected George for so long, despite feeling such deep love for him in the moment. The group tends Jimmy's wounds and goes to sleep.

Anna, George, and Jimmy all have minor breakdowns in parallel: Anna sees the contrast between Willi's mechanical attitude toward sex and George's genuine passion; Jimmy, for the first of many times, drinks himself into a stupor because he loves Paul and fears dying in the war; George realizes that the people he thought of as political mentors did not truly care about politics. All confront the limits of their reality, which completely fails to meet their expectations.

The next morning, the three airmen come with breakfast, which they had convinced the cook to let them make—and the rest of the hotel's guests are already partying, so all the socialists but the rigidly mannered Willi join. They stride into the kitchen, where Paul Blackenhurst asks the cook about his family life, to Mrs Boothby's disdain—she kicks them out. Anna feels a momentary attraction to Paul, who calls her name and makes her realize how unhappy she is.

Paul's turns his joke about the Boothby's cook into a reality, even though he is clearly more interested in stirring trouble than actually starting a "revolution" in the Hotel. Although Anna recognizes Paul's insincerity and general misanthropy, she still appreciates his willingness to act, in contrast with Willi and perhaps even George.

They go into the beautiful "big room," where Johnnie is busy playing jazz piano and Stanley lingers around him—Stanley only likes Johnnie because he is a "passport to a good time." Indeed, Stanley is a ruthless lawbreaker, keen to use people for his own benefit—except Ted, whose care he finds flattering but inexplicable. All day, Johnnie improvises on the tunes Ted hummed, but Stanley has "no ear at all." Paul Blackenhurst points out how pitiful Maryrose is, surrounded by men "positively hang-dog with sex frustration" but still fixated on her brother. And so is Jimmy, who stands next to her but is still in love with Paul. Meanwhile, Paul is reluctantly realizing that he has never been a true homosexual, that he only yearns for Maryrose and Anna.

Although the party's atmosphere is celebratory, Anna focuses on the romantic tensions it brings out in the guests, who all begin to think about their identities in terms of whom they are capable of loving. This becomes a refrain in the book: people understand themselves through the mirror of their lovers and romantic frustrations, which sometimes reflect people's true selves more faithfully than self-reflection can.

George Hounslow walks in and comes after Maryrose—he always approaches women with humble words but intent eyes; he is a rare breed "who really, very much, needed women." He needs them "under his spell," as his "hidden arrogant power" demands it. He says something to Maryrose, and she punches him in the face. George comes over, in tears, and complains to Paul Blackenhurst, who casually mentions that "I'm in love with Anna and my heart is breaking." Not wanting to deal with George as he sinks deeper into self-deprecation, Paul decides to go "help Maryrose," and George turns his attention to Anna, taking her outside to meet Willi on the verandah as the crowd filters into the big room.

George, much like Anna, needs love in order to feel whole—his words conceal his intentions, which are nevertheless clear, just as Anna sees language and her writing as revealing reality despite their failures to faithfully portray it. Unlike George, Paul and Willi are clearly malicious, with no interest in other people and no empathy for George's predicament—if love is selfish for Paul and Willi, for George it involves a genuine (if sometimes self-sacrificing) commitment to another person's well-being, even if it is possessive for all of them.

Sitting and drinking beer on the verandah, George Hounslow explains his intolerable family life: he lives in a tiny house with his wife, all four of their ailing parents (who spend all their time playing cards and complaining), and their two sons and daughter. They are poor, and George spends half of his time fixing roads around the country and pursuing his affairs, mostly with African women. This includes the Boothby's cook's wife, Marie, who had his child—George finds it horribly hypocritical to preach socialism but not care for his illegitimate son.

It becomes increasingly clear that George needs women's love to alleviate his miserable home life; nevertheless, he nobly sustains his family out of obligation: the others are materially wealthy but morally impoverished, while George's material poverty is actually a result of his developed sense of morality. His class status and moral feeling also make him the only one with sincere political feelings.

Willi says George Hounslow has no obligation to his illegitimate son, and Anna has conflicted feelings: she is jealous of the woman but also hates her, she is both repulsed and attracted by George's "powerful sexuality," and she still "loved him, quite simply, as a human being." Willi manages to point out Anna's prejudice and insist that George would ruin his family if he took in his mixed-race child; George calls Willi "an inhuman swine" and insists that he cannot stand "the gap between what I believe in and what I do." Willi suggests that George's child does not capture "the problem of the African in this country." George storms off, and Willi tells Anna they should stop "sitting around crying about it."

Willi still cannot connect the big picture of inequality to the daily experiences of people's lives; he is only selfless in the abstract, but never in his personal relationships. Because of his scarce capacity for empathy, he cannot understand why George might feel responsible for his own son. Willi is dominated by the intellect, George by passion—yet Anna seems to be suggesting that the latter is what genuinely leads to action, and that political courage requires a combination of the two.

Anna goes inside, past George Hounslow, and meets Maryrose, who has clearly been crying after realizing that the group has lost its optimism about changing the world. She remarks that "someone like George could make me forget my brother," which is why she hit him. She leaves for lunch, and Anna finds George outside, gazing at the cook's shack, failing to light his cigarette. The gong rings, signaling lunchtime, but George tells her to wait, saying that he could sleep with her, and then Marie, and then his own wife, "and be happy with all three of you." She insists she does not understand, "lying on behalf of all women." Suddenly, she tells him he "can't commit suicide," and he asks, "why not?" Because he has people to care for, she replies. They walk back to the hotel for lunch, and Anna eats by Paul Blackenhurst.

Maryrose has George's depth of feeling, but lacks his sense of obligation to act. If Willi offers political insight without passion and Maryrose loses her passion because of her insight, George struggles against the contradiction between the two: his optimism and his knowledge that revolution is impossible. Maryrose seems to feel that being with George would mean dishonoring her brother, and she and Anna are both unsettled to feel that George could genuinely love three women in a way Paul and Willi could not love any. Finally, by abruptly mentioning suicide, Anna shows a deep recognition of George's moral crisis and hints at her own.

They dance until about five that night—Paul Blackenhurst with Anna, Willi with Maryrose (on whom George Hounslow was also fixated), and Jimmy, somehow cut and bleeding again, by himself. This becomes "the pattern for all the rest" of their days at the hotel. The next night, Stanley begins a "disastrous" affair with Mrs Lattimer—but "disastrous" is a "ridiculous" word, Anna notes, for "nothing was tragic, there were no moments that could change anything or anybody" in those years. Mrs Lattimer is about 45, married to Mr Lattimer, who is a drunk, "bad-tempered commercial type" and insults her relentlessly. She loves her dog, which is red as her hair, and spends the night dancing with Stanley after her husband stumbles off to bed. Barely rested, the group goes back to town at the end of their long weekend, but they return every few weekends for many months.

In retrospect, Anna troublingly realizes that her intense feelings were completely meaningless—nothing that happened in Africa could truly affect her in the long run, and yet (perhaps because it was so inconsequential) her time in Africa was the happiest phase of her life. Like Marion, Mrs Lattimer has a typically miserable relationship with her husband, and her inability to escape it illustrates the pitfalls of marriage, in which love seems to inevitably erode. Her affair with Stanley offers her an escape, a sort of freedom—this is a curious foil to the rest of the infidelity in this book, which inevitably involves men cheating on their wives (not the other way around).

Perhaps six or eight months later, "the crisis, if it can be called a crisis, occurred" with their final visit to Mashopi. Stanley and Johnnie have split from the group, passing time with Mrs Lattimer—who enjoys "publicly playing the mother-and-son roles" with Stanley—and the farmer's wife, with whom Stanley has set up Johnnie. Anna realizes that she defines her time at Mashopi by its beginning and end, "but that is just the lazy memory," for events in between must have contributed to what finally happened. However, her attempts to remember leave her exasperated—how can she trust that she "remembered" the important things? For her time with Mother Sugar and the **notebooks**—she stops her thought mid-sentence, for "this kind of observation belongs to the blue notebook."

Mrs Lattimer and Stanley's relationship begins to look incestuous, much like Maryrose's love for her brother—their love is based on their mutual need for someone to play certain roles in their life, rather than genuine feeling. Anna recognizes that memory and writing distort the truth of experience by recounting it retrospectively and giving disproportionate weight to particular moments that may not have been significant at the time. This also calls into question whether experience or memory is closer to the "truth"—a question that Anna later realizes cannot be resolved. As her faith in writing gradually erodes, she manages to keep going by keeping her notebooks separate.

On this last weekend, Mrs Boothby kicks Anna and Paul Blackenhurst out of the kitchen (being there is "against the rules"), where they have been chatting with the cook, Jackson. Paul instead starts walking Jackson back to his cottage, making sure to show white spectators that he is willing to place his hand on the black man's shoulder. Ted, jealous of Stanley, who is all too aware of his intentions, tries to convince him that Mr Lattimer is a threat. And George Hounslow's son becomes common knowledge—the others joke about them realizing their relation through "some mystical link," like the son becoming George's servant.

Ted and George continue to pursue their authentic feelings while the rest of the group parodies them, revealing their refusal to be honest about their own emotions and commitments. For instance, while Paul does take something of a stand against colonial racism, he is clearly motivated more by the chance to shock and disrupt than a legitimate desire for social equality. Ted's feelings for Stanley, although not sexual, are still based on a kind of possessive commitment that he realizes Stanley cannot reciprocate.

There is another dance that weekend, and Anna's "almost asexual" relationship with Willi continues to anchor the "romantic, adolescent relationships" between almost every other pair in the group. June Boothby brings Paul Blackenhurst and Anna to the kitchen to help with that evening's dinner, and of course Paul starts chatting with Jackson, which leads to an explosive argument with Mrs Boothby—June storms out, and Paul and Anna calmly leave for the big room. Anna wonders whether Mrs Boothby might have had feelings for Paul, but thinks June's marriage and upcoming move across the country are probably "at the bottom of her mother's unhappiness," along with Mr Boothby's miserable alcoholism. In retrospect, Mrs Boothby seems like "a lonely pathetic figure" now, but Anna looked down on her at the time, which is now painful to remember.

Anna's suggests that her bland relationship with Willi keeps the group together by holding the true relationships they want at bay. In fact, this desire for transgressive love—to dissolve the stale, existing romantic order—was the main reason for the group's existence in the first place. Mrs Boothby is clearly invested in sustaining the strict racial order of colonial Africa, in which Jackson's position as a servant is as far as the native black population can possibly advance—her tragedy is that nobody appreciated her endless work to sustain the Mashopi Hotel, which reflects the general predicament of domestic work in this novel.

Paul Blackenhurst meets Jackson after his shift ends, while George Hounslow looks at "the father of my child" and complains that he cannot help support the family—he is still sleeping with Marie, whom he still loves, and Jackson is none the wiser about the son who is not his. Mrs Boothby walks outside and yells at Jackson, who goes home. The dancing resumes, and that night Willi is tense with Anna—both because he is tired of George and because he sees her budding relationship with Paul (and she notices his with Maryrose).

George feels a sense of obligation, not jealousy or resentment, toward the man married to his lover. The reader already knows that a crisis is brewing, and the tension between Anna and Willi is a sign of their relationship's coming disintegration.

Everything is tense in the hotel the next day: everyone gives Mrs Boothby the cold shoulder, and she goes to take a nap, only to watch Stanley visit Jackson in his cottage and ask for the keys to the cupboard, and then Stanley eagerly come inside and make the coffee Mrs Lattimer wanted. Mrs Boothby threatens to fire Jackson, and George Hounslow despairs at what this would mean for Jackson's family, which would probably have to return to Nyasaland instead of staying near the hotel. Jimmy also disgusted Mrs Boothby the previous weekend by drunkenly kissing Paul Blackenhurst. This final weekend, he and George drink and dance; Mrs Boothby walks in and insists they "take their disgusting behavior somewhere else." George dances with June instead, Jimmy wanders off, and everyone seems to realize that they will not return to the hotel.

Again, Mrs Boothby is the messenger of prejudice even though she is a pitiable and, at heart, selfless character; Anna seems to chalk her racism and homophobia up to ingrained prejudice or stupidity in the colonies, but fails to realize the true danger it poses (only George does). Most of all, Mrs Boothby seems to be jealous about the love and goodwill that Paul and Jackson, Jimmy and Paul, and even George and June show one another. Meanwhile, Mrs Boothby's labor and sincerity are never appreciated, so her resentment takes over—like so many invisible housewives in this book.

Around midnight, Paul Blackenhurst mentions that Jimmy has not returned and goes looking for him along with Anna and George Hounslow. They stumble upon Jackson in the kitchen, "angry and troubled" for the first time, looking at "Jimmy lying asleep or drunk or both on the floor." Mrs Boothby walks in right as Jackson lifts Jimmy up and Jimmy throws his arms around Jackson's neck, proclaiming that "you love me Jackson, don't you." Horrified, Mrs Boothby fires Jackson, who has no idea what is happening and has worked in the hotel for 15 years. George tries to talk to Mrs Boothby, and Jackson is surprised—which suggests that he knows about the affair.

Mrs Boothby's two prejudices converge, and again she blames Jackson for everything. This entirely uproots his life: the least powerful and malicious person at the hotel suffers horrible consequences for the socialists' behavior, securing the opposition between their thought and their actions. It seems clear that they should not be the ones to enforce a revolution of any sort in Africa. While the rest of the socialists stay silent, George, of all people, is the only one with the decency and empathy to try and change Mrs Boothby's mind.

George Hounslow stumbles away, and Anna and Paul Blackenhurst take Jimmy to bed before Paul tries bringing Anna to bed herself, since he knows he might be leaving any day for the war. He walks away, she follows him, and Willi intercepts her, bringing her into the bedroom, where he proclaims that Jackson's firing is "the best thing that can have happened" because George will "come to his senses." He calls Anna's objections sentimentalist, and she leaves him in the bedroom, meets Paul on the verandah and runs away with him, with no destination in mind, stumbling in the rain into the veld, where they spend a few hours. They cannot find their way back, so sit on a rock atop a kopje for the rest of the night. This, Anna writes, was the happiest moment of her entire life.

Willi, again, does not seem to recognize the glaring injustice in front of him, and rather prefers to ensure that people maintain their clear-minded revolutionary vision even though everyone seems to know the revolution will never happen (at least, with their participation). With this show of Willi's inhumanity and conservatism, Anna makes the crucial decision that dissolves their relationship, eloping with Paul instead—her happiness is a symptom of the drive to dissolution she wrote about before turning to this lengthy story.

In the morning, they see the hotel and realize that they are sitting above a cave filled with Bushman paintings. When they make it back, they find Mrs Lattimer crying on the verandah and Mr Lattimer cruelly insulting her from inside. Anna meets Willi inside; he knows what had happened, and for the only time ever "mak[es] love to me with any conviction." This is the end of their "sexless" relationship.

The cave paintings point to the kind of mythical, perhaps primitive art that Mrs Marks and Anna later discuss as a sign of universal human experience, much as Anna wondered a few pages before whether the visual arts could capture human wholeness and personality in a way that writing cannot. Mr Lattimer's abuse of his wife foreshadows Willi's attitude toward Anna—his anger at potentially losing her is the only thing that drives him to pay her any attention; whereas Anna and Paul had sex because of their love, Willi has sex with Anan in order to prove a love that does not exist.

The next day, George Hounslow is solemn, and Jackson has already disappeared with his family, leaving his chickens behind. Mrs Boothby apologizes to Jimmy, who has no recollection of the night before, but she has no regrets about firing Jackson. The socialists leave and never return. Soon thereafter, Paul Blackenhurst dies and Jimmy is deployed to Germany; Ted purposefully fails his exams to be with Stanley, who "told him he was a fool." Johnnie keeps playing at parties; George manages to find Jackson and send him money, supposedly on behalf of the Boothbys, who in reality feel no remorse.

By the end of their time at the Mashopi, the socialists have only created further injustice, sending Jackson back to the poverty in which most black Africans are forced to live. The group dissolves, and they all live out tragedies consummate with their personalities: Paul dies in a mockery of war, Jimmy's anxieties dominate him but prove false, Ted sacrifices himself for the only person who does not appreciate him, and George heroically fights to do what little good he can, given his life's already tragic circumstances.

"And that was the end of it all," Anna declares—there is "nothing at all in common" between the truth and the story of *Frontiers of War*. She remembers realizing at the Mashopi Hotel that she would write the book, feeling the "dangerous delicious intoxication" of "the recklessness of infinite possibility, of danger, the secret ugly frightening pulse of war itself, of the death that we all wanted, for each other and for ourselves."

The book's setting and plot are clearly grafted from Anna's experience at the Mashopi Hotel and the relationships between George and Marie and Anna and Paul, but the very act of distorting the truth to pursue "infinite possibility" is precisely the thrill in writing for Anna.

Some months later, Anna writes that she has reread her above account and found it loaded with nostalgia. Actually, she would "rather die than have to live through any of that again." Her past self is "like an enemy" or an old friend better left behind.

Anna's perception of her own past and writing transforms from moment to moment; she is neither a stable writer nor a stable critic of her own writing.

Unlike the black **notebook**, which starts with a series of doodles and half-finished sentences, Anna's red notebook begins with no hesitations. It reads, "The British Communist Party," then "Jan. 3rd, 1950."

The color red is a straightforward and common symbol for communism; the red notebook's subject matter seems much more clearly defined.

Molly has told Anna about her reservations with the British Communist Party, which she listed for "dozens of bloody pages" on a form. Anna thinks such open criticism is risky; they both wonder why Molly joined the Party at all, and why Anna thinks about joining it. Molly tears up the form. Anna also gets a call requesting that she talk with Comrade Bill, since rumor says she is planning to join the Party—she was not, but she had been on the brink of it, although she hates joining organizations and can never feel comfortable voicing her criticisms to other members. She wants to join the Party whenever she has to deal with the literary world, which is variously "prissy, maiden-auntish" or commercial and dull, and when she sees Molly during her periods of enthusiastic organizing.

Unlike more dogmatic communists like Willi or fashionable ones like Paul and Jimmy, Anna and Molly seem to agree with the Party's goals but not its methods, butAnna and Molly recognize that their decisions to join the Communist Party are more a result of personal convenience and reactions to other events in their life than straightforward political stances; Anna recoils from the literary world's privileged cloister and admires Molly's passion during her organizing projects, which contrasts with her own confinement to her thoughts and reluctance to act.

The next day, in a glass office building on King Street, Anna meets Comrade Bill, whose brisk, contemptuous attitude throughout the interview leads Anna to reluctantly accept her place in the Party. He is skeptical of her as an intellectual—she fires back, displaying the sarcasm and suspicion that the most dedicated Party members employ to identify themselves. Back at home, Molly assures that "I joined in spite of myself, too"—she was always friends with communists but never joined the party until someone accused her of being a spy.

In fact, the decision to formally join the party — like Anna's decision to move to Africa—was more of an accident than an intentional move, whether for personal or political purposes; there seems to be no clear line between communist sympathizer and card-carrying party member, except for what it signals to other people. Anna and Molly did not join in a state of frenzied excitement; they were disillusioned with the Party from the beginning.

February 5, 1950: Anna notes that she can only be honest in political discussions with people who have left the Party. Six months later, on August 19, 1951: Comrade John defends the Soviet Union at lunch, but Anna is forced to defend it at dinner with an old friend, Joyce. When he stops by that night, Michael is unsurprised. He plays the Eastern European ex-revolutionary, and it is "fascinating—the roles we play, the way we play parts."

Anna realizes that people's political beliefs hinge as much on context and relationships as on independent thought or ideology; yet she feels that others' membership in the party (but not hers) leads them into a dogmatic perspective that prevents them from thinking freely about what might be good for the world.

On September 15, 1951, Anna recounts the story of journalist Jack Briggs, who "moved steadily to the left" during and after the war, turned down lucrative jobs at conservative newspapers, and ended up fired for trying to write an article on China and blacklisted as a communist—until, at a trial in Hungary, he was named as an anti-communist conspirator, and the Party declared him "a capitalist spy." Anna meets him, and she and Comrade John go to Comrade Bill, who does nothing and insists that "anyone could be an agent 'including me.'" Then, Briggs's editor decides to publish his essay on China, but Briggs refuses. Anna sees this as representative of "the story of the communist or near-communist intellectual in this particular time."

Briggs was demonized by capitalists for his insistence on taking a moral stand but by the communists for a sheer misnomer; yet the Party seems more interested in defending itself than actually pursuing justice, its stated goal. In the background is the question of how to at once act and think for justice: Bill is suspicious of intellectuals because he sees their commitment to truth as paralyzing their activism and threatening their loyalty, but Anna is suspicious of the Party precisely because it refuses free thought.

On January 3, 1952, Anna wonders why she writes so little in the red **notebook**. She also wonders why all her entries criticize the Party—which she still has not left.

Again, Anna hints at the notebooks' failure to capture the range of her experience and bias toward exceptional thoughts, away from the mundane.

Three of Michael's friends are hanged in Prague, and he insists to Anna that they could not be traitors, but also that the Party would not frame them, so they must have found themselves in "'objectively' anti-revolutionary positions." He cries all night in bed. Anna is busy organizing a petition for the Rosenbergs—nobody outside the Party will sign it, as Britain is on the brink of its own McCarthyism. She cannot explain why she defends the Rosenbergs but not Michael's friends. Molly cries, too, which reminds Anna of Maryrose crying when she realized that the beautiful revolution will not happen.

Michael looks for an explanation of his friends' hangings that allows him to maintain loyalty to them as well as the Party. He ends up with a explanation reminiscent of Willi's beliefs: his friends could have been obstacles to the revolution despite their best intentions and efforts. While this seems like a long shot, it is also precisely what was wrong with the African socialists' politics and recalls Paul's insistence that a true mass uprising would also be directed against them. Anna, too realizes (despite her full awareness of the Party's dogmatism) that she can more easily side with it than criticize it, even on the exact same grounds; she cannot help but feel the double-standard.

The Rosenbergs are executed. Anna wonders why she cares so disproportionately about them, why she feels "responsible for what happens in the West, but not at all for what happens over there" in the communist countries.

Anna realizes that her sense of responsibility is divided between the crimes committed by her ideology and the crimes committed by her country. Again, her uncertainty revolves around how to balance ideas and reality.

Anna cannot stop thinking about Koestler's insistence "that any communist in the West who stayed in the Party after a certain date did so on the basis of a private myth." Anna thinks hers is that, within the flailing Soviet Union, "there must be a body of people [...] waiting to reverse the present process back to real socialism." Molly is too busy to discuss—her personality, like Anna's, is split between a "dry, wise, ironical political woman" and a dogmatic "Party fanatic." The Party is isolating, which is why Anna will leave. In the next entry, Anna notes that she wrote yesterday that she'd leave the party; she wonders if, when, and why she would.

Anna seems to understand that she could not have remained in the Party based on concrete evidence alone; she needed a story for herself, the myth that unadulterated socialism remained on the horizon but was impossible for her to perceive directly, in order to maintain her faith in the form of socialism she desires. Anna and Molly both waver about their commitment to politics, but this shared commitment also separates them from each other.

At dinner, Comrade John says people stay in the Party because they cannot bear to abandon their "ideals for a better world." This contradicts his previous insistence that the Party is not cynical. Anna wonders whether she seeks wholeness through the Party—but it actually "intensified the split." That night, she discusses it with Michael, that "witch-doctor" and "soul-curer," who affirms that the human soul is far too complex to understand.

In John's mind, the Party allows people to continue believing in justice, contrary to reality—this gives a false sense of wholeness but in reality amplifies the gap between thought and action. Michael is a psychiatrist, which is curious given Anna's psychological wavering and the breakdown he creates in her.

Anna and Michael go to East Berlin, which is ominous and terrifying. Some old Comrades are hostile to Michael, thinking him a traitor like his executed friends. They accuse him of spreading "capitalist poison," particularly because he is wearing a suit—a cheap one, but East Berlin lacks consumer goods, and their bitterness is thoroughly ironic.

Suddenly, Michael's affiliation sets him on the outs of the party, even though he tried to justify his friends' executions to himself. East Berlin has the air of authoritarianism, not the egalitarianism that communism is supposed to achieve; Michael's old acquaintances seem bitter that he comes from a capitalist place, reducing him to a characteristic he cannot choose and ignoring his personal commitments and beliefs.

"Stalin died today," leaving Anna and Molly upset but feeling that they should be pleased. They suggest that Stalin might not have known about "all the terrible things that were happening," and later Michael agrees, since "anything is possible." He mentions that he used to see Stalin as a "great man." With a headache, he brings Anna to bed, where he again cries through the night.

Anna and Molly recognize the evils Stalin perpetrated but also worry about the instability that his death will inevitably bring their ideology; without Stalin, they now have to confront the contradiction between their affiliation and their values.

During an election in North London, the Communists rehash the tired debate about whether they should try to win (which they cannot) or support Labour (which would mean compromising their values). The meeting ends with a hearty joke: "we aren't going to win enough votes to split the Labour vote." Anna goes canvassing in Comrade Bill's working-class neighborhood, adoring the atmosphere of camaraderie. Other women argue over whether their clothes are too posh. One house plans to vote Labour, another is unlikely to vote at all, in a third a housewife chats obsessively with Anna for three hours, but says she still plans to vote Labour. After two more days, Anna finds only two people planning to vote for the Communists—they are already Party members—and five guilty, self-doubting housewives, who are convinced "there must be something wrong with me." Anna finds them much more interesting than the election.

While the joke at the end of the meeting successfully diffuses the Party members' tension, it leaves unanswered the question of whether the Party can or should actually affect politics; when they confront their growing powerlessness, the Party members retreat from caring about politics. Anna recognizes that the overwhelming dissatisfaction that women like Marion and Mrs Boothby feel is an extraordinarily common problem, grounded in married women's relegation to and isolation in the home. Because women are so isolated, they do not recognize that their predicament is shared.

Jean Barker, thirty-four, is the talkative wife of a condescending "minor Party official." Like everyone else in the Party, she is writing a novel. Her "verbal incontinence" has turned her into a clown, even though she lacks any sense of humor and only laughs at her own awkward turns of phrase. Her children are proud to have been raised in the Party. Jean manages a canteen and the local Party, but feels that "I'm not doing enough." She decides to coach a "class of backward children on Saturday afternoons" to make up for this sense of inadequacy; most Party members "aren't really political at all," but want to serve others or find the family they never had.

The fact that everyone seems to be "writing a novel" demonstrates the Party's bias toward idealism and imagination above realistic action, which contributes to Anna's disillusionment but also challenges her to justify whether her own writing is more likely to help people grasp reality or flee from it. Jean's work in the party extends her sense of domestic obligations, but her complete selflessness ends up preventing her from self-regulating, or consolidating herself into order.

The yellow **notebook** (which is entitled *The Shadow of the Third* and is a manuscript for a new novel) begins with Julia calling upstairs to Ella, who is putting her four-year-old son, Michael, to sleep and has decided not to go to the party. Julia hopes to "wallow in peace when you're gone" in her small house, which she shares with Ella and little Michael. She is "plump, stocky, vital, energetic, Jewish," a frustrated and unsuccessful actress. Ella writes miserable articles about fashion and relationships for a women's magazine, but has started enjoying her new role responding to letters. She also writes fiction on the side. So "there was no reason for Julia to envy Ella. But she did."

Julia, Ella, and Michael are clearly fictionalized versions of Molly, Anna, and Janet, respectively. Just as Anna transformed her experiences in Africa into Frontiers of War, *she seems to be translating her experiences in* Free Women *into fiction—although the reality of what is fact and fiction later turns out to be far more complicated. The cryptic title* The Shadow of the Third *expresses this relationship between Anna and her fictional characters: she is in the "shadow" of her novel, whose characters are "shadows" of her reality.*

Julia mentions that Ella wants to remarry and should go to the party—they are both "very normal" but lack "conventional emotional reactions" and can never find men "capable of seeing what they really were," although other women still envy them. Ella does not care that her husband remarried the day after their divorce, and while she is happy with "the child, her self-respect, a future," she still wants a man, but cannot manage to attend the work party full of people Julia, a working-class communist (but not Party member), considers "absolutely awful" middle-class bureaucrats.

Anna's analysis of Ella's romantic difficulties is much more direct and astute than her perspective on her own in Free Women, which attests to the fact that she uses her fiction to explore her emotions in a private medium more thoroughly than she can with Molly. Ella and Julia's inability to have "conventional emotional reactions"—like Anna and Molly's ability to dismiss and easily move past their mistakes—both prevents men from controlling them and alienates them from men.

Ella reads Julia one of her letters, which was addressed to the medical advice column but apparently neurotic rather than medical in nature, and they lament the unacknowledged misery of so many thousands of people around the country. Julia goes for her bath; Ella wonders whether she truly wants to go to the party. She then turns to her half-finished novel about a man's sudden suicide, which he commits after spending his "orderly and planned" life with a "vague and impossible" sense of direction for the future that points to his subtle "substratum of despair," until he finally understands himself in his final moments. She decided to write it after realizing one day that, were she to commit suicide, she would do it not in despair but in the realization that "that's what I've been meaning to do. That's been it all the time!"

Ella's work at the women's magazine, like Anna's canvassing for the Communist Party, reveals to her the private misery of so many women confined by gender roles and their unfulfilling relationships with men. Ella's uncertainty about the party, like the notion that suicide might not be an impulsive mistake but rather an unrealized life plan, suggests that people cannot transparently understand their own desires; rather, the appearance of a coherent life (as for miserable housewives) might in fact point to people's underlying brokenness and inability to reconcile their desires with their actions.

The novel is hard not because of the writing but because of Ella's shame at it—she knows Julia would respond badly, with some "judgment from the current communist armoury," if she were to mention it. And she wonders whether she has secretly decided on suicide, too. She realizes she has decided to go to the party—her dress (like all of her clothes) is unflattering, also like her face and hair, even though she has potential, for "her features were good." On her way out, she lets Julia know she is going.

The analogy between Ella's party and her protagonist's suicide becomes evident. Despite how much Anna contemplates what it means to act on principles, both Ella and her protagonist undertake pivotal actions in their lives—actions that express their principles—by realizing those principles in the moment rather than reflecting on them beforehand. Just as Ella cannot mention the novel to Julia, Anna is likely projecting her thoughts of suicide into her novel because she knows she cannot

Ella hates London's "weight of ugliness" and decides to walk the last mile to the house, which is like any other house on any other street, "ruled by fear and ignorance." But she notices a flash of color—a painter's house, and those of other professionals cut off from the others living around them. Dr West is one of these professionals, and his wife meets Ella at the door. Mrs West looks down on Ella because she is a "career girl."

Ella sees Londoners' identical houses as proof that they are "ruled by fear and ignorance," and so cannot live deliberate or principled lives; yet she does not see herself as living the same way, despite her evident fear before the party and ignorance about her motives for going, Mrs West's feelings toward Ella reflect dominant gender roles: she seems to think Ella works only because she cannot find a husband, and that her ability to take care of a man and children would be the measure of her value.

Mrs West brings Ella to the living-room, where Ella chats with the "editress," Mrs Patricia Brent, about her letters and "these people you can't do anything for," a phrase she regrets using. Dr West jokes that Ella wants a revolution—the only way to "do anything," of course. He votes Labour, and Patricia Brent, who likes to prove her tolerance, favors the Tories (her willingness to put up with Ella is also a show of tolerance). Patricia left "one of the big smart woman's magazines" because she was too out of touch with culture, but she takes Ella's "highbrow" perspective as a point of pride at *Women at Home*. So she agrees with Ella's assessment of her job responding to letters.

The very people charged with helping women resolve their misery see their jobs as hopeless—this implies that this misery has a structural cause, but Dr West laughs at the prospect of structural change. Patricia Brent is proof of the problem: her conservative political beliefs contradict her reverence for Ella, which are based precisely on Ella's view of the cultural climate she favors.

Ella looks around, noticing the unusually large living-room and hideous blocks of color on the walls. It does not even feel like a genuine party, and Ella wishes she had stayed home—and then a nervous but sweet psychiatrist named Paul Tanner comes over to chat with her. She will later fall in love with him, although he will deny that she had. Here, she feels too entrapped by his pride, which reminds her of her ex-husband George, whom she married "almost out of exhaustion" and felt "sexually repelled by" after the divorce—he slept with, and then married, another woman to spite her, and she was relieved. While she worries endlessly about repeating the errors of her marriage, she just as often uses her love for Paul as proof that she never loved George.

From the moment Ella meets Paul, Anna foregrounds the eventual tragedy of their relationship. Of course, she takes Paul and George's names from her own past in the black notebook; in reality, they represent Michael and Willi (or Max), respectively, in Anna's life. This also demonstrates how Anna's attempts to partition her life and mind into separate notebooks inevitably fails. Yet, whereas George and Paul both offered Anna genuine love in the black notebook, the characters named George and Paul both spurn Ella here, which suggests that Anna is writing in part to overcome her sense of lost love (just as Ella uses her feelings about Paul to overcome her sense that George was a mistake).

Compared to Dr West, Paul Tanner is far more understanding about Ella's frustrating work—she shows him a letter and explains that there is nothing to be done to help its writer, but that she feels burdened with the obligation nonetheless. She blames the woman's marriage, and Paul calls her "a sort of psychological social worker," prompting a joke from Dr West about Paul, "the witch-doctor." Paul reluctantly agrees, then asks Ella whether she is middle-class—she says she is working-class, and then to break up the conversation, Patricia leads Paul away.

Ella feels caught in a double-bind: she must help the women who write letters, but cannot. This sense of futility, of course, parallels her (and Anna, Julia, and Molly's) disillusionment with political work, which they feel is the only way to resolve the problems they see yet far outside their control. Ella and Paul's professions offer competing visions of neurosis: whereas Ella sees the social and cultural causes behind the woman's dissatisfaction, as a psychiatrist, Paul's job is to treat it as a mental disorder; yet Dr West seems not to take psychological problems very seriously at all.

After just an hour, with Paul Tanner claimed by Patricia and another captivated woman, Ella decides to go home. She flashes him a smile and leaves, but he chases her outside and offers to drive her home. London now seems "a hazy and luminous city blossoming with lights," and Paul asks about her life: she talks about working at a canteen during the war, spending six months in a sanatorium with tuberculosis, and her father, a brutish ex-army man. He asks about her novels—she denies that she writes. Ella agrees to go on a drive with Paul the following afternoon and returns inside to Julia's home.

Suddenly, Paul's interest in Ella transforms her perception of London as a whole, turning it from a dreary collection of identical houses into something full of life and possibility; this suggests love's capacity to reshape people's relationships to the world in addition to just other people. Instead of defining herself by her dissatisfaction in the present, Ella discusses her past and (like London for her) also gains a new depth for Paul and the reader. Yet she remains unwilling to discuss her writing, the most concrete proof of what she hides under the surface.

Julia invites Ella into her bedroom—the party was boring, Ella says, but a man whom she does not much like drove her home; Julia asks why, and Ella simply thanks her for looking after her son and goes upstairs.

Ella does not admit her interest in Paul—but it is unclear whether this comes from her own inability to admit that something good came from the party or her distrust of Julia's reaction or motives.

The next day, Ella thinks about Paul Tanner's voice while making lunch for her son, whom Julia has brought to visit friends while Paul takes Ella for their drive. Ella is at once glad and disappointed that Paul comes late; but she loves his voice as he explains the miscommunications in the hospital that delayed him (as the lone working-class doctor in his section, he does not understand how "the upper-middle-classes communicate with each other in inaudible squeaks, like bats"). They find conversation easier, and Ella is "intoxicated" to leave London and realize "that this man would be her lover," just from the sound of his voice.

Although Ella is usually quite cerebral, she clearly falls in love through her senses and impulses: Paul's voice (as opposed to his actual words) and the visceral feeling of freedom in the countryside, which recalls Anna's fixation on the notion of freedom through dissolution in the black notebook, are what change her mind about the budding relationship.

Paul Tanner notes Ella's pleasure and she mentions how ugly she considers the city's buildings, how unfair it is that people are forced to live in them. Paul points out that things are "better" economically for most people, making the class barrier between him and Ella obvious. Like him, she insists, the country is split in two, rich and poor. He chuckles that she is "a revolutionary after all," although she claims to have no interest in politics.

Although, at Dr West's party the night before, Ella insisted she was working class, it becomes clear that she is not (she is *working class in the Marxist sense of the division between workers and property owners, but in practice, she isn't working class like Paul is). Anna clearly recognizes that her (and Ella's) distance from hardship allows them to view class and society in more abstract terms than someone like Paul, who spent much of his life fighting to overcome poverty but also feels a sense of gratitude to capitalism for his own success.*

Ella hopes they might "get away from the villages," and Paul Tanner is "frankly startled" (which she only understands later). He asks about Ella's father, whom she insists is not "like the caricatures" but rather lives alone in an old house in Cornwall and spends his days reading philosophy. Paul asks whether her father likes her—she has never thought of it, but she thinks he does not, and Paul replies, "of course he does." While her father seems happy to see her when she visits, "it doesn't seem to make any difference to him." He follows his routine and "doesn't even talk to me." He only has one friend, also from the army, and they barely even talk when they are together. Paul changes the subject, asking whether the small field they have found will suffice. Ella is pleased.

The subtext here is that Paul misinterprets Ella's desire to get away from people—and, by implication, the sense of suffocation she feels around them—as a shameless sexual advance and seems to think her apparent promiscuity must have something to do with her relationship to her father. Ironically, of course, Ella is not simply using Paul for sex but is rather falling genuinely in love with him, and her father's apparent lack of love for her has nothing at all to do with it—she appears to feel just as indifferent toward him as he does toward her.

They lie on a rug in the field—Ella worries that Paul Tanner is already trying to sleep with her, but later he insists that *she* was planning to make love to him on the spot. She always figures he will know the right time. They chat about her ex-husband and son—and then his wife, whom he does not love, and two kids. And there, in the field, it is the right moment for them to make love. Afterward, he asks when she last slept with a man, and she lies, "not since last week." He gets suddenly detached, then hostile; she wants to cry and cannot stop thinking about George.

Ella and Paul both refuse to take responsibility for initiating sex, yet she also plays into his fears by lying about the last time she had sex in order to hide her own feelings. (She also appears to be denying her residual feelings for George.) Paul's attitude toward Ella clearly relies on double standards: he resents her claim to have slept with another man (whom she presumably did not love) even though he is still married to a woman he does not love.

When he drops Ella off at home, Paul Tanner asks if she might see a film with him, for she clearly likes him. Ella replies that she will not see him again, and admits that she had not slept with anyone for two years, then calls him stupid, a psychiatrist who cannot "understand the simplest things about anyone." She goes inside and cries, ignoring the doorbell and the telephone, which ring again and turn out to be Julia, telling Ella she can stay out; Paul calls soon after, and Ella agrees to go to the movies with him. They end up at a coffee bar, though, where Paul speaks of his frustration with the middle-class doctors and his anger at his patients' helplessness.

Of course, although Ella accuses Paul of not understanding her, she clearly cannot consciously admit her feelings for him—which he, on the other hand, does recognize. However, Ella does point out his apparently inhumanity—as a psychiatrist, he seems more interested in decoding her than emotionally connecting with her. At the coffee shop, Paul's discussion of his patients clearly parallels Ella's feelings about the women to whom she writes letters. They both inherit the helplessness of the people they are supposed to be helping; they wish they could save people but recognize that they themselves need saving.

Seemingly having forgotten "the episode in the field," Ella brings Paul Tanner home, and they make love again. This is "the deepest experience Ella had with a man"; he comes over every night that week and leaves early in the morning, which suggests that "his marriage must be no marriage at all." On Sunday, they again go to the country, where Paul compares them to "an old married couple already" and tells her she is "sensible" to stay single, which makes her feel "completely rejected" and disdain their sex that night. She chats with Julia, who is pessimistic about Paul and thinks he had "such a tight miserable face"—and he is somewhat miserable, Ella admits, although he has so much *energy*.

Paul and Ella's intense and rapidly escalating affair gives the reader an oblique view of what Anna's relationship with Michael must have looked like; the affairs seem to capture all the intimacy of marriage without any of its commitment or security. Paul's insistence that Ella should stay unmarried reveals that he has little interest in pursuing this commitment, but also cannot realize Ella's need for it; he sees her as a "free woman" in the sense that he can use her freely for his enjoyment. And Ella loves Paul for what, in her own depression, she lacks most: energy.

That next night, Paul Tanner is so sweet that Ella is "restored to happiness." However, he then says that he has to spend the following night with his children, and "suddenly a picture came into her mind" of him leaving money on a mantelpiece, startling her and making her feel that their love is all a lie.

Ella's reactions to Paul continue to completely dominate her feelings; she cannot square his refusal to commit to her with the knowledge that he is already married, and therefore perfectly capable of commitment.

At work, Ella pays special attention to Patricia after offending her with a temperamental comment. Patricia's husband left her after 11 years, and she has a "gallant, good-natured, wisecracking cynicism" about men. Ella phones the editor of another magazine, asking if he is free for a lunch but really intending to sleep with him, because "why not?" She is not attracted to him, but with Paul Tanner's casual attitude, that is the point. Their lunch is lovely, and she overcomes her impulse to give up on her plan, although she cannot stop thinking about Paul during or after sex with the editor (which she ultimately found meaningless).

Patricia's jaded but outwardly optimistic attitude toward men reflects her sense of injury and resignation, which Ella and Anna are afraid of falling into; Ella sleeps with the editor in order to test her commitment to Paul and realizes that she is, indeed, in love with him. She conceives of her brief relationship with the editor, it seems, as equivalent to Paul's relationship with his wife.

When they see one another again, Paul Tanner remarks that, "if you love a woman sleeping with another woman means nothing." Ella does not fully process this comment until the following morning—it means that Paul has also "been experimenting with someone else" during those intervening nights, and this leads her to fully trust him. He asks what she has been up to, and she mentions the editor but not their having sex. So she decides that, since they both found other people uninteresting, they are now truly "together."

Of course, Ella does not consider the possibility that Paul means to say that Ella means nothing to him because he loves his wife. Their seemingly transparent communication hides their fundamentally different expectations for their relationship and their parallel assumptions that the other person shares those expectations.

Ella and Paul Tanner begin spending every night together—he thinks nothing of his wife, and Ella only worries about her son, who seems to make Paul uncomfortable. Paul treats the boy like an adult, and Ella worries that little Michael will forever lose "a natural warm response to a man." However, she soon ceases worrying and begins enjoying her happiness.

Paul's inability, or refusal, to take a paternal role in relation to Ella's son again shows his refusal to commit to their relationship—he is using her to flee from familial obligation, not to pursue a new family in parallel. Ella feels torn between Paul and Michael, unwilling to subject her son to a false father figure.

Anna remarks that she feels like this novel has already been finished, and that she is reading rather than writing it; she now sees naivety as the central theme in Ella's relationship with Paul Tanner. Naivety is what Anna sees in her own relationship with Michael—but neither she nor Ella understood during their relationships how men destroy "the knowing, doubting, sophisticated" versions of them and instead force them to live in "spontaneous creative faith." Now, Anna sees this naivety as the proof of a relationship's potential, but also as impossible to fully regain in the future. She concludes her commentary, "*what Ella lost during those five years was the power to create through naivety.*"

Anna feels caught between the roles of writer and reader because she is translating her own life—in which the story of her affair has long been resolved—into fiction. Her analysis of heterosexual relationships suggests that the failures of communication and commitment she has explored in the black and yellow notebooks translate into the imbalanced gender dynamic that forces women into a submissive, emotionally reactive role. However, she sees potential in the naivety of that role, and her analysis recalls her attitude toward dissolution. Both involve loss and potential: naivety means the loss of intellect and maturity, but it also engenders a radically open, curious orientation toward the world. Anna's insistence that Ella cannot recover her naivety is, of course, a way of writing about her own creative block (her inability to write a second novel). Love seems to offer Anna a means to restore this sense of naivety, which could allow her to create.

The **notebook** returns to Ella and Paul Tanner: namely, "the end of the affair." The first, crucial sign is his loss of interest in her letters. Paul feels he has nothing to contribute, as he does not want "to share all the serious business of life" with Ella—she is his mistress, not his wife. In anger, Ella replies that she *is* his wife, for he tells her everything every night in bed. She knows it is the end of their relationship, even though his reaction is understated.

Anna's above commentary appears to have been inspired by her discomfort at writing about Ella and Paul's happiest moments, which would have meant painfully remembering her own with Michael. Instead of exploring this happiness, Anna immediately announces the relationship's end, as though it were inevitable and sudden.

Ella's novel gets published, and Paul Tanner "reacts with elaborate sarcasm." He says that "the real revolution," greater than any political one, is "women against men"—now women can have babies on their own, so men are "no longer necessary." Ella calls Paul mad, and he mockingly agrees, replying that she is so sane that she would want to have a baby without men. She says that she would never do so, that she wants his child, that everything has been "happy and easy and joyful" between them. He embraces her.

Paul seems livid that Ella might make something of herself independently of his control; he expects to possess her without making any commitment at all to her. Like Richard, Paul mocks the notion of women's freedom from men only because it threatens his ability to treat women however he likes. And so he forces Ella to proclaim that she wants commitment only so that he can ensure that their breakup is entirely up to him. Again, his double standard shows that, despite his profession as a psychiatrist, he has a remarkable lack of empathy.

Anna remarks on "the difficulty of writing about sex," which is better the less one analyzes it (at least for women). It is common knowledge that "sex is essentially emotional for women," and that even "the most perceptive and intelligent man" cannot understand—like when Julia insists that a marriage broke up because the wife did not love the husband, and Bob insists that it was his "prick the size of a needle."

Anna seems to see an essential, irreconcilable difference between the way men and women perceive sex; the notion that sex is better with less analysis suggests that language degrades experience and points to the thrill in "naivety."

Anna has never analyzed her own relationship with Michael—it was "like a curving line on a graph." Anna explains that, in Ella's first months with Paul Tanner, because of their love and his need for her, she has vaginal orgasms; later, during sex he switches to "mechanical means," external stimulation, which gives her clitoral orgasms that she finds "very exciting" but still somehow resents. Vaginal orgasms are the only true kind of orgasm, even though Paul insists that "eminent physiologists" have proved they do not exist. By the end, when she is no longer having vaginal orgasms, Ella knows "emotionally what the truth was when her mind would not admit it."

Of course, despite her insistence that sex is better when left unanalyzed, Anna decides to analyze it anyway. Paul's belief that there are no vaginal orgasms reflects the limits of "the most perceptive and intelligent [men]"—who think that their beliefs and instruments are the ultimate test of reality, and that they can define the female experience better than women themselves. Anna is torn between her emotions and body, which hold a kind of unconscious knowledge that her mind continues to resist, and her impulse to believe whatever is most convenient in the moment.

Around the same time, Paul Tanner tells Ella about a lecture at the hospital, during which a male professor insists that female swans do not have orgasms—all the women in the audience walk out, and then the professor declares that women have "no physiological basis for a vaginal orgasm" either. Then Paul walks out and chats with his coworker Stephanie—Ella is uncomfortable at this story but laughs along with him. He calls her "the least jealous woman I've ever known" and announces that he will not go home with her tonight; she realizes that he has been mentioning Stephanie quite a bit.

Paul denies the existence of the female orgasm with Ella but agrees that it exists when he talks to Stephanie, which shows that he is entirely willing to believe whatever is most convenient for him to persuade women to sleep with him (but never get too close). Clearly, he views Stephanie the same way he views Ella—but, since it is too hard for her to believe this, she remains stuck in naivety and insists that he must love her above all other women.

Paul Tanner and Ella eat dinner, and he remarks that that he has not "succeeded in changing you in the slightest" before criticizing her appearance and clothing, as usual. He lets down her hair and insists that she "could be a really beautiful woman if [she] would let [herself] be." Then, he mentions that he might be moving to Nigeria—she understands that "something final [is] happening" and hopes to go with him, then realizes that she has given up every other relationship in her life to focus on him. She asks if she can come; he is apprehensive.

Paul's attitude toward Ella is completely contradictory.On the one hand, he clearly wants her to prove his influence on, or even ownership over, her by changing her appearance and mannerisms. Yet he is also leaving for Nigeria in part because of the danger of becoming too committed to her. He ultimately resents Ella for not becoming his fantasy, even as he insists she is too attached to him and eager to please him.

One day, Ella comes over while Paul Tanner's family is away. She clearly sees that "this was his home." The wallpaper is aged, and the kitchen table is covered with copies of her magazine, *Women at Home*, which Paul's wife presumably reads. She wonders why he is showing her his house at all, and they go up to his bedroom, which has two beds, separated by a table with "a big framed photograph of Paul."

Paul and his wife's separate beds suggest that their sex life is uninspired, and the giant photo of Paul indicates that he considers the home his domain, even though his wife is clearly the one who maintains it (as proven by her copies of Women at Home *magazine). Instead, the copies of Ella's magazine are the only trace of Paul's wife, which suggests that she is probably much like the miserable and bored housewives Anna met during her canvassing and also forces Ella to empathize with the woman injured by her affair with Paul.*

Ella proposes what Paul Tanner's miserable wife might write to her own advice column; he admits he is "not exactly proud of [himself] as a husband," and she wonders why he does not just "put an end to it," so his wife can find another man. He insists that it is not so simple, that he has asked her, and she does not want to leave him. Paul's wife, unlike Ella, wants security and respectability—so does he, it becomes clear, and this is Ella's shortcoming in his eyes. Soon, he says it explicitly, asking why she is not a housewife "like other women" and mentioning her novel before trailing off and explaining how she has sustained him through the previous few months.

Anna points to the conflict of values that lies at the heart of her identity as a "free woman"—the experiential, personal value of pleasure and love against the social values of security and respectability. It seems increasingly clear that it is an all-or-nothing choice: all the characters in this book end up in loveless marriages or short-lived flings. Paul only values Ella because of circular logic: she has previously turned down security and respectability in her life, so he does not take her seriously and denies her the secure, respectable relationship she actually wants. Ella becomes a victim of the way others interpret her past, just as Anna feels defined by her past after publishing Frontiers of War.

Then Paul Tanner suddenly goes to Nigeria—Ella is supposed to follow him in a few weeks, but the "painful grimace of his whole body" at their goodbye makes it clear that she is unwelcome. He only sends Ella one letter; then, he sends one to Dr West, who summarizes its contents to Anna: Paul says his family is going to join him and mentions his affair with "a pretty flighty piece." Dr West thinks little of this mysterious mistress and hopes Paul would "stay out of England as long as possible" to crush her hopes of marrying him. Ella decides Paul must be writing about Stephanie at the hospital.

Paul never truly breaks up with Ella; he appears unable to tell her directly that or why he is leaving, and his dishonesty and secrecy are clearly the most difficult part of the breakup for Ella, who remains unable to fathom the possibility that Paul values her as little as he does Stephanie. Dr West, too, never imagines what Paul's mistress (whom he probably knows to be Ella) might feel or desire; as doctors, they both seem to completely lack empathy for women they consider disposable.

Ella feels a deep sense of depression and rejection, which she imagines Paul Tanner's wife must have felt, too. She **dreams** that she is keeping Paul's house, waiting for him to return from Nigeria, and awakens in tears, realizing that "she was the flighty piece," and Dr West mentioned the phrase to her on purpose. She grows furious rather than depressed. She gets a new wardrobe, haircut, and flat—one big enough for a man.

Ella comes to understand the cyclical pattern in Paul's mistreatment and dismissal of women, a pattern shared by most of the other men in this book. Dr West expresses his loyalty to Paul above Ella; her switch from grief to fury reflects her realization that she was deceived as well as undervalued, as though Paul did not believe her intelligent enough to realize what he was doing to her.

Then Ella hears that Paul Tanner is back in London for two weeks. As though against her will, she waits for him every night, thinking: "this is being mad." She sees that this is part and parcel of the same madness that first brought her so much joy in the affair. Soon, Dr West informs her that Paul has returned to Nigeria—this time without his wife.

Ella's creeping sense of madness comes from the conflict between her conscious desires and her emotional instincts, but she recognizes that this same conflict creates the pure thrill of being in love. In leaving his wife behind in London, Paul adds insult to injury—it is not merely that he preferred his wife to Ella, but that he was not willing to commit to anyone at all.

Anna worries that this story recounts the affair "in terms of what ends it," which is not how people experience love. Even two portraits—one of the beginning, one of the end—could not suffice. For "literature is analysis after the event." If the Mashopi piece takes the form of nostalgia, here "the form is a kind of pain." The daily, iterative beauty of living is for film, not literature.

Anna's reflections on the limits of literary form helps explain the structure of the novel, which attempts to capture life as it is lived through a fragmented, almost cinematic form. And her commentary about film becomes incredibly important at the end of the novel, when she starts to relive her past through film rather than literature.

The blue **notebook** begins: "Tommy appeared to be accusing his mother." Then, Anna wonders why she begins this way, turning reality into fiction as though to evade it, rather than simply to record the facts. So she decides to keep a diary.

Anna comments on the yellow notebook's function: to cope with reality by fictionalizing it. She announces her belief that the blue notebook will be more faithful to reality than the others—but it remains to be seen whether it actually is.

January 7, 1950: Tommy turns 17. He argues with Molly, which has been happening frequently since his first visit to his father, Richard, after which he accused her of "being a communist and 'bohemian.'" A few weeks later, Anna explains "the whole long ugly story" of how Richard threatens and bullies Molly. One day, Tommy insists on doing his National Service and attacks Molly's politics—but he later decides to be a conscientious objector (but attacks her politics anyway). Anna finds this stupid, but fears that her daughter might think of her parents the same way one day. Anna feels helpless thinking about Max; but when Janet was born, "the silly empty marriage" no longer mattered, which she wished Janet could see.

This entry returns to the subject matter and cast of characters from Free Women, *although it is set years before that frame story. It shows that Tommy's moral conflicts with his parents are long-standing—he feels both forced to choose between his parents and forced to maintain relationships with each of them. While he ends up aligning with his mother's beliefs while speaking out against them, it is unclear whether his decision not to join the military was really an act of political courage or an act of personal cowardice.*

Four years before, on October 9, 1946: Anna meets Max in "that horrible hotel room," sensing his despair as he declares they have "nothing to say to each other." She insists they are not "the same kind of person," and they do not have sex; they hear the couple next door doing so in the early morning and Anna is distraught. Max suggests having a baby, and Anna figures, "why not?" They conceive Janet that morning, marry the next week, and separate the next year.

Anna clearly sees that her decision to have Janet was borne of the same impulsivity and arbitrariness as Tommy's decision to become a conscientious objector. Curiously, her relationship with Max is clearly the same relationship with Willi she described in the black notebook—which is strange because the blue and black notebooks both purport to be recounting truth rather than fiction.

On January 10, 1950: Anna writes about going to Mrs Marks for the first time, because "I've had experiences that should have touched me and they haven't," like Tommy faltering about the army—she sees how people could so easily convince themselves to pick each side of a dilemma. She also says she will never write another novel—she is not in psychoanalysis because of a writer's block, she just does not "believe in art" anymore.

Anna's central problem is that she cannot act because she cannot feel. Able to see both sides of an issue, she feels unable to choose principles on which to act, which explains why she and her characters so often fall into their decisions out of impulse or convenience. Her lack of certainty is connected to her loss of naivety, which she recounted through Ella's story in the yellow notebook.

On January 14, 1950: Anna **dreams** "a great deal." In one dream, she is "dressed absurdly," sitting at a grand-piano in a full concert hall, "unable to play a note." She tells Mrs Marks this is "about lack of feeling." In another, she is dancing with Max in Central Africa during the war. This dream is about the same thing—frigidity, and the fear that she might be frigid again.

Anna's inability to feel has two primary symptoms: her creative and romantic blocks. At the same time, she seems to believe that her dreams hold unconscious knowledge about her feelings that she cannot access in waking life.

On January 19, 1950: hearing a baby cry through the wall of her room, Anna remembers waking to the same noise each morning in Africa, and then Michael's "cold irony," which was also repetitive. Playing with Janet and her blocks, Anna feels nothing. She tells Mrs Marks this is about Michael—but they are still sleeping together. Anna insists it is absolutely not about art, and that she does not "care if I never write another word." Mrs Marks explains that many of her patients are artists "unable to create any longer." Anna feels frozen, unable to feel—she cares only for her daughter, not even for Michael, she explains. Then their time is up. On the way out, Mrs Marks reminds her that "the artist has a sacred trust."

Anna's dual blocks—art and romance—become the focus of her sessions with Mrs Marks. She feels stuck in a cycle of failure: as the same experiences and symbols recur, they begin to lose their meaning. Mrs Marks seems to suspect her dream about Janet is really about art because it reflects her lack of feeling when she builds something out of the blocks with Janet. Anna's unprompted insistence that she doesn't care about art is, paradoxically, the clearest proof that her inability to write continues to weigh on her.

On January 31, 1950: Anna tells Mrs Marks about numerous recent **dreams** that have felt like "false art, caricature, illustration, parody." They were pleasant and vivid—even though half were nightmares. She once met a longtime psychoanalysis patient who preferred her dreams to her life. This woman "once believed herself to be a writer," like everyone else at one point in their lives, but Anna does not want to be like this. Mrs Marks offers "her conducting smile." Anna knows she is implying that "all my creativity is going into my dreams" and insists on changing the subject. She looks around the room, which is covered in statues and prints, pleasant "like an art gallery," so unlike the "crude, unfinished, raw, tentative" lives of Anna and everyone around her—which is "precisely what was valuable," Anna realizes. Mrs Marks agrees to set dreams aside.

Anna's feeling of false art points to the layers of contradictory meaning and stories in her own accounts—none of them tell the whole truth, and so in a sense they are all false art. Yet Anna seeks the whole truth through her dreams, where the raw material of her life seems to be flowing—indeed, dreams and the novel itself take a "crude, unfinished, raw, tentative" form unlike the packaged, ostensibly coherent form of art. And since the dreams feel like "false art," it seems that, whether she is awake or asleep, Anna's energy all goes into false art. She begins to realize that all "valuable" art is false art, that polished art is still more *false, and that any art which pretends to be more than "caricature, illustration, parody" is in fact deceptive.*

Anna adds that, the day of the above entry, she "stopped **dreaming** as if a magic wand had been waved." She and Mrs Marks talk about her resentment for Michael, who mocks her writing and preference for Janet above him, and who says he will not marry Anna right after insisting that "he loves me and I am the most important thing in his life." One night, Anna and Michael argue about this, and she is "frigid with him for the first time." Mrs Marks mentions an old patient who never had an orgasm with the man she loved until their wedding night and suggests that Anna is "a real woman," at which they both laugh. Then, Mrs Marks asks about politics—Anna says that, with the Party, she swings from "fear and hatred" to "desperate clinging," like with Janet, Molly, and Michael.

Mrs Marks seems to control Anna's dreams: when she insists they stop, they do, which suggests that these dreams are not purely the product of Anna's creative energy (as she just argued) but also that psychoanalysis offers Anna a way to transform her unconscious thinking, as it is intended to do. Just like Paul does to Ella, Michael secures Anna's commitment by insisting on ambiguity, alternatingly declaring his commitment and indifference. Anna's emotional life seems governed less by her "inability to feel" than by her wild mood swings and inability to reconcile the opposite feelings that overtake her.

On March 15, 1950: Anna tells Mrs Marks she is the happiest she has ever been with Michael, but hates him every morning. Mrs Marks suggests it is "time you started **dreaming** again," and as if following an order, Anna does.

Again, Anna's relationship with Michael is split, and Mrs Marks's suggestion that Anna dream seems intended to help her reconcile her split parts by finding a means to integrate them in her unconscious.

On March 27, 1950: Anna finds herself crying at night, which Mrs Marks says "are the only genuine tears." She gains pleasure from the pain—this is the same feeling that led her to write "that damned book," a phrase that startles Mrs Marks. Anna insists that psychotherapy has merely made her realize "that the root of that book was poisoned," and Mrs Marks asks whether she keeps a diary, and if she mentions her psychoanalysis in it. Anna knows that Mrs Marks thinks this was "unfreezing" the writer's block and feels "so angry, so resentful," as though Mrs Marks is "robbing" the diary from her by incorporating it into their sessions.

Anna writes out of the impulse to resolve her contradictory feelings—pleasure in pain—which is the same reason she goes to psychoanalysis (where she realizes that the thing she feels most strongly is a fear of feeling). She guards her writing intensely: she is unable to bring it into psychoanalysis, even though she brings her psychoanalysis into writing. She feels robbed, like she did by those who sought to use her novel Frontiers of War *for a movie rather than remaining faithful to her authorial intent.*

For four years, Anna's blue **notebook** consists only of newspaper clippings, largely covering the American war in Korea, development of the hydrogen bomb, and persecution of suspected communists (McCarthyism).

In fact, Mrs Marks's comment freezes Anna's writing rather than unfreezing it—when her blue notebook becomes public and threatens to escape her control (like Frontiers of War*), Anna shuts it down. This fact reveals as much about the underlying fears that prevent Anna from writing another novel as her psychoanalysis sessions do. In fact, she replaces her private thoughts with the most public information of all—international news—and the reader loses all sense of how this news affected her private life.*

On April 2, 1954: Anna realizes that she is "beginning to withdraw" from her "experience" with Mrs Marks, who has long known this. On April 4, 1954: Anna has a nightmare about "the anarchic principle" as "an inhuman sort of dwarf." Mrs Marks is in the **dream** "like a kind of amiable witch" but, in their session, insists that this figure is part of Anna herself. Anna feels that she is being set loose, with this figure as something like "a talisman against evil."

Anna seems to be "withdraw[ing]" from psychoanalysis because it has already filled its purpose for her: Mrs Marks enters her dreams as a protective figure, and this dream about "the anarchic principle" becomes very significant later in the novel, where it figures as the dream about "joy in spite."

On April 7, 1954: Mrs Marks asks Anna if she is taking notes, even though she has not mentioned the diary for three years, and Anna admits that she is just collecting clippings about "war, murder, chaos, misery." She decides this is a way of "keep[ing] things in proportion," reminding herself of problems beyond her own. She also **dreams** about these horrible things, as if they are personal—Mrs Marks asks if it is "an instruction to yourself of how to dream," and Anna cannot see what is wrong with that.

While Anna has in fact started writing again, she carefully keeps this a secret from Mrs Marks and prefers to instead focus on her years of collecting newspaper clippings. While fixating on the news helped Anna look beyond her perspective, global problems also became personal for her, and she lost the ability to address her underlying creative block. Indeed, her newspaper collecting is probably symptomatic of this deeper creative sterility.

On April 9, 1954: Mrs Marks asks Anna when she is "going to start writing again," and Anna says, "very likely never," asking why Mrs Marks fails to understand that "nothing I could write would seem to have any point at all" compared to what is in the newspapers.

Anna feels paralyzed by the world's disorder: since her writing cannot solve global problems or prove more significant than them, she feels it is meaningless. In fact, even though she just claimed that the newspapers "keep things in proportion," they lead her to think on a global scale and forget about herself as an individual. Yet this journal entry's existence proves that Anna has *started writing again, even if it is unclear what motivated her.*

On April 15, 1954: Anna has multiple **dreams** about Michael leaving, which convince her that he will indeed leave soon. Though unhappy in life, she is emotionless about it in the dreams. Mrs Marks asks what Anna has learned through psychoanalysis, and she says that she has learned to cry, to become more vulnerable—and also to become stronger. Mrs Marks assures that Anna will write about this, and Anna assures herself that her next appointment will be the last.

The relationship between Anna's dreams and her waking life seems to have switched: now she feels in reality what she knows but cannot feel in her dreams, which proves that psychoanalysis has successfully taught her to feel again. Of course, what she is afraid to say is that it taught her to write again, and she cannot bear to return to psychoanalysis precisely because Mrs Marks violates the integrity of her art by telling her what to write.

On April 23: during her last appointment, Anna recounts a **dream** of walking a casket through a room "full of dead pictures and statues." She hands the casket to the people at the other end of the room, delighted to relieve herself of it, but they give her "large sums of money" in exchange, much to her horror. Then, they are all characters from something she has written. In the casket lie "a mass of fragments, and pieces [...] from everywhere, all over the world"—pieces of earth and gunmetal, the flesh and personal effects of the dead. To her, it is too painful to look at; to the businesspeople, it is delightful. Then, it becomes a crocodile, crying diamonds, and Anna awakes laughing.

This dream represents Anna's deepest fears about her art. Her horror at receiving money reflects her fear of "selling out"—not only by compromising her work's integrity but also by participating in the capitalist racket that sees art only as a commodity for sale. She fears that she has already done this by losing control over the reception of her first novel Frontiers of War *(as represented by her characters becoming her buyers here). The pain that produced her art is a delightful opportunity for the entertainment industry to profit, and the crocodile crying diamonds could be a metaphor for either how her fictional expression of emotions creates something beautiful or how the world has eagerly decided that art she considers dishonest is immensely valuable.*

Mrs Marks has no reply to this **dream**, but says Anna should "drop in to see her" if necessary. Anna knows Mrs Marks is already inside her and will appear in her dreams when she is in trouble. Anna walks outside from "the room which is like a shrine to art" to the "cold ugly pavement" and recognizes her reflection in the window "as the grin on the snout of that malicious little green crocodile in the crystal casket of my dream."

By deciding not to respond, Mrs Marks actually lets Anna maintain ownership over her dream and its interpretation—even though the psychoanalyst is already buried inside her unconscious. Outside, Anna's reflection indicates that she may again be ready to write, even if she recognizes that her art may not be taken as seriously as she wants.

FREE WOMEN: 2

Molly calls just after Anna puts Janet to sleep. She asks whether Anna has seen Tommy, who has spent the previous month virtually catatonic in his bedroom. She then moves on to her dinner date "with some old flame from America," a man she always finds utterly boring but still considers "the best of the bunch," which leads her to wonder why she feels entitled to have someone good enough for her. She has to leave for the theater, but asks that Anna call Tommy in an hour and hopefully learn what happened during his visit to Richard's office that afternoon. A few minutes later, Molly calls again—Marion, drunk, has called and said that Tommy briefly visited her. Marion was also furious at Anna and a girl from Richard's office, both of whom Richard claimed to be sleeping with. Molly says she is terrified—"something awful" is surely happening.

The linear narrative of Free Women *picks up a few weeks after it left off more than 200 pages earlier. Molly seems to have lost all faith in romance and begins to blame herself, although partially in jest; Marion's drunkenness and misery is proof enough of an incompatible marriage's dangerous consequences. And Molly's sinister prediction foreshadows the remainder of this section, but also shows how* Free Women*'s more ordinary narrative structure differs from that of Anna's notebooks, which are still written in the past tense but also track the uncertainty of her experience more closely.*

Tommy shows up at Anna's flat. He is sure his mother would be "upset because of all those madness [psychology] books" he has been reading. Molly does not pick up Anna's phone call; Tommy compares Anna's bed to a coffin and lets out a "harsh, uncontrolled, and malicious" giggle when she asks about his visit to Richard. He turned down his father's offer to oversee workers during construction projects in Ghana or Canada, and obviously his father blamed the influence of communism. However, he did not mean Molly and Anna's influence; he meant communists' refusal to pursue anything but the wholesale restructuring of entire societies. Tommy assures that Anna and his mother would take those jobs—he did not, not because he was a communist, but because he was suffering "paralysis of the will."

Tommy's attitude, too, suggests that something sinister is about to happen. Surprisingly, Richard's critique of communism is not grounded in his personal resentment for Molly and Anna but rather in the same recognition that led George to frustration with Willi in Africa: seeing communism as merely theoretical leads to the same "paralysis of the will" that Tommy claims has overcome him. This "paralysis" reflects the enduring conflict between motives, principles, desires, and goals (on the one hand) and the necessity to make decisions and act, on the other.

Tommy is surprised to see Richard as more than "ordinary and second-rate" at work—Tommy can be a successful tycoon himself, too, but would never do it because of his "divided mind." He knows that "people like you and my mother are a hundred times better than he [Richard] is." Anna feels worried and lost for a moment, then reminds Tommy of his father's own communist and bohemian phase in the 1930s. Tommy supposes that Richard justified his affairs because they prove "he's not just an ordinary respectable cog in the middle-class wheel." Tommy went to visit Marion after his father; he fully blames Richard for "ruining" her and their children. Anna does not know what to say; both she and Tommy seem to understand that "she was failing him."

Tommy recognizes that Richard's success at work relies on his undivided personality: he can conveniently block out the critical and dissenting parts of himself, whereas Tommy, Anna, and Molly cannot. Yet Tommy insists that honesty and self-awareness are more important than the ability to act with certainty. Richard refuses to confront his contradictions and ends up deceiving himself—for instance, his affairs are precisely what make him an ordinary middle-class businessman.

Suddenly, Tommy walks over to Anna's **notebooks** and asks why there are four. "I don't know," she says, "it just happened." It would be "such a mess" if she had just one notebook, but Tommy thinks this mess would be fine. Janet calls from upstairs; Tommy brings her water and says goodnight. Meanwhile, Anna feels "an extraordinary tumult of sensations," angry and terrified at Tommy, who walks down the stairs and asks what Anna imagines Janet will become. She is only eleven, Anna insists.

Tommy's same worries about division apply to Anna's notebooks: she fears the apparent chaos of unifying her thoughts in a single place, so holds the separate parts of herself in different places. She is furious not only because Tommy violates the privacy of her writing but also because he threatens her efforts to divide herself.

Tommy apologizes for his attitude, but Anna seems "aggrieved." Tommy asks about Janet's father. Anna says she seldom thinks of him—Tommy's parents are much more involved with one another than she ever was with Janet's father, Max Wulf. She did not love him—she loved nobody until Michael. She thinks this is not so terrible, but that the only terrible thing is "to pretend that the second-rate is first-rate," deceiving oneself into feeling satisfied with the unsatisfactory.

Anna's refusal to accept the "second-rate" is the core belief that shapes her relationships with men and art: she settles for neither unhappy marriages nor inadequate art. Although this arguably leaves her with no marriage and no art, it also gives her a clarity of moral insight that, among the book's characters, only Tommy shares.

Tommy nods and opens the blue **notebook**, reading an entry in which Anna wrote that Janet was having "a difficult phase." Tommy remembers once being frightened and anxious in bed, then walking downstairs to see Molly and Anna, only to hear Molly say he was "in a difficult phase." This made him feel that all his "victories" were lost, that all the sense of self he had developed was "just a phase" and would pass. Anna is busy thinking about Janet—who, on the whole, is perfectly fine. Knowing that Anna and Molly think he is currently "in a difficult phase," Tommy asks whether his feelings are valid at all, since "one can't go through one's whole life in phases. There must be a goal somewhere." Anna suggests that women simply see things (especially their own children) "in a sort of continuous creative stream." She continues to feel a sense of foreboding.

Tommy cannot reconcile the possibility of simply living out "phases" with his faith in human progress. He sees that the notion of a "difficult phase" is really an excuse to avoid confronting life's obstacles: such "phases" do not merely pass on their own, but rather must be actively overcome through a struggle for personal development. People do not abandon their previous phases, he argues, but rather carry their past selves with them as they gradually improve themselves. Without growth, he insists, life has no point. Of course, he is also speaking to Anna's difficulty overcoming her creative block.

Finally, Anna says she knows Tommy has come to hear "what we are alive for." She says that "our kind of people" are "a sort of latter-day stoic." Perhaps Tommy has too many options in life. Tommy says he envies the milkman's son, who can either pass his exams or remain a milkman forever—he mentions another friend, Tony, who became a conscientious objector and joined a new socialist movement ("a sort of substitute" for the stale communists) even though he does not quite believe in them. Anna asks if he also envies Tony, and Tommy "positively shriek[s]" that she is being dishonest. He returns to her **notebooks**. She feels "terribly exposed" but figures it might help to let him read what she has written.

Stoicism was a school of ancient philosophy that emphasized learning to accept what one cannot change and take responsibility for what one can: Anna's description of her and Tommy as "latter-day stoic[s]" implies that they are forced to cope with the limits of their will despite realizing that the world is following the wrong moral path. Tommy accuses Anna of dishonesty because he does not envy Tony, who followed the most convenient political path rather than the one he truly believed—Tony seemed to act out of moral exhaustion rather than moral conviction.

After perhaps an hour, Tommy asks why Anna writes different entries differently, and how she decides what is important. She said she does not know—he points out one day's entries: she wrote first that she imagined jumping out of her window, then licking up her own blood and brains from the pavement, but set this section off in brackets. Then, she wrote about going to the store. Anna says that the first entry consists of unimportant "mad flashes," worth bracketing away only because it looks wrong to write this down next to the day's "ordinary things." She feels this is not the truth for which the blue **notebook** exists.

While Anna insists that each notebook expresses a particular truth, Tommy undermines the notion that she can set out with such truths in mind rather than discovering them during the process of writing; in the blue notebook, her "mad flash" is as true as the events of her day. Of course, the first section of the blue notebook is largely about Anna's encroaching madness—to Tommy, her insistence on bracketing out the "mad flashes" looks like an attempt to deny rather than confront her sickness.

Tommy asks why Anna cannot just have one large **notebook**—"chaos," Anna explains, which she fears. Tommy finds her fear irresponsible. Anna feels this accusation is the culmination of his visit; he reveals that he has been coming in to read her notebooks in the past, and that he has determined she is dishonest: she does not reveal her inner turmoil to the world, but divides it up in her books instead. This is her only way to avoid admitting that she is in "a bad phase." Tommy also insists that people are "cannibals" who "don't really care about each other." However, he claims he will give Anna "another chance." He reminds her that she used to believe in communism, that "every so often, perhaps once in a century, there's a sort of—act of faith" that pushes the world forward because people can dream of a better world.

By keeping the four books, Anna avoids "a phase" by refusing to see herself and her pain as a unified whole: instead of confronting the contradictions among the different parts of herself, she houses those different parts in different notebooks, trying to create separate, stable selves that will not change (but will also not overcome their problems, hence are stuck in a rut and not in a "bad phase" that she can surpass). This is why she is dishonest. If she cared about people, Tommy thinks, Anna would write her turmoil together in one place and publish it for the world to see, publicly confronting the chaos within herself as a demonstration of the moral courage that people need in order to build a better world, one in which people care about each other rather than merely focusing on themselves. Tommy sees redemption through innocence: he thinks that this publication would be a transformative "act of faith," which is a clear reference to the communist faith in revolution but also recalls Anna's declaration in the yellow notebook that love creates naivety, or "spontaneous creative faith."

Anna takes gets a call and says she is expecting a visitor—Tommy leaves, thanking her for the conversation. Anna calls Molly and explains that Tommy "frightens" her. Marion is coming to see her, and they need "to do something for Tommy, quickly." Now in a much better mood than before, Molly figures they are "worrying about nothing."

Molly's worry has passed on to Anna, who feels the same sense of imminent danger Molly had at the beginning of this chapter. Molly, on the other hand, seems like an entirely new person, which recalls Tommy's feelings about "phases" and divided selves.

Marion comes upstairs and replaces Tommy in the chair across from Anna. Marion drunkenly slurs something about Anna being fortunate to be so free and asks for a drink. Marion asks about Richard; Anna realizes Marion is jealous of her and insists that Richard had been lying about their supposed affair. In fact, Marion says she envies Anna's freedom—but Anna replies that she would prefer to be married. Marion decides she will have to stay the night, because Richard is so stingy, despite their extraordinary wealth, that he will not pay for her to take a car home. She also jokes about Anna's male lodger, until Anna clarifies that he is quite merely a lodger. Marion continues pontificating about Richard's indifference to her—she knows that he will never love her again, that no man will ever love her again—and demands another drink.

Marion continues to represent the prototypical distraught housewife, who yearns for freedom from her imprisonment in marriage and shows what Anna might have become had she remained with Willi/Max, or perhaps even Michael. Marion thinks that Anna has not only freedom, but also gets to have Richard—in reality, Anna feels she has neither, and both she and Marion yearn to play one another's roles. Marion also speaks to Anna's fears about romance and history of meaningless affairs by insisting that nobody will ever love her.

The phone rings: it is Molly. Tommy has shot himself in his room, and he is about to die. A policeman takes the phone from Molly and tells Anna to come to St Mary's Hospital. Marion has fallen asleep in her chair; Anna pulls her into bed, then runs outside. It is after midnight; there are no taxis, but a policeman calls her one. At the hospital, Tommy is not yet dead, but is "expected to die before morning."

Just a few pages before, Tommy declared that the world needs an "act of faith" and told Anna she deserves a second chance; yet he seems to have abandoned both of these ideas here, with a decision seemingly based in despair. Still, it is no coincidence that Anna appeared to be the last person Tommy talked with before shooting himself—and his decision points to her description of them both as "latter day stoics," since the Stoics advocated suicide as a viable solution to a desperate situation. Tommy's suicide also recalls the suicide in the yellow notebook—that of the protagonist in Ella's novel. The relationship between these two suicides is, as of yet, completely unclear: it may be a coincidence that Anna had been thinking about suicide and then Tommy committed suicide; most troublingly, he may have gotten the idea from reading Anna's yellow notebook; or perhaps the relationship between Free Women *and the notebooks is not as straightforward as it initially appears.*

THE NOTEBOOKS: 2

The black **notebook**, still divided between the "*Source*" heading on the left and the "*Money*" heading on the right, now continues only under "*Money*." A letter arrives from a Mr Reginald Tarbrucke, who wants to talk about turning *Frontiers of War* into a television play. Anna replies that she has no faith in the genre; they both rehash their positions in subsequent letters and get lunch anyway. "Reggie" Tarbrucke is surprised she has not been writing more, but insists that he wants "to get anything halfway decent through the meshes," since the network leaders are "bone-stupid." Anna wonders if they would film the adaptation in Africa; when prodded, she explained that "the colour bar" is her novel's central theme. Reggie proposes setting the television version in England, at a military training base. It would still be the same "simple love story."

As with Anna's own past, the reader only gets an indirect view of Frontiers of War, *as the black notebook is itself divided between the inputs and outputs of Anna's work; not only did* Frontiers of War *reinterpret and (in Anna's mind) twist the truth of her experience, but the "*Money*" column shows how her novel was in turn reinterpreted by those who sought to profit from her story. "Reggie" both professes to understand Anna's complaints about television and proves their accuracy by trying to sanitize her novel, removing its main theme and turning it into a love story that idolizes rather than condemns the violence of war and racist violence of British colonialism.*

Anna has no patience for this proposition and no interest in turning her novel into a film. Reggie implores her to consider his offer, which does not even meet her very low expectations. Feeling that she is about to say something self-destructive, she proposes turning *Frontiers of War* into a comedy: it could be soldiers mourning their lost compatriots while the national anthem plays in the background. Reggie is confused about the comedic aspect; she says he must have realized that the central theme is "nostalgia for death." It would be a parody of other war films, she proposes, laughing. Reggie turns sour, but diplomatically tells her that idea is for film, not television, which is "a simple medium." They part ways, and this mocking proposition is the only part of their meeting Anna later feels no shame about. She resolves not to reply to any more media companies; they prove that writing is pointless.

While Reggie apparently understands that Anna is trying to mock him, he does not understand the full weight of her "comedic" proposal: that there is something unseemly about a nation honoring those it has condemned to death; that war is not honorable or truly tragic, but farcical. Of course, her new main theme is what she claimed the novel's impetus to be in the previous iteration of the black notebook: the thrill of dissolution, whether in war, death, or love. However, in phrasing it as "nostalgia for death," Anna also points to her own dissatisfaction with her novel, her sense that she is celebrating something horrible.

Another letter arrives from a television producer, the American Mrs Edwina Wright, who has included a nine-and-a-half page brochure explaining that each of her one-hour weekly variety stories "authentically grapples with genuine experience," but that none can mention "religion, race, politics, or extra-marital sex." Anna replies that her novel obviously mentions these forbidden themes, but still ends up having dinner with Wright, "an expensive woman" and fast drinker who brags about her familiarity with British literary circles, but Anna quite likes her. Wright waves to an American man eating alone in a corner; Anna imagines their "dry and measured coupling" that night.

The American brochure again exposes the contradiction between popular media's insistence that it provides "authentic" truth and refusal to confront the obvious injustices of the time. Wright, clearly successful in her profession, nevertheless also sacrifices her own individuality in order to pursue it; Anna's image of Wright's "coupling" with the American man suggests that she sees Wright as also unable to express any individuality or emotion in her most intimate moments.

At last, Mrs Wright mentions the novel, asking whether the interracial sex can be taken out—Anna thinks it can; Wright grimaces at the American in the corner, clearly hoping Anna would resist but happy to downgrade the plot to mere interracial romance. She proposes they turn *Frontiers of War* into a musical and imagines how the airman and the African girl might meet—all her scenarios would have been impossible under racial segregation laws in Africa. So she proposes a normal television play, set on an air base in England, with an American soldier and an English girl—Anna mocks her, and Mrs Wright insists that she guards her work too closely, for television is "the art form of the future."

Wright's job puts her in a strange position: she wants Anna, as an artist, to insist on the integrity of her work but also knows that she must sacrifice it in order to create palatable television. Despite Wright's declaration that Anna is too invested in the integrity of her work, Anna is actually less interested in preserving her own story than in presenting a plausible truth—but, again, Wright's proposal ends up evacuating Frontiers of War *of its central political content and trying to tell the exact same story as Tarbucke's.*

Mrs Wright offers Anna limp professional advice and hopes she will visit America; Anna replies that she is a communist, and Mrs Wright is physically startled and speechless. Anna remembers a similar reaction when she told a Russian communist friend about someone being tortured in a Moscow prison. Mrs Wright says she is surprised and "cannot understand it"; Anna suggests that she vet her writers better. The American man from the corner comes over, and Anna leaves them for the night.

Mrs Wright's inability to "understand" how someone might be a communist reflects not only the political biases of the 1950s but also the enormous gap between Anna's view of art and the one growing in popular media. Anna sees how people's political commitments—the roles they choose—seem to determine their beliefs, rather than vice versa, and shows that her own independence from dogma is part of her feeling of isolation.

In the red **notebook**, in an entry dated August 28, 1954, Anna writes that she and Molly want to learn about Quemoy but can find little information. Molly discovers that the Party is hiding news of her friends' imprisonment from her; they both think about quitting. Molly is fed up with the Party's lies to defend the Soviet Union. Anna tells Michael about this at night, and to her surprise, he supports her.

Anna is just as suspicious of the Communist Party's dogmatism as she is of Western anti-Communism's; Molly and Anna both recognize that the Party has more interest in protecting its reputation than in actually affecting political change but wonder if they can pursue change independent of its infrastructure.

Anna has a wonderful **dream** about "an enormous web of beautiful fabric" covered with moving images of myths, all in red, in the shape of the Soviet Union and growing outward—but then the rest of the world, in its other colors, comes into focus and she falls sick. The other colors invade the red, creating an "indescribably beautiful" picture and giving her "almost unbearable happiness," until everything explodes and she is alone, watching the world's fragments fly about in chaos. All she cares about, truly, is Michael—he is the only thing that brings her happiness.

Anna's dream represents the Soviet Union's attempts to spread Communism throughout the world—while she first feels sick when she sees the rest of the world apparently taking other paths, strangely enough she is delighted to see the Soviets' redness invaded by the rest of the world. This suggests that she has already unconsciously broken with the Communist Party and can also be seen as a metaphor for her desire for her red notebook to lose its strict division from the other notebooks—her desire for unity.

"Some scribbled sheets" from November 11th, 1952 recount a group of five communist writers meeting "to discuss Stalin on linguistics" the night before. They talk diplomatically about Stalin, even though by now they dislike him. Anna thinks his pamphlet is nonsense and wonders about "the break-down of language." She proposes that "perhaps the translation is bad," and it becomes clear that everyone thinks the pamphlet itself is bad, although nobody will admit it. They turn to other matters; Anna notes that, when more than two communists are around, the quality of discussion deteriorates. She makes tea and remembers an interesting story sent to her by a Comrade, which "could be read as parody, irony or seriously."

The Soviet writers feel forced to defend something they do not believe in because of their roles in the Communist Party, even though they chose those roles because of their initial political beliefs—when belief translates into action, it seems to betray itself. Anna's interest in language's breakdown—the deterioration of the relationship between form and content—also points to the process of mental breakdown and the seeming futility of writing in a world that recycles fiction for its own ends: to the rest of the world, Anna's own writing and political beliefs no longer mean what she originally wanted them to.

The story is gummed into the red **notebook**: Comrade Ted is proud to join the teachers' delegation to the Soviet Union; as soon as he arrives in his hotel room, he begins religiously documenting his trip. "Two young chaps wearing cloth caps and workers' boots" come into his room and bring him downstairs to a car that takes him to the Kremlin, where he meets Stalin, who is sitting "behind an ordinary desk" and asks him to "outline for me what our policy ought to be in Great Britain." After three hours, he leaves and returns to the hotel, where he resumes his diary, "thinking of the greatest man in the world."

This story partakes in a number of communist clichés: the valorization of "workers," a vague category often defined flexibly by those in power; Party members' blind orthodoxy and reverence for political leaders like Stalin, who seem to represent the everyday "worker" despite their inflated power; and the notion that Communist politics will be radically democratic, involving input from everyone.

Anna's writing continues: after she reads the story to the group, it falls silent for a moment, then one man calls it "good honest basic stuff," Anna cracks a joke about **dreaming** the same fantasy, and the same man says he "thought it was a parody at first." Another man recalls reading an old story from the 1930s about Stalin helping two peasants fix their tractor in the Red Square. The group disperses with "the room […] full of hostility."

The man who first sees the story as "good honest basic stuff" and later insists he saw it as a farce shows how beliefs can be so flexible to social pressures that they completely lose their meaning—the story's multiple interpretations both recall Anna's own novel, which now seems like a farce to her and is being turned into a farce by producers, and point to the reader's difficult task in making sense of The Golden Notebook*'s layers of meaning and contradiction.*

The novel *The Shadow of the Third* resumes in the yellow **notebook**. Patricia Brent recommends that Ella go to Paris for a week—she needs to free herself from Paul Tanner, who left her a year ago. In Paris, she returns to the same hotel where once she stayed with Paul. She unconsciously organizes her things so as to leave Paul space in the room, only to realize far too late what she is doing. She eventually makes her way to dinner and back, feeling anxious and afraid when two men greet her, realizing that Paul's jealousy has transformed her entire personality. She watches the city out her window, knowing she should venture out but feeling unable to go. She goes to bed and, as usual, cannot sleep except by thinking about Paul. When awake, she remembers the pain he caused her; asleep, she can only remember his sweetness.

The yellow notebook, which ended its first iteration by jumping abruptly from the peak to the disintegration of Ella's relationship with Paul, resumes a year after it left off; Ella's life remains defined by her relationship with Paul, which suggests that Anna is still trying to make sense of the way she feels defined by her relationship with Michael for years after their breakup. Ella's conscious and unconscious minds fight for her independence: she creates living space for Paul without realizing it, and her sleep is bookended by her thoughts of him (which, according to Mrs Marks's analysis of sleep and dreams in the blue notebook, indicates even more strongly her emotional fixation on him).

The next day, Ella visits the office of Monsieur Brun at *Femme et Foyer*. He is polite, if disinterested in the deal that serves as her pretense for visiting Paris, and tells her about his "formidably pretty, intelligent and talented" fiancée, Elise. Ella knows that Patricia would love if she bought the story *Comment J'ai fui un Grand Amour* from Monsieur Brun, but she also knows it is entirely unsuitable material for their magazine. She explains to Brun how the story would have to be rewritten—the original is about an orphan who gives up her life in a convent to move with a man to Paris, only to have a series of men betray her. The girl leaves a baker (the only man who ever loves her), resumes her previous ways, and then is finally saved by the baker before it is too late. Ella thinks the story is too "French" and needs to lose its religious elements.

Anna seems to rewrite her own experiences meeting with television executives from the opposite perspective: Ella asks Robert Brun to distort his story by removing its taboo elements and, understandably, he refuses. This story mirrors Anna and Ella's patterns of unfulfilling relationships with men who take advantage of them, but also their self-defeating faith that men will save them from the misery men cause them. Indeed, the French magazine's story replaces the traditional faith in salvation through God's love with a secular faith in salvation through romance—which might also be one of the religious elements Ella hopes to remove from it.

Robert Brun is frustrated but gives up on trying to change Ella's mind when he sees a woman who looks much like her approaching. To Ella's surprise, this woman is not his fiancée; he continues to gawk at passing women until his "ugly, yet attractive" and well-dressed fiancée Elise comes over. They discuss the carpet she has bought, and she is delighted to be around him except when she, "his captive," catches him staring at one approaching girl after another during their 20-minute conversation. It is clear to Ella that the couple is ill-fated: she is just wealthy and "desperately, fearfully in love with him." Despite her irritation, Ella still does not want Brun and Elise to leave, and she cannot help fixating on Paul Tanner after they do. A man comes to talk with her, and she leaves like "a frightened schoolgirl."

Robert Brun, much like Dr West, exemplifies male chauvinism despite his prominent position at a women's magazine: he clearly objectifies women and values his fiancée for her money rather than her love or character, which is all the more ironic because he is trying to sell Ella a love story. Ella sees Elise—whose name is perhaps a play on her own—as slated for the same kind of tragedy that befell her with Paul and Marion with Richard.

Ella decides to fly back at once and try and cure her heartbreak by writing another novel, but soon returns to thinking of Paul Tanner, realizing that in his absence she was "alone, frightened to be alone," and without "moral energy." She notes that "women's emotions are all still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists," that her fixation on a single man is untenable—but she "can't be like that." She boards her plane, which has to return to the airport due to "a small fault in the engine," and realizes she feels completely isolated from those around her. She forces herself to stop fantasizing about Paul saving her and determines to feel the full force of her pain.

Ella sees a connection between the men's mistreatment of women and the tragedy of modern capitalism: in a society that only values material wealth and external appearances, emotional sophistication and "moral energy" become meaningless to most people. She realizes that, by refusing to feel the pain Michael has caused her, she only further represses and extends that pain; instead, she decides to try and overcome that pain by embracing it.

An American man reading medical magazines nearby jokes with Ella about the plane, which they eventually board again, all ignoring the fact that the mechanics fixing it were clearly arguing about their repairs in the final moments before they turned it over to the pilot. Ella is pleased to think she is about to die, and is not shocked to realize this. The plane takes off and climbs; Ella thinks about her son and feels grateful that a plane crash would be less hurtful than suicide, which many parents must forego just to spare their children. She falls asleep fantasizing about falling out of the shattered plane and awakens on the tarmac in London.

Ella begins to see that her novel about suicide was more a reflection of her own intentions than she was originally willing to admit; like her protagonist, she only realizes in the moment that she seems to have been planning to die all along, and she enjoys the same thrill of death and dissolution that Anna explored in the black notebook; this is the first thing besides Paul that can get her to sleep.

Ella shares a taxi with the American, who invites her to dinner. She visits her son and goes to bed, for the first time not thinking about Paul Tanner as she falls asleep. She spends the next day at home, then meets the American, Cy Maitland, for dinner at "a good solid restaurant," although only after fielding her son's complaints that she is leaving so soon after getting back. Despite their late arrival the night before, Cy "looked fresh and vital" and explains that he usually only sleeps three or four hours a night. He also does not drink, happily calls himself a "hick," and eats his steak in less than ten minutes—and works as a brain surgeon.

Although Ella is perhaps disappointed to survive, her psychological near-death experience truly does redirect her attention away from Paul. Cy Maitland is completely unlike Ella: proudly unsophisticated and childish, full of energy but deeply boring, professionally successful but personally unremarkable. Curiously, whereas Paul was a psychiatrist, Cy is a brain surgeon, which perhaps makes him an appropriate next step for Ella: his work is still to fix broken minds, but in a much more intrusive way that requires a much less sophisticated picture of human psychology than Paul's.

It is Ella's turn to talk about herself, but she feels that she "could not be described by a simple succession of statements" and is upset by her attraction to Cy, even though they are completely unalike—she considered him "a healthy savage" and worries that she might become frigid with him, which is such a funny thought that she laughs aloud. Cy proposes she follow him upstairs, so he can make some work calls and she can tell him about herself afterward. She agrees, completely unable to interpret his intentions or his likelihood to cheat on his wife with her.

Ella seems totally comfortable with Cy because his "savagery" makes him emotionally unthreatening; she is even tempted to read a nonexistent subtlety into his actions in order to give him the benefit of the doubt. Her inability to reduce herself to "a simple succession of statements" (whereas Cy happily describes himself in a few sentences) reflects her sense of complex and fluid identity, her insistence on discovering herself and progressing rather than defining herself as one thing (like Richard in Free Women*).*

At the hotel, Cy makes his twenty calls and shows Ella a picture of his beautiful wife and five boys, about whom he is exuberant. She wonders whether she should try and excuse herself and dodges his questions about her; so she simply asks him whether he would sleep with her, and he says, "Boy, oh boy, would I?" Viewing him as simply a mass of flesh, she marvels at her own audacity. Sex lasts but a few seconds, after which Cy starts explaining how much he loves his wife, even though they never have sex—he likes how "fine and easy" sex with Ella was, for he lacks the time to really chase mistresses. They have sex again, more slowly, and Ella is astonished to realize that, for the first time and completely unlike with Paul Tanner, she is "*giving pleasure*."

Ella is clearly experimenting with Cy, trying to remain as anonymous as possible and invest as little emotionally as possible; Cy's lack of subtlety and sexual clumsiness border on the absurd, which makes this easy. He has the naivety Ella has lost—but it now looks ridiculous to her, especially in light of his supposedly happy marriage. Ella's realization that she is "giving pleasure," taking an active rather than receptive role in sex, offers her a sense of power and control with Cy that she always lacked with other men. Even if she has no future with Cy, her affair with him can still be a means to her independence. They both "use" each other to meet their needs, but without injuring one another—which, so far, is a rarity in this novel.

Ella understands that "she would never come with this man" and realizes that her sexual integrity required orgasms. Still, she and Cy are both happy, and after she dresses, Cy wonders out loud what marrying "someone like you" would be like. She asks if his wife is happy, and he at once grows surprised and serious before listing all the lovely things his wife has in life, not least of all himself. Ella likes him but explains that she "could no more understand a woman like your wife than fly."

Ella finds Cy's wife unfathomable not only because she is satisfied with his brutishness but, more importantly, because he declares that her happiness is simply about the things she has *in life—and not at all about what she feels, accomplishes, is, or loves. To Ella, this reeks of inauthenticity: Cy and his wife appear to be living out someone else's checklist rather than pursuing authentic happiness, which always depends on a person's specific interests, needs, and character.*

Ella leaves, and the next evening they eat at the same restaurant, where Cy talks about his eventual aspirations to become a senator, and more immediately to interview doctors in Russia—but he cannot, because of McCarthy, with whom he wholeheartedly agrees. Ella says that the woman she lives with is a communist, they agree it does not matter, and they go back to his room again, where "again, she gave pleasure."

Even though Cy declares that he wants to become a senator, he is scarcely able to explain his political beliefs or express what he disdains about communism. He appears interested in politics because it offers him power, rather than because it would allow him to improve the world, and represents the mindset that turns so many political leaders (communists as well as capitalists) into impotent, droning bureaucrats.

After sex, they discuss Cy's specialty, leucotomies. Ella disapproves and mentions that she "once had an affair with a psychiatrist" who was averse to ordering leucotomies; Cy disapproved of her having "once had an affair." She is glad, though, that this language suggests she is finally over Paul Tanner, whom she still admits to Cy that she loved. Even though Ella says she wants to get married, Cy says he does not understand her, for she is "a pretty independent sort of woman," although she has "taught [him] things." He also says someone told him about Ella's book, which he would love to read (even though he does not read). She is not willing to tell him what it is about and decides to leave instead, as they agree he would not like being married to her.

Leucotomies, or lobotomies, are a surgical process that separates the frontal lobe from the rest of the brain and destroys patients' complex functions and personality, effectively reducing them to the mental function of a child. Cy's job ironically points to his own childishness and inability to think for himself, but also suggests that he is complicit in the social repression of women: a sizable majority of lobotomy patients were women deemed "hysterical" by their families and husbands, often because they sought to defy traditional gender roles.

At home, Ella tells Julia that Cy was "very nice" and she will be "extremely depressed in the morning," although not because of him. Ella feels "there's no use my going to bed with anyone but Paul Tanner," although she intends to persevere.

While Ella enjoys her time with Cy, his childishness and sexual clumsiness still mostly remind her of the satisfying relationship she used to have with Paul.

The blue **notebook** continues. In an entry dated September 15, 1954, Anna recounts how Michael declares that their affair is over, but poses it as a question. He celebrates their "great love affair," but she feels horrible, "as if he were denying my existence," as he insists she should decide whether their affair was "great" or not. Later, she feels "unreality, as if the substance of my self were thinning and dissolving." She uses her "critical and thinking Anna," whom Michael "dislikes most," to save herself; he accuses her of inventing stories, so she decides to "write down, as truthfully as I can, every stage of a day. Tomorrow."

Michael's indifference frightens Anna: he seems to feel nothing after asking whether their relationship might be over and appears to value Anna only for the "great love affair" she gave him, not at all as an individual. They both see her identity as defined in terms of him, and when she tries to break free from him by thinking for herself, he insists that she cannot access the truth—this implies that Anna's relentless search for the truth of her identity and experience in the blue notebook is in large part driven by her need to prove him wrong, to learn to trust her own judgment above Paul's.

September 17, 1954: Anna writes that she was too unhappy to record her whole day the previous night, but wonders if her close attention to the day's details was in fact what made it an unhappy day. However, she will still write it all down.

Anna's quest to capture an entire day in fine detail is both a new attempt to capture the real truth and a direct homage to James Joyce, who used a version of this format for his epic novel, Ulysses.

Anna's portrait of her day begins. She wakes early, next to Michael, and wonders whether it will be their last time together, which feels impossible in the moment. He reprimands her in his sleep, as he is apt to do. She thinks about his dead family, murdered in the Holocaust, and friends, "communists murdered by communists." She thinks his very existence is a miracle; he stirs for a second and tells her to go to sleep. She lies down and is "careful not to" fall sleep because Janet is nearly awake.

Anna has trouble reconciling not only her knowledge that her relationship with Michael is collapsing with her feelings of intimacy and affection, but also the pain he has endured with the man she knows so well. She runs up against the limits of her empathy, but Michael also clearly has little empathy for Anna's competing obligations to care for him and Janet.

Anna feels tense and resentful, looking ahead to a day full of meaningless tasks, knowing that Michael will have "women in all kinds of capacities" helping him with his work all day. From Mother Sugar, Anna knows that resentment is a universal, impersonal emotion for women; Michael, starting to wake, begins having sex with her, and she thinks about the endless tension between him and Janet, whom she visits after he finishes. Molly and Tommy are sleeping; a baby cries through the wall, and Janet asks why Anna does not have another baby. She sends Janet to school before waking Michael, because "the two personalities—Janet's mother, Michael's mistress, are happier separated." She walks Janet downstairs, gives her a raincoat, and assures her that someone will be home when she returns.

Anna's silent frustration at her position and hope that Janet will never have to live like her reflect how women's daily work to sustain and care for those around them gets taken for granted and ignored in a society that primarily values men's economic labor—which, after World War II, relies on the support of myriad unappreciated women in the workplace. Michael is so accustomed to being served by women that he does not consider their efforts or perspectives. Anna sees how her varying obligations lead to the split in her personality, but prefers this split to the chaos of trying to incorporate the different parts of herself. Sex is mechanical and impersonal, with Michael seemingly using Anna's body (and her not much enjoying it), the precise opposite of Ella's sex with Cy Maitland. The crying baby through the wall—like the ones Anna and Max encountered in Africa—represents the ostensibly healthy, functional families that nameless others seem to enjoy—but no character in this book can.

Anna wakes Michael, who praises her "efficiency and practicality." She makes breakfast and eats with him while wondering if he is about to end their affair, feeling a sense of loss; instead, he asks if he can stay the next night, too, and then says that she is still more practical, and that "when a women gets all efficient on him, the time has come to part." She is pained but says she will look forward to that night. With a kiss that represents their love and his insistence that, "if we have nothing else in common, we have sex," he leaves for work.

Michael acknowledges Anna's labor only because she performs it expertly, but does not question whether it is right for her to cater to his every need. He at once expects this labor from her and admonishes her for becoming nothing other than his support—it is increasingly unclear what, if anything, Anna gets out of their relationship.

Anna dons a dress that Michael likes and buys the food she plans to cook for him. She changes the sheets and notices a bloodstain; realizing she is on her period, Anna begins to "feel tired and irritable, because those feelings accompany my periods." Feeling tense, she waters the plants and then takes the bus, where her mind returns to "the practical treadmill," now regarding work obligations.

Anna even dresses and shops for Michael, rather than for herself, despite realizing how little he values her. Notably, she experiences fatigue and irritation only when she notices her bloodstain, as though out of obligation—similarly, the "practical treadmill" of the daily grind blocks her off from feeling by structuring her time around obligations to others.

Anna also starts worrying about having to write down everything from this day, and especially the part about her period: having to write down the word "blood," which feels like "a major problem of literary style," similar to when Joyce wrote about "his man in the act of defecating," but also when men refuse to think about women defecating. Anna worries that she smells, for she hates the smell of menstrual blood (the only smell she hates). Her period is just a "routine problem," until she has to write about it.

Anna's reference to James Joyce's Ulysses *comments not only on the transgressive nature of expressing the inelegant parts of human life through the medium of literature but also on the form she has extended from Joyce, which forces everything (including crudeness) into the frame of a story: the attempt to capture the totality of a day, a prototypical day that in turn stands for the totality of human experience.*

Anna will be seeing Comrade John, or as she ironically calls him, "Comrade Butte." The previous week, after an argument, they joked that they would have shot one another if they had been in Russia; after John left, Anna and Jack discussed the changes in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death—Jack was the only person with whom she could actually criticize the Soviets or joke about leaving the Party. Today, Jack has asked her to give John, who is his superior, reports on two books; Jack, like Anna, is tired of the Party's intellectual decline, but he has faith that it will recover in the long term. She loves and will miss Party members' vigorous commitment to their philosophy, even if it is stuck in the internationalism of the past.

Anna is torn between the sense in which the Party is one of the only social spaces where ideas have power and people like John's blind commitment to particular ideas, at the expense of questioning and improving those ideas. Whereas the Mashopi Hotel group (besides Willi) was so flexible in its ideology that it never took political action, the Party's rigid ideology prevents John from even taking new ideas seriously. Jack is the closest foil to Anna's own perspective on the relationship between ideas and politics—his optimism about the Party's future does not seem like the product of ideological difference, but rather a difference in basic faith.

Anna is a half hour late to the Party office—even though she is unpaid—and washes herself in the bathroom, hoping "to defeat the sour musty smell," before heading up to John's office. She remembers what Jack has told her about John's energy and brilliance in the past; she laments how the Communist Party breaks and degrades people like him. For the first time, she starts to see societies and institutions (including the Party) as absorbing their critics, rather than fighting them off; older, hardened members balance out young revolutionaries, who eventually grow older and more hardened. She hates this view of life as "simply a process, a wheel turning." She remembers a recurring nightmare she has about a man who is about to be executed by firing squad, but after a shout of "we have won!" from the streets, trades places with one of the soldiers and shoots him instead.

Anna's work at the Party is unpaid, much like women's work in the home. Furthermore, despite getting her labor for free, the Party does not seem to appreciate her contributions. The Party not only absorbs critics by, say, turning John from a freethinking revolutionary into a dogmatic bureaucrat—it is also in the process of doing this to her, and she recognizes the arbitrariness of who ends up in which "role," defending or attacking an institution one nevertheless believes in. Of course, Anna is already anxiously trying to efface a part of herself—her period, the unseemly baggage of her femininity—in order to fit into the Party.

It is clear that Comrade John has already decided to publish the two books—Anna notes that she thinks highly of neither and remembers John's mild disdain for her as a "successful bourgeois writer." The first book is a badly written account by a bricklayer, "totally inside the current myth" and divorced from reality, but Anna resigns herself to the fact that they will publish it anyway. She realizes that she has been cast in the role of the "captive critic," as John's "youthful self, sitting opposite him, which he has to defeat." When Jack evokes a specific criticism from her, John bangs his fist and yells, "Publish and be damned!" Anna laughs, John asks why, and she says that he proves "the intellectual rottenness of the Party." She worries about hurting Jack—John is furious—but the book will still be published.

In the Party, as in Michael's life, Anna is called to faithfully play a role and never step out of line, rather than genuinely expressing her individual feelings and personality; again, she becomes a pawn in men's symbolic struggles for power, usually with themselves. It is unclear whether John disdains Anna's success or her class status, but his indifference to her critiques—even though her job was to critique the books—recalls the television writers' indifference to the intent and themes of Anna's art, which they value only for its potential success as a cultural commodity.

Comrade John asks about the other book, and realizing that the Party's actual operations in no way match her interesting conversations with Jack, Anna decides that she has to quit. She affirms that "both books will be published" and leaves to go read the English newspapers and magazines from all of the communist countries, to see if any stories are "suitable for British conditions." She realizes that the writing is horrible, "curiously jolly," and driven by "the myth"—the same one that drove her to write *Frontiers of War*. She resolves to never write again. The only truly artistic moments in anything she reads are "flashes of genuine personal feeling," and she hopes that she will come across some piece driven entirely by such feeling. This creates a paradox, given the impulse behind her own work.

The "myth" seems to be just like the one Anna earlier realized she needed to believe in to stay in the Party, or the ones that appeared in her dreams about the Soviet Union as a giant red fabric: a faith in the absolute truth and future potency of one's ideas, which is tied to the sometimes dangerous (but often politically necessary) desire to dissolve the current order of things. Anna's search for genuine feeling is what drives her attempts to capture her truth in the notebooks. While Frontiers of War *was borne of Anna's strong feelings about love, war, and dissolution, she used the novel to displace her feelings through a completely imagined story rather than expressing and confronting them directly in the book—which is what she seems to believe good art must do.*

Most of Anna's work for the Party consists in giving lectures about art—the transformation from communal to individual art, driven by the pain of modernity—once, she stammered and failed to finish her lecture, and she knows "what that stammer means." She realizes that she wanted this work so that she could hold a public mirror to her feelings about art; despite her hopes for communal art, she and Jack recently realized that their conversations are all about "the individual conscience."

Years after publishing her novel, unable to write anything else, Anna is much more a critic and theorist of art than an artist; but she recognizes that criticism, too, requires the creative energy that she has lost (as represented by her stammer). Her desire for communal art represents her search for communion with others in a world increasingly fragmented and dominated by individual self-interest. Yet it also seems to contrast with her search for art borne of "genuine personal feeling."

The bulk of Anna's work is what Jack jokingly calls "welfare work." Before she begins work, she goes downstairs and washes, wondering whether another version of herself might soon decide not to leave the Party and realizing that Michael and Jack, "the ex-communist" and "the communist bureaucrat" respectively, represent her nightmare about the execution. She goes upstairs, realizes that she cannot bear to keep reading magazines, and ends up sharing lunch with Jack, discussing stories of anti-Semitism and repression in the Soviet Union. She starts to find their conversation politically dishonest—they are safe in London—and feel that words are losing their meaning, that they cannot adequately refer to the atrocities in question. She admits that she is planning to leave the Party and begins to regret how this will cleave her from Jack. She starts to cry and decides to do so in her office.

Just as Anna recognizes the arbitrariness in the roles of revolutionary and bureaucrat (as Michael and Jack) she sees an arbitrariness in her own split between the reluctant loyalist who needs the Party for intellectual sustenance and political hope and the cynic who loses all faith in the Party's potential. She is capable of considering the two opposite dimensions of herself together but recognizes that the emotional strength in this self-awareness also prevents her from acting. Her sense that language is inadequate to represent the horrors of authoritarian repression, of course, reflects her loss of faith in art and writing—but also the increasingly unbridgeable gap between thought and action, ideas and reality.

Anna turns to her "welfare work," which gives her "the illusion of doing something useful." She replies to the letters that accompany novel submissions, invariably from Party members bitter that their manuscripts were rejected elsewhere, excited to contribute to the communist future, but apologetic about their lack of time to write. She gives the writers "practical advice" while working across from Rose Latimer, the "typical Party member" who blindly idolizes anything to do with the working classes and Anna cannot wait to rid herself of. She doubts that her "welfare work" has made any real difference and decides to visit Jack.

Ironically enough, Anna feels a severe sense of alienation from her work—which is the classic Marxist critique of labor under capitalism—even though she is working for the Communist Party. Anna's letter-writing work is clearly the basis for her character Ella's job at the Women at Home *magazine in the yellow notebook; most of the terrible manuscripts she receives reflects people's blind faith in the communist myth—a faith, it seems, that they use in order to cope with the misery of their daily lives, which resembles the misery of the housewives whom Ella advises. However, these manuscripts are also borne of people's true convictions, which calls into question what Anna means when she calls for art borne out of "genuine feeling." Rose Latimer, who notably shares a name with Mr and Mrs Lattimer from the black notebook, appears to share this naïve faith.*

Jack is a historian of the Party in the Soviet Union—his writings are too truthful to be published. When Anna says she is unsure what to do with herself after leaving the Party, he reminds her that, throughout history, few people have the right conscience for their times. She talks about "being split," and he goes on about scientific achievement, the grandeur of which prevents anyone from being whole. Surprisingly, when she accuses him of seeing someone like Rose Latimer as whole, he agrees; he tells her that he thinks her "soul is in danger" because her royalties can pay her bills and she might end up "doing nothing at all very much except brood about everything." Anna thinks that might be perfectly fine. They embrace and she leaves.

Jack's scholarship—which is unpublishable because it conflicts with the communist myth—can only express a truth in private, precisely as Anna feels unable for most of the book to express her true experiences outside her hidden notebooks. Having a historically appropriate consciousness—a key belief in communism, which thinks that revolutionaries must combine a transhistorical understanding of power with a sensitivity to the present time's best routes to revolution—means being split, and so Rose Latimer's wholeness seems to reflect her narrow-mindedness. Science's success seems to make wholeness impossible not only because it gives people knowledge about themselves that seems to conflict with normal intuitions about identity based on the division between body and mind—people are at once bundles of molecules and conscious, moral beings—but also because of the global catastrophe it promises through the development of nuclear weapons and events of global war.

Anna takes a stuffy bus home through the rain, wishing to bathe and determining to "leave behind the Anna who goes to the office." The house is empty; she takes a bath and notices that her dress has a "slightly grimy" collar, picks another outfit and imagines Michael's criticisms. She makes two dinners (one for Janet, one for her and Michael) and runs to the store for sugar, where the workers call her pet names like "love and duck." Molly, Tommy, and Janet have since come home; Molly tells Janet a story, and Janet takes a messy bath, then eats dinner in bed while Anna tells her a story about "a little girl called Janet." Molly leaves for the theater and Anna sings Janet to sleep.

While Anna pursues her political beliefs and fight for women's liberation at the office, as soon as she gets home, she returns to a stereotyped woman's role, organizing her life around Michael and Janet. Anna ends Janet's day by turning her life into a story, much like she packages her own experiences into fiction—with a clear beginning, end, plotline, and message—in order to cope with her actual uncertainty and frustrations. Of course, this novel's break with that usual form reflects Lessing's attempt to create unity without blocking out a dimension of the self—just as Anna seeks to do in her conversation with Jack.

Anna makes veal for Michael and herself, feeling delighted until her happiness disappears into self-doubt and tiredness, guilt and dissatisfaction. She attributes both the happiness and the negativity to "a habit of the nerves from the past." She ruminates about Michael, the other woman whom he loves more, how he will react to the news of her period, how his love will erase "the resentment against the wound inside my body which I didn't choose to have."

Anna's final job of the day is her first labor of feeling, although it requires her to explain away her other feelings as learned, mechanical reactions to the world rather than genuine responses to her particular situation.

Molly returns from the theater and asks if Michael is coming—Anna promises that he is, but Molly doubts her. Anna tells Molly that she will leave the Party and complains of Tommy's newest girlfriend, who dislikes Molly and voices the criticisms of her that Tommy can't (just like all his previous girlfriends). Molly remembers Tommy working in the coalmines instead of going to war, but also all the people who have done that work all their lives. Molly also worries about losing the ability to "see anything *pure* in what people do," worries that Tommy will marry this girlfriend, who is "one of those academic socialists from Oxford" and talks to him about financial planning.

While Molly's pessimism gives her clear insight into Anna's life, she is distraught to hear the same cynical perspective from Tommy's girlfriend. Whereas Tommy worked in the mines temporarily and takes pride among his bourgeois family and acquaintances in his momentary status as a worker, the true working class never wins the same recognition, which suggests that, as a leftist, he is using them instrumentally rather than truly fighting on their behalf (much like his academic girlfriend or, of course, Anna and Molly themselves). Molly's question about "purity"—in other words, whether anyone can ever exclusively act for the common good and not for self-interest—is clearly also a question about her and Anna's participation in politics.

Anna realizes Michael will not be coming; he calls and says he can't make it, but that he will call her again soon, and that he is "sorry if you cooked especially for me," which infuriates her because of the "if." She hangs up and throws away almost all the veal and "realise[s], at last, that this is the end." She feels overcome with chaos, drinks some wine, and cries herself to sleep.

The only part of her day that Anna enjoyed—cooking for Michael—proves fruitless; he knows that she would have cooked for him but refuses to recognize the emotional significance of their dinner to her or imagine the energy that Anna must have invested into it. She sees Michael standing her up in this instance as proof of the entire relationship's failure, both because she is writing retrospectively and because the gap between them is so profound.

Every word of the above story is crossed through, and Anna writes below: "No, it didn't come off. A failure as usual." There is a "more neat and orderly" entry for September 15th, 1954: it was a "normal day," during which Anna resolved to quit the Party; she "must now be careful not to start hating" it, as she started to with Jack. Janet is "as usual"; Molly is distraught over Tommy; Anna understands "that Michael had finally decided to break it off" and "must pull [her]self together."

Not only have Anna's dinner and relationship with Michael failed; she also sees her attempt at writing the precise truth of her internal monologue as a failure, somehow too subjective to capture the truth of experience. So she replaces it with a dry, objective account of just the facts, which clearly seems to miss the subjective truth of fiction.

FREE WOMEN: 3

After she and Anna spend a week with Tommy in the hospital, Molly remarks that it is "odd" that they now accept it as inevitable that he will live, although they could have easily accepted the opposite. They search for the singular way that they "definitively failed him." Tommy is now blind, but his brain will be fine, and "time established itself again," with Molly crying endlessly and Anna busy caring for her and for Janet, who is terrified.

Since the novel declares that Tommy will die, then reveals that he survives only after lengthy excerpts from Anna's notebooks, Molly is calling out the reader as much as herself and Anna, as well as pointing to the mystery of what is fact and fiction in this book more broadly—which Tommy's blindness here also represents.

They all seem to forget "the accusing dogged obstinacy" that led to Tommy's suicide attempt. When he awakens, he realizes he is blind and goes silent after Molly confirms it—afterward, Richard scolds her for telling Tommy the truth. She suggests that Tommy had been awake the whole time, but was just waiting until his whole family arrived, and somehow took pleasure in hearing about his blindness from her, in front of everyone. Richard, disgusted, leaves with Marion.

The people around Tommy have difficulty connecting his past self to his present one and do not worry that he will eventually carry out his earlier suicide plans, even as they continue to see him as malicious and misanthropic; while Richard wants to give Tommy false hope, Molly considers it better to confront than potentially delay the realization of ungainly truths.

Tommy never has a breakdown, but is judicious and calm, "a model patient" in the nurses' eyes. He goes home and quickly learns to care for himself without his eyesight, which he scarcely seems to mind having lost; he moves into the first-floor living room but insists that nothing else should change in their lives. He starts learning Braille and relearning to write with the "large, square and clear" handwriting of a child.

As in the previous sections of Free Women, *Tommy confronts and accepts the truth like the "latter-day stoic[s]" Anna suggested they may be, even though he is also now cut off from the world by his blindness—like Anna's, his life now largely consists of reading and writing alone in his room. As character foils for one another, they both seek to communicate the world's truths despite restricting themselves to a confined space and perspective.*

Molly returns to work, and Anna stops visiting Tommy, who prefers being alone and to whom she had nothing to say. Molly calls her from phone booths or work to complain that Tommy never leaves his room or asks for her help with anything. Visitors blame Molly, with more or less tact, and Anna defends her.

Tommy completely withdraws from the social world, too, in a way even more extreme than he had before his suicide attempt. As he pushes Molly away, her sense of motherhood begins to erode and his future is no longer the central question in their relationship.

However, both Anna and Molly feel, and are afraid to mention, "something else" beneath their panic: Anna and Molly's "years' long, slow growth of intimacy was checked and broken." Tommy dominates the house and hears everything that happens in it. Molly bursts unexpectedly into tears and spends all her time working or sitting alone at home; she tries bringing a man home but realizes that Tommy would hear every moment. She starts to "get physically irritated" when she sees her son, who seems to enjoy frightening her, but is also somehow "happy for the first time in his life." Molly's hair has begun greying, her eyes falling sullen.

Tommy's mere presence in the household—others' fear that he is listening in, rather than his interactions with anyone—begins to also erode Molly's connections to the rest of the world: he draws her into the same isolation that defines his existence. While isolation brings Tommy a sense of tranquility and wholeness by absolving him of any obligations to his mother or the rest of the world, Molly experiences this isolation as breakdown, since her sense of value in life hinged on her relationships to others.

Molly calls Anna to report that Marion has started visiting Tommy every day, for hours. She has also stopped drinking, and Richard is incredibly angry. Anna goes to visit him one day at the office—she is glad he did not come to her, for she is still devastated to remember Tommy going through her **notebooks** before he shot himself and feels that she is losing possession of her room. She is surprised to find Richard's desk and office building so impressive; Richard's secretary reminds her of Marion and is clearly having an affair with him.

Anna worries that, when Tommy read her notebooks, the despair and negativity she hoped to keep private spread out into the world, exactly as she'd feared—although Tommy wanted her precisely to unify and publicize her turmoil. Perhaps Tommy's suicide has something to do, at least symbolically, with giving Anna "another chance," as he promised.

Richard complains that Marion is spending too much time with Tommy, talking about politics, and not enough with her own children. Anna suggests he "employ someone" to take care of the children, and Richard worries about the cost, and having "a strange woman around the house." Anna mentions that Marion is certainly doing better; Richard is "genuinely wounded" by "Marion's escape."

Marion and Tommy's relationship, a kind of surrogate marriage, threatens Richard because it relieves them of their previous dependence on him; despite (or perhaps because of) his obvious, immense power in the workplace, Richard seems unable to grapple with the possibility of losing control over his wife and son.

Richard is considering divorcing Marion and sending her "off on some holiday" with Tommy, while he introduces his children to his latest mistress, Jean. Molly would not mind, Anna insisted, but Tommy might—he is keeping Molly "as his prisoner." Enraged, Richard calls Anna and Molly a "filthy-minded, loathsome, cold-brained pair of…" and Anna decides to leave, marveling that her relationship with Richard is based on their mutual need for her to abuse him. She realizes that his door only opens if he pushes a button on his desk.

Relationships between men and women seem to be about a mutual, unhealthy need for unequal power. Anna implies that Tommy somehow needs his mother's continued misery for his own sustenance, which seems strange given Tommy's newfound happiness and relationship with Marion. Perhaps she is pointing to the fact that Richard cannot stand Marion's happiness, and—like his son, apparently—wants to keep his wife "as his prisoner" rather than letting her pursue her own happiness. Of course, Richard momentary keeps Anna as a literal prisoner in his office, making her substitute for his failing marriage just as he tried to make her substitute sexually for his wife through an affair—yet Anna seems to desire, even "need," this imprisonment just as Molly lets Tommy control her life rather than pursuing it independently of him.

Richard complains about Marion "outwitt[ing]" him and "cheat[ing him] out of a normal life." Anna assures him that "the supply of secretaries is unlimited," but he worries that Jean wants to marry soon, whether to him or someone else. Anna finally convinces Richard to open the door and suggests that he offer Tommy a job, which might work "if you handle things right," despite Tommy's politics. Richard insists that he hates his job and wants to retire; Anna goes for the door, but Richard jumps in front of it and closes it, then stares at her with a sinister smile that recalls the night he tried to sleep with her. Finally, he opens the door again, and Anna leaves for the underground.

The prospect of giving Tommy a job is no longer about Tommy's future, but about ensuring Richard's continued control over his son; Richard ironically complains about losing the normal nuclear family he had long since abandoned, and then about his job, even though he insists on the nobility of his profession and wants Tommy to follow him into the business world. This confirms Tommy's suspicion at the beginning of the book: capitalism erodes people's spirit through alienating work, even among the bourgeoisie (the class that owns property and capital, like Richard).

The rush-hour crowd overwhelms Anna, and she leaves the ticket line to hide by the wall, where she wonders about "all these people, caught by the terrible pressure of the city—all except Richard and people like him." She forces herself through the ticket line and onto the train, where she wonders what it means for someone to "crack up" and repeats to herself, "Anna, I am Anna," reminding herself that Janet (and only Janet) needs her. Anna imagines herself writing in her room, then Tommy reading her **notebooks**.

Anna interprets these rush-hour commuters through her Marxist perspective on capitalism: even though Richard is unhappy as a corporate executive, she sees the deeper misery among those forced to work their lives away in unfulfilling jobs in order to stay afloat. Richard creates the city's "terrible pressure," everyone else gets subjected to it, and nobody ends up happy. Anna feels the same sense of alienation and salvages her identity only by thinking about how her labor as a mother is necessary. This recalls Tommy's comparison of Anna and Molly (who are "several things") with mindless office workers like Richard (who could "never be different")—but Anna seems to be losing track of her multiplicity as she starts to define herself through labor.

Anna opens her eyes to see a hideous man staring at her, smiling, "looking into my face and imagining it under him." She tries to inch away from him, but he follows her when she gets off the train, asking if she would "like a walk?" She is frightened and realizes that "this happens every day, this is living in the city, it doesn't affect me—but it *was* affecting her." Seeing that she needs to "see something or touch something that wasn't ugly," she buys fruit and feels better, "immune" to the man who is still behind her.

As Anna confronts capitalism's assault on her identity and humanity, she must also confront this man's: she can see him reducing her to her body, imagining her as a tool for his sexual pleasure. While, on the one hand, Anna is losing her usual resilience to the world, she is also finally opening herself to the full horror of the fact that "this happens every day." Her search to find "immunity" through beauty clearly represents her search to insulate herself from the violence of markets and men through art.

Anna is not worried about returning late, since she has Ivor, the upstairs boarder, who has recently become Janet's friend and has started looking after her. Anna thinks he is not "a real man" and wonders what that could mean—perhaps it means the "whole area of tension" with men like Michael and Richard. Ivor's friend Ronnie has "moved into Ivor's room and to his bed," and Anna does not much care, considering it "the price she was expected to pay for Ivor's new friendship with Janet." However, she dislikes Ronnie—"the type rather than the person," his cultivated hair and teeth in particular. Anna wonders how Janet might react if Anna married a "real man." Janet would probably be resentful, but maybe "children need the tension."

While Anna takes no issue with Ivor and Ronnie's homosexuality in itself, she does think of them as deficient men (whereas, despite their homosexuality, Paul and Jimmy were still "real men"). Under her valorization of "real men," Anna clearly recognizes that her feelings are vague and problematic, and that there is a profound difference between being a good lover and a good father—she struggles to square her internalized desire to be controlled with the equality and respect she knows should define a healthy relationship.

Anna hears Ivor reading Janet a story about a girls' school and feels that he is mocking "the feminine world." She thinks this might be a stronger version of the "cold evasive emotion" straight men feel for women. Ronnie is singing, seemingly "mocking 'normal' love," and Anna worries about "all this" affecting Janet. He smiles at her; she finds it malicious and notes that he and Ivor seem to always dominate her space. He then walks out of the room and tells Anna that Janet is "such a delightful child." Ronnie seems like "a well-brought-up young girl," and Anna smiles back as a warning, which he seems to understand—but she knows she is too afraid to kick him out.

Anna at once sees Ivor and Ronnie as overly feminine (and therefore not "real men") and as more extreme versions of "real men," with a deeper misogyny that, unlike straight men's, is not tempered by a desire to be with women. Their effeminacy, to Anna, at once betrays their failure as men and parodies women. Ivor and Ronnie take over Anna's household just as Tommy takes over Molly's—but they do so by threatening her own role as Janet's mother and sole caregiver. Even though Ronnie is "mocking 'normal' love," he and Ivor seem to have a much more equal and stable relationship than anyone else in the book.


Anna fills a glass of water to calm herself, feeling both that the flat was poisoned and that she is saving herself from something. She opens her room door and sees a menacing figure, which turns out to be Marion. Anna thinks that her intelligence is the only thing keeping her from "cracking up." Anna and Marion have a drink—Tommy has told Marion that drinking normally is braver than giving up alcohol altogether—and Anna mentions that she has just seen Richard as Ivor finishes his story for Janet upstairs. Marion looks like "an abundant, happy, lively matron."

Marion seems to have taken on Tommy's sinister air, but so has the whole world: Anna is seeing unreal threats everywhere, in everyone, and Marion is harmless as ever—her only threat to Anna is her apparent happiness, which reminds Anna of what she is missing (much like Ivor and Ronnie's relationship).


Marion explains that, ever since she has started reading with Tommy and infuriating her family with her interest in politics, she feels like "a new person." Marion asks whether Richard is serious about the divorce—he is, Anna explains—and they agree that his secretary looks just like Marion in her youth. Marion realizes that she has been "wrapped up in" Richard for so long, incredibly miserable in her marriage, and "what for?" He is neither good-looking nor intelligent, and she thinks, "My God, for that creature I've ruined my life." Richard keeps falling in love with his "type," which has "nothing to do with" Marion, who laughs and fights the impulse to ask Anna to fill her glass.

Marion now clearly sees that Richard's indifference was the cause of her unhappiness but also that she has the power to escape it by leaving him; she seems delightfully "free," just as she has always thought Anna to be. Yet, in reality, Marion has still put herself under a man's control (Tommy's) and Anna resents the lack of human connection that defines her "freedom." Anna doesn't feel free because she is *free; Marion feels free because she is* not; *Lessing questions whether there is a real distinction between freedom and unfreedom, or whether (like so many words for Anna) these ideas have lost their meanings.*


Anna, resenting the "awful dripping coy little girl" that Marion has became, asks what Tommy thinks; he has told Marion to "make [Richard] face up to his responsibilities," she reports, by simply ignoring him and focusing on "bigger things," living "for others and not myself." She asks where "that black leader" (Tom Mathlong) is, and which prison he is in—she wants to help him—but Anna says he probably cannot even receive letters and is likely imprisoned in the middle of nowhere. Marion rattles off a speech about Africa skimmed directly from newspaper headlines. Anna suggests joining an organization and wonders if Tommy really could be so naïve as to think up this plan.

Anna hates Marion's naivety—something she remarked in the yellow notebook that Ella has lost as a result of her breakup. Yet Marion reflects not the juvenile naivety of a blind faith in love but independence—both a faith in her ability to survive without Richard and a faith in the same liberation struggles that Anna quickly lost hope in during her time in Africa. Yet nothing about Marion's faith is original, much like that of the optimistic workers and writers whom Anna encounters in the Communist Party.



Marion hopes to unite the three of them, working "for the common cause," which makes Anna realize that Tommy has "decided to save her soul." Marion apologizes; Anna gives her the address she has asked for, although Tom Mathlong, the man she seeks, "won't get [the letter] of course." Marion leaves and Anna calls Tommy to ask about his motives—he thinks that "it would be good for Marion" and agrees that this is "a sort of therapy." Anna insists that *she* does not need therapy herself; Tommy thanks her and hangs up. She laughs in anger and thinks about how Tommy has become "a sort of zombie," not quite mad but "something new…"

Tommy seems to be offering Anna the second chance he promised her; oddly, he tries to kill himself before trying to save the world when his initial plan fails—both are ways of dissolving his own self, and his inhuman sense of confidence and invulnerability points to the sense in which such blind activism also emerges from bad faith. Locked away in a prison, Tom Mathlong represents the impossible, intangible revolution in which Western Communists have so much naïve faith—and the futility of writing to him parallels Anna's sense of futility in her own writing, which has never seemed to catch a likeminded audience.

Anna has to bring Janet dinner. When she does, Janet asks whether Anna likes Ivor and Ronnie—Anna says she does like them, but Janet knows she actually despises Ronnie, "because he makes Ivor behave in a silly way." Janet eats in silence and goes to bed.

Anna always tries to put on a façade of happiness and certainty for Janet, who now begins to see through it. Anna's anger at Ronnie seems to be a much greater threat to Janet than Ivor and Ronnie's apparently feminine influence.

Anna decides that Ronnie is the problem and figures she will tell Ivor to get rid of him. She feels as she did about Jemmie, a previous boarder whom she disliked but did not want to evict because he was colored—but he ended up returning to Ceylon. Ivor and Ronnie, too, will have trouble getting anywhere else to live, but Anna wonders if this is her problem. Unable to convince herself that it isn't, she rages internally against the notion of property—"*my* home, *my* possessions, *my* rights"—and worries about finding Janet one of the "few real men left" in England.

Anna now recognizes that Ronnie is her "problem" but also feels torn between her desire for control of her household and her sense of obligation to help the queer couple avoid the discrimination they would face elsewhere—just like her contradictory desire for "real men," her instinctual sense of property contradicts her more basic values.

Anna finds Ronnie using her lotion in the bathroom, wearing expensive clothes that suggest "he should be in some harem, and not in this flat." He knows what is coming and complains about needing to look "distinguished"; she proposes he find "a permanent rich protector" (he has tried) and despairs to think that she herself "might have been born a Ronnie." They have a tense exchange over the lotion, and Ronnie leaves for the bedroom. On her way upstairs, Anna hears Ivor and Ronnie announce, "Fat buttocky cows…" and "Sagging sweaty breasts…" from their room, then make some obscene noises that infuriate and frighten her. They slam their door and laugh behind it; Anna is "appalled. At herself." She sees through Ronnie and Ivor's antics, yet still feels hurt.

Anna's animosity toward Ronnie clearly represents her disdain for women who marry for money and status rather than love—in a sense, this means betraying their humanity for the sake of material ends, but in another sense their values are exclusively material, an extreme symptom of the erosion of love that Anna continues to feel. Now, Ivor and Ronnie clearly do mock Anna with descriptions of grotesque femininity—but she directs her anger at herself for letting herself be affected by something she knows does not matter.

Anna smokes in bed and wonders how "this new frightened vulnerable Anna" has come into being, realizing that it is because of Michael leaving her. Yet she is glad to think she can be strong "just so long as she was loved by a man." She worries about Tommy, too, and thanks her "increasingly cold, critical, balancing little brain" for saving her from the chaos.

While Anna is clearly troubled by her realization that she cannot feel strong on her own—that she needs to derive her strength from a man's love—her ability to admit this suggests that she is finally and sincerely confronting the anxiety she preferred to disregard at the beginning of Free Women.

Imagining a dried-out well, Anna determines to **dream** about water. Instead, she dreams about needing to trek across the desert, toward beautiful, colorful mountains, with no water in sight. When she awakens, she knows the dream is a sign of self-knowledge, which means that "she must shed burdens." She tells Ivor to leave; he offers money, which she refuses, and says they will talk about it that evening. Surprisingly, Janet is not fazed when Anna mentions the coming evictions, but she does ask to go to boarding school. Ronnie mentions that perhaps he could help with shopping.

The water in Anna's dream represents the wholeness, strength, and happiness she hopes to achieve through love—but her dream about a failed quest for water instead points to the obstacles she must overcome for love. While this dream fails to remedy Anna's pain, it does spur her to action—perhaps her first decisive action in all of Free Women.

That night, Ivor asks that only Ronnie leave, and Anna agrees. Ronnie makes a scene that leads Anna to feel like "a bitch for turning him out" and shows Ivor "that he had lost his mistress." Ivor returns to his old, reclusive self, and later reunites with Ronnie, who moves in down the block.

Anna's precise motivation for evicting Ronnie (whether genuine concern for Janet, jealousy and displaced anger about her own relationships, or homophobia) remains unclear, but she nevertheless overturns the household's new order, reclaiming her previous control—it is, in this sense, born of a conservative impulse.

THE NOTEBOOKS: 3

Both columns of the black **notebook** are now filled. Under "*Source*," on November 11, 1955: A man kicks a pigeon, expecting it to fly away, but it hits a lamppost and falls to the ground. A woman yells at him and a crowd gathers as the pigeon writhes on the ground. Two boys mock the woman's concern and "an efficient frowning man" proclaims the pigeon dead, then picks it up, and finds himself unsure what to do with the body. The woman follows the kicker, demanding his name and address, until the boys distract her and start making fun of the efficient man, who threatens to call the police. They leave; the woman takes the pigeon to bury it at home.

This memory of Anna's centers on the people's varying responses to the pigeon's death: the kicker commits violence without realizing it or truly caring, the woman feels a deep sense of concern and injustice, the boys mock her empathy, and the "efficient" man is completely disconnected. Respectively, these seem to quite loosely represent Jimmy, Maryrose, Paul, and Willi's attitudes about violence and justice in the story that follows.

November 12: Anna **dreams** about the pigeon, realizing only upon waking that it reminds her of a story from Africa, one weekend at the Mashopi Hotel. Mrs Boothby brings a .22 rifle to breakfast, asking if anyone can shoot—which Paul Blackenhurst can—because Mr Boothby wants pigeon pie. She directs Paul to a nearby marsh, and he goes with Jimmy, Willi, Maryrose, and Anna out into the veld after breakfast.

While Paul is training for the Air Force, ironically this episode is the closest thing he experiences to combat. Anna's group agrees to go more out of boredom than any sense of obligation to the Boothby family or taste for pigeon, which shows how truly lost and out of place they are in Africa.

The group passes "a million white butterflies" and a cloud of other insects mating furiously, "the very emblem of stupidity." Paul Blackenhurst suggests that the butterflies are also "pursuing vile sex"; Paul and Jimmy crouch down to pull busy grasshoppers off one another and reorganize two couples, re-matching insects with others of their own size—but the bugs return to their initial pairings. Jimmy jokes that perhaps some are same-sex couples. Everyone is uncomfortable, although they would not have been if Paul had said the same thing. Paul crushes his two insect couples, which offends Maryrose, and gives a speech imitating Stalin, which alienates everyone.

The insects' gratuitous coupling points to the group's hedonistic attitude in Africa and, of course, romantic frustrations. While Paul and Jimmy first try to rearrange the couples and create better matches (much as the group's members yearn to shuffle their own romantic loyalties), the insects revert back to normal (just as Anna remains in her unsatisfying relationship with Willi till the end, despite loving George and eventually pursuing Paul). Paul crushes the insect just as he unempathetically dismisses so many suitors, especially Jimmy, who uses the insects to express his own discomfort with his sexuality and love for Paul.

They walk on through the veld; Anna remembers the distinct kind of heat, which suggests that it must have been October or November, a few months before Paul Blackenhurst died the morning after eloping with Anna down this same path in the veld. They reach a clump of trees—they see only one pigeon but hear innumerable, maddening cicadas. Paul shoots the pigeon and, like a hunting dog, Jimmy retrieves it. They can hear more pigeons in the distance. Jimmy pokes at some holes he finds in the sand and, irritated, Paul takes his grass-stem and unearths the insect that made them.

In retrospect, Anna imagines this episode as foreshadowing her eventual move from Willi to Paul, but this reveals the fundamental difference between literature and experience, which lacks such definite links between the present and the future.

Two more pigeons arrive; Paul Blackenhurst shoots them and Jimmy reluctantly retrieves them. Then one more—Paul splatters Jimmy's arm with blood but fails to kill the bird. Jimmy challenges him to finish the job, but the bird dies before Paul can figure out what to do. Jimmy angrily calls him "damned lucky," and Paul acknowledges that "the Gods favour me," but remarks that he could not have killed the pigeon with his own hands. They still need two more. They watch the ant-eating insect that dug the sand pits trap and kill two ants. Paul explains that these "realities of nature" make him grateful to have come to Africa; Jimmy says, "I hate this country" and declares that he cannot wait to return home.

Paul and Jimmy's tense relationship is on full display: while Jimmy does Paul's bidding, they both resent one another—Paul because of Jimmy's feelings, Jimmy because Paul rejects him. Paul's interest in "realities of nature" (meaning the survival of the strong and the death of the week) probably relates to his desire to prove his own masculinity and superiority, for indeed he takes pride in his relative power in the group—although it is really only because he claims this power, and not because anyone respects him (although Anna and Jimmy are in love with him, he is only the group's core because he argues with Willi for sport, and Maryrose hates him).

Another pigeon approaches, but turns and flies away; some farmworkers pass with averted eyes and an obvious fear of the rifle-carrying white people. Paul Blackenhurst goes into a tongue-in-cheek speech about how the colony has enough resources for its million and a half blacks—like the whole world, says Maryrose. Humorlessly, Willi says to look to "the philosophy of the class struggle," and everyone but Maryrose laughs at him. Paul asks Maryrose why she never laughs—she did when she was with her brother, of course, for she was happy (which none of the others have ever been). Paul shoots another bird on his second try, then retrieves it himself when Jimmy refuses.

The black workers' presence is a reminder that the socialists are nevertheless agents of colonial power. Paul makes an obvious point, which everyone in the group accepts as true yet all the white colonists who surround them refuse to consider: that their own power in Africa is unjust, and that it would be better for them to be overthrown and their resources distributed to the native population. Of course, the paradox is that they are there anyway, and to fight for justice would mean to fight themselves. Paul seems to recognize this irony but puts his self-interest above the global interest in justice, which is why he makes fun of Willi. Willi seems not to recognize their own position within systems of power and oppression, and simply talks about revolution dispassionately.

Paul Blackenhurst insists on shooting one more bird, describing the "toothsome pie" that they might all share with Mr Boothby and asking whether the others would remember the pigeons' "tender songs" while eating them; the women would, and Paul says that they are tender, too. He speaks of the fields they can see being covered with houses for workers and criticizes "the simple savagery" of Africans—another joke on Willi, who falls for it easily. Maryrose reassures Willi that they are laughing at his predictability, not his words. Paul disagrees—Willi is wrong—and imagines seeing industry here when he becomes an investor in the future. Three more birds appear, Paul shoots them and Jimmy brings them back. They have enough pigeons, so it is time to head back.

Paul, like the boys in the story that opened this section of the black notebook, mocks the women's empathy for other living creatures and Willi's interest in creating a just society, which Paul interprets as forms of weakness—he sees only the strong dominating the weak. Although he is still clearly joking, Paul's declaration that he will become an investor is the closest he gets to admitting his true values. Anna's love for him is deeply contradictory given her own beliefs, but it is merely the first time she falls for narcissistic men overly concerned with their own masculinity—as proven by her relationship with Michael and her coming romances in the remainder of the book.

A large beetle approaches, and Jimmy puts it in the ant-eater pit, where it fights with the other insect; another bird lands, and Paul Blackenhurst shoots it, and another, which does not die—but he wrings its neck, then digs out the anteater, which has been decapitated, its jaws stuck in the beetle. He blames Jimmy for "upset[ting] the balance of nature." They stand up, the cicadas begin shrieking again, and two more pigeons land at the other clump of trees—at Maryrose's request, Paul refrains from shooting them. The two walk off together; the others remark that they would be a perfect couple, but of course Maryrose has ill feelings toward Paul. They make the return trip in silence, noticing that nearly all the insects have disappeared.

While Paul sees Jimmy "upset[ting] the balance of nature" by putting the beetle in the sand-pit (which is a thinly veiled reference to his homosexuality), Jimmy is also clearly enforcing the rule of force, introducing a stronger, foreign insect to kill the beetle—a process parallel to the colonialism of which they are agents (but, besides Paul, oppose in principle). Although Paul previously claimed he could not kill a bird with his own hands, he eagerly does so here, and the insects' disappearance points to the group's own immanent dissolution and departure from the Mashopi Hotel.

Under the heading "*Money*": A New Zealand review asks Anna for stories, which she does not write, and then journals, which she thinks are better kept private. She writes an imaginary journal, that of "a young American living on an allowance from his father," traveling in Europe, writing occasionally, disdaining his home country. In entries from April 16 to June 30 in Paris, London, and Italy, the imaginary character names various women, laments his father's inability to understand his art, makes absurd declarations about what "a writer is," drops the names of various novelists, plans to kill himself, and publishes a book of pornography, for which his father sends him money as a congratulations.

Rather than offering the personal reflections the review requests, Anna again expresses her feelings about life and art through fiction—but, here, in a parody of male writers' excesses, art's futility, and her own diary style. This fake journal-within-a-journal covers all the same themes as Anna's notebooks—love, the nature of art and writing, suicide, and publication and money (under which it falls in the black notebook)—but also allows her to at once parody and hide behind the overrepresented, often emotionally unsophisticated male perspective.

Anna shows this to "the young American writer James Schafter," and they add some more entries before getting it published in an American review. Schafter is a peculiar kind of writer; once for two weeks, he gave his worst critic a generous tour of London—the critic insisted that he would "never allow personal feelings to interfere with my critical conscience," but published a nuanced and favorable review after two weeks. Unlike most young writers, James embraces corruption rather than naivety, openly and shamelessly flattering directors and critics, treating it as a joke and sometimes reaping benefits from it. "Integrity is the poor man's codpiece," he insists.

Anna's declaration that James is corrupt, not naïve, recalls her emphatic statement from the yellow notebook that Ella's failed relationship destroyed her "power to create through naivety"*; with his irreverence and mockery, James offers a different pathway to creative expression. Like the black notebook's Paul Blackenhurst, James is more interested in provocation than truth—this allows him to mock the literary world and expose its inanity, but also suggests that he (like Anna) is afraid he has nothing original to say.*

Anna and Schafter decide to invent another journal, this one written by a middle-aged woman, who had spent several years in Africa and "was afflicted with sensibility." The journal is meant for another of James's enemies, Rupert, the "wet, limp, hysterical, homosexual, intelligent" editor of *Zenith*, who has asked Anna for material. On Easter Week, the journal begins with a lengthy description of a Russian Orthodox Church; the people there were "few, yes. But *real*. This was reality. I was aware of reality." The fictional diarist meditates on paganism and sexualizes the priests, finds a deeper awareness and decides she is an agnostic, not an atheist; she goes to a literary party and proposes making a play out of Anna's book, which exposes the true injustice of colonialism: "the tragedy of the whites." She surveys the advantages of clean linens on her way to bed.

This journal's author is a fictionalized version of Anna (who is in turn a fictionalized version of the author), with all her worst qualities caricatured. This character's meditation on "the tragedy of the whites" at once parodies colonial whites' inability to look beyond their own perspective or see blacks' humanity, but also offers scathing self-criticism, not only of Frontiers of War*—which she wrote as a love story in which the great tragedy is the white male protagonist losing his love, not his black lover getting kicked out of his home—but also the black notebook itself, which emphasizes the tragic situation of the Mashopi Hotel socialists who felt their hands were tied, rather than the tragedy of colonial injustice altogether.*

On Easter Sunday, this character has lunch with someone named Harry and they discussed adapting *Frontiers of War* by having the white farmer convince the "young African girl" to get an education and elevate herself past her family of "crude Reserve Natives." She falls in love and accuses him of rape when she learns his true, civilizing motives; this supposedly shows how white people, with their "superior spiritual status," get "dragged down into the animal mud of Africa." Anna's fictionalized version of herself celebrates the "*beautiful* experience" with a bath.

Harry's suggestion comes straight from the clichés of British colonialism, many of which still endure: for him and Anna's parody self, it becomes clear, "the tragedy of the whites" is the fact that British people are "forced" to "civilize" natives. In reality, the tragedy of Anna's group was that they recognized that their own government was illegally occupying land, then oppressing and murdering its inhabitants and their cultures for the sake of British profits—yet the socialists were themselves British subjects and legally could not leave the colony (curiously, with the exception of Anna). They understood that they were the oppressors, could not help being the oppressors, and could not help the oppressed fight back precisely due to the circumstances of oppression (racial segregation).

Anna is apprehensive about her parodied character, whom the editors happily accept. Anna insists that the editors promise to publish the journal anonymously.

Of course, the downside of James Schafter's strategy is that those reading Anna's work see it as authentic—this is further proof of the literary world's immorality and corruption, and Anna's decision to use a pseudonym either betrays her lack of courage or means a refusal to take credit for false art.

Pasted in the **notebook** is a story, "Blood on the Banana Leaves," that James Schafter has written in lieu of the 12 reviews he is supposed to send a literary magazine. After this, he gives up on further parody and writes his serious reviews. In the story, clumsily written and full of heavy-handed racial metaphors, an African couple, John and Noni, lament the violence of colonialism on a stormy night before revealing that Noni has been raped and impregnated by a white man. John goes away to exact revenge, and crude descriptions of the land and plants in the storm close the story, serving as a metaphor for the couple's pain.

John's story, perhaps somewhat like Anna's Frontiers of War, *is built on crude stereotypes that point to obvious injustices. While the authors consider their own work unoriginal for this reason, the broader literary world seems delighted because the public does not recognize colonialism as an evil (and, as Anna has seen, popular media outright* refuses *to do so). This is part and parcel of Anna's disillusionment with politics: she feels both powerless and far more ideologically sophisticated than everyone with the power to create change.*

Anna has pinned in a review of her novel from August, 1952, in *Soviet Writing*. It claims she reveals "the real truth behind British Imperialism!" but criticizes her picture of the class struggle: how could the airman and cook meet, and "where are the working masses" and "class conscious fighters?" Another review, from the *Soviet Gazette*, in 1954, begins by lauding the "majestic and untamed" land and criticizing the unrealistic expectations set by Anna's excellent opening lines. It hopes that she will eventually learn "that a true artistic work must have a revolutionary life—asserting content, ideological profundity, humaneness, as well as artistic quality." Anna's heroines, it insists, are "not yet typical of the deep moral potentialities of the future."

These reviews reveal how ideology prevents people from genuinely appraising art on its own terms; they also exemplify Anna's critiques of communist dogma. First, while Anna did have an important political message, these reviews evaluate her art entirely *based on that message, not based on its truth or literary quality (which the second review only mentions as an ancillary criterion). Secondly, both reviews only understand the problem of African colonialism in terms of the communist concept of class struggle between workers and bourgeois property owners, but (much like Willi Rodde) do not consider the unique factor that makes colonialism different: the racial segregation that prevented Anna from ever encountering "the working masses" or becoming a "class conscious fighter."*

A third review, from the *Soviet Journal for Literature for Colonial Freedom* in 1956, claims that Anna is a "petty psychologiser" of the colonial situation, out of touch with the heroic nationalist struggles. She must "learn from our [Soviet] literature" to overcome her negativity and join the march of historical progress.

This review repeats the others' faults; notably, Anna's black and red notebooks are beginning to overlap in content, as these reviews offer a smooth transition between subsequent notebooks for the first time in the novel.

The red **notebook** continues on November 13, 1955: The Party changes in the two years following Stalin's death; Anna and four other ex-members meet nine current members "with full trust." They are deciding how to reform the British Party and cut its suffocating ties to the Soviet Union. Anna is thrilled, for the first time in many years. An enormous assemblage of newspaper clippings, letters, and schedule documents are stuck in the notebook here.

The Soviet crisis of power and legitimacy after Stalin's death brings communists together rather than dividing them: as their dogma proves untenable, Party members become open to other ideas and perspectives. In other words, Anna learns that the dissolution of order can actually lead to unification and consolidation.

On August 11, 1956: As before in her life, Anna spends "weeks and months in frenzied political activity" but accomplishes "absolutely nothing." The new group grows fast, but an Austrian visitor's speech illustrates its limits: everyone seems to recognize that the Party leadership is hopelessly corrupt, but "instead of drawing the obvious conclusions" that this leadership must be overthrown, Anna's band of rebels simply hopes their superiors will resign. Anna notes that people ignore this speech because of its satirical tone, a tone often shared by the finest speeches at such meetings. She says she has reread the previous **notebook** entry and finds herself "amazed at our naivety."

While many Party members realize the limits of dogmatic communism and agree to pursue alternatives, those in power do not, and so their efforts are blocked. As with the London canvassers' joke about whether they could ever get a candidate elected, Paul's satirical declaration that he will become an investor in African industry, or Anna and James Schafter's parody journals, in the Austrian's speech irony again reveals the truth much more clearly than direct discussion ever can.

On September 20, 1956: Anna stops attending meetings. The rebellious sect understands the risk of creating two competing parties that will denounce each other, but has no better plan; people are quitting the Party en masse, "broken-hearted and cynical to the degree that they were loyal and innocent before." Some are eager to restart the whole cycle of rethinking and reorganizing. Molly calls to say that Tommy has become one of these eager reformists; he reminds Molly of her younger self and seems to believe that socialism will magically emerge in the West next week.

Two years after Anna quit the party in the previous iteration of the blue notebook, she again gives up on politics, as the continued divisions among Party members make decisive political action impossible. While she understands that this cycle of inspiration and disappointment is inevitable—with Tommy caught in the beginning of it, driven by naïve faith—this understanding only sustains a parallel division in her consciousness—she can now be inspired and disappointed at the same time, disappointed because she knows about the cycle yet inspired to finally break it.

Anna's novel *The Shadow of the Third* continues in the yellow **notebook**. "The third" in the novel's title used to be Paul Tanner's wife, then it was Ella's alter ego based on "fantasies about Paul's wife," then her memory of him, and now Ella, who imagines herself "whole, healthy, and happy" as she "cracks." The "thirds" are connected by normal, "respectable" emotions that Ella rejects.

Here, Anna explicitly reflects on her novel's title. All of Ella's thirds are the third member in her sexual triangle with Paul, the other women—and imagined, normal women she could be—who define her status as his mistress by offering him what she cannot. Ella is constantly forced to live in the "shadow" of those thirds; even though she never encounters them in the "real" world, Ella's inability to be any of these thirds defines her life. In this sense, the yellow notebook is a "third" to Anna's life, too, a fictional shadow of her encounters with the world: the story she wishes she could tell about herself, and the novel that defines her inability to get at the truth or unify herself with her art.

Ella moves out of Julia's flat, creating animosity between them. Ella realizes that Julia used to dominate her but now merely complains about her. However, Ella used to be "rather like a willing captive, with the captive's hidden core of independence." Leaving Julia feels like leaving her mother or a marriage.

Ella leaves Julia's flat just as Anna leaves Molly's, turning their relationship into an equal, free association. The notion that people imprisoned by others in relationships retain a "hidden core of independence"—the choice to be in the relationship at all, the decision to remain captive—is key, because it demonstrates the interdependence of freedom and the lack thereof, neither of which is absolute.

Ella feels "more alone than she ever has been," as her closest friendship has fallen into "hatred and resentment," while Ella continues to ruminate about Paul Tanner. Ella also learns that Julia has "protected [her] from a certain kind of attention"—she sees the difference between living alone as a woman and living with another woman. Dr West tries and fails to start an affair with her; instead, he ends up with Patricia Brent, his last choice. Ella is amused but angered at Patricia's reverence for him; she resents Dr West despite feeling that his search for an affair is understandable.

Indeed, Anna's freedom from Molly has deprived her of the freedom to be with Molly and the freedom from unwanted male attention. She realizes in retrospect that her cohabitation with Molly was built on the emotional and social bonds of marriage. Meanwhile, Patricia Brent's excitement about Dr West shows that her cynicism about men was merely a defense mechanism against admitting her loneliness.

Ella talks with Julia at a mutual friend's house, and "their relations are chilly" until she mentions Dr West. Julia replies with a story about an actor from the theater who once came over to complain about his wife, coerced her into sleeping with him through guilt, and then turned out to be impotent. She gave him another chance and he performed no better, calling her a "castrating woman" on his way out.

Ella and Julia again bond over their resentment toward men just like old times, offering each other the mutual understanding they have not found through love. The actor confronts the contradiction between his desires and his physical capacities—in other words, fantasy and reality—by blaming the object of his desire (Julia) rather than accepting his own failure (which he seems poised to repeat).

Ella gets four phone calls from men at work in the next few weeks and tells Julia, who "shows a flash of triumph." They share an awkward silence, considering Ella's departure and the possibility that others believed they were lesbians. Ella thinks that men would have flocked to her and Julia even *more* in that case, believing themselves "redeemers of these lost females." At home, Ella "literally feels poisoned by" her own bitterness. She notes that she used to get the same attention a decade before, but considered herself superior to the men's wives. Now, she thinks she is starting to sound like a spinster.

Men's propensity to pursue lesbians in an attempt to "redeem" them further proves those men's own self-defeating desire to control the world and achieve the impossible. While Ella previously believed that men were choosing her because she was better than their existing wives, now she realizes that they actually see her as lesser than their wives, a source of sexual and psychological gratification to supplement their marriages.

Ella and one of the magazine's subeditors, Jack, are coming up with articles about women's emotional problems. They pick both official and satirical private titles for each article. On their last night working together, he drives her home, and she knows he will try and sleep with her. She feels unattracted to him because of Paul Tanner—who also did not attract her at first.

Ella's knowledge and feelings again pull her in opposite directions with regards to men: she knows that she is more likely to develop than immediately feel an attraction to someone like Jack. However, she is also clearly afraid to repeat her failed relationship with Paul.

Ella sleeps with Jack, who is "the efficient type of lover." She feels tearful and blames her own double standard; Jack mentions that his wife is "a good girl" but begins revealing his resentment for her, and Ella knows that she is a tool for him to explore that resentment—and that, when he returns home, his wife will immediately know he has been sleeping around. She decides to give up sex and not tell Julia.

Even though Jack's job was precisely to write about women's emotional problems, he seems to lack any understanding of these problems and is completely unable to imagine how Ella might react to his using her.

At lunch the next day, Ella nevertheless tells Julia about her experience and decision to stop having sex. She worries that her own bitterness will turn into Patricia Brent's joking criticism of men; Julia's "is turning rapidly into a corroding contempt." Ella thinks of them as psychologically lesbian, but manages to refrain from mentioning her overarching dissatisfaction with men to Julia. Ella "begins to suffer torments of sexual desire," which she has never felt without a specific man in mind; she masturbates to "fantasies of hatred about men," feeling humiliated. She realizes "she is falling into a lie," the one that men "contain" women's sexuality. She continues to refuse the advances of men she cannot love.

Confronted with another failed relationship, Ella chooses the nuclear option: she refuses to pursue the love she knows she needs and deserves. Yet she also recognizes that she must hold out hope for that love, which will require her to eventually come out of her sexual isolation, precisely because she sees the consequences of giving up in Patricia and Julia. She tries and fails to find sexual satisfaction through the rejection of men; she realizes that she must develop the capacity to enjoy sex without hating or giving up her entire sense of self to men.

Ella starts going to parties again, and she meets a Canadian script-writer whose wife is "professionally beautiful." He shows up at Ella's apartment the next morning—they have sex without feeling, and afterward he says he counts himself happy, with work and his wife and now his "girl" (Ella), who has become part of his "project or plan for a happy life." He seems to think they will continue an affair, and she tells him that things are over, that neither of them have "much conviction in it." He says he is sexually unsatisfied with his wife and seems to think that he satisfies Ella because "he has a large penis; he is 'good in bed.' And that's it." He jokes about her appearance; she wonders why "all these intelligent men" suddenly act stupid around women.

The screenwriter, too, views sex as a checklist rather than an emotional experience—he wants a mistress only because he is supposed to and sees his anatomy as evidence of his sexual prowess. He is busy comparing himself to other men rather than considering the interests or experience of the woman he is with; similarly, he pursues the trappings of a happy life without caring whether he is genuinely happy.

Ella finds Julia "sardonic rather than bitter." Julia explains that the impotent actor has made another advance, and Ella wonders whether he has forgotten what he did, or whether "we're all in a sort of sexual mad house." Ella says this is the price they pay for being "free women," and Julia laments that the men are not free, but rather stuck on "the old idea of good women and bad women." Ella finds it freeing for men that they can get erections with anyone, but Julia insists that eight of her last ten partners have been unable to.

Julia's recognition that men are not free because of an idea *is crucial: freedom is fundamentally* psychological *rather than social. Specifically, it relates to whether people live according to prejudices and expectations or forge and pursue their own understanding of the world. Anna, Molly, Ella, and Julia are not, strictly speaking, free. However, unlike most everyone else in the novel, they are at least engaged in the* pursuit of freedom*—of psychological wholeness and the harmony between belief and action.*

For some time, Ella "becomes completely sexless" and no longer feels any desire, but understands that this is "the other side of being possessed by sex." She starts looking for "the book which is already written inside her."

Ella's loss of feeling leads her to wait for both sex and art to spontaneously rise from some latent place within her—she begins waiting for her unity of mind and purpose to emerge on its own, rather than actively pursuing it.

Anna, who insists that she is Anna, declares that she is also Ella, but sometimes not Ella—she does not understand how "Ella separates herself from me and becomes Ella." At a party once, Anna met a girl named Ella, who had penetrating eyes and knew that she needed exactly "an inch of red wine" to get intoxicated—which is "not Anna at all."

Anna recognizes the gap between herself and her fictional alter ego, which is a necessary result of all writing and not a coincidence. Every character has multiple selves, and Ella is both one of Anna's selves and something more.

Ella thinks of a story: a woman gives up her whole life, emotional and professional, for her affair with a man, who criticizes her for trying to be "a career woman" and sustain a social life. When he leaves her, she "becomes everything he has criticized her for being," as a means of revenge. Then she meets the man again, and he falls in love with her, wanting her to have been a promiscuous socialite all along. She rejects him, because "he has rejected her 'real' self." Worried that the story might come to life, Ella never writes it.

By imagining her relationship with Paul as a mere story, Ella replicates Anna's creative process—art imitates life within a novel in which Anna tries to imitate her life. Anna's fictional, autobiographical character creates her own fictional, autobiographical character. Ella adds a conclusion that looks like revenge, but also realizes that perhaps her "'real' self" would not want revenge.

Ella thinks of another story that features a woman "over-ready for serious love," and a man "playing at the role of a serious lover because of some need for asylum or refuge." The woman "turns into a jailor," feeling a different, possessive version of herself take over. She insists she was never jealous. Ella wonders where this story came from—perhaps from the way her husband treated her. She does not write this story, either, feeling it is not hers.

This story is not the tale of a relationship the reader has already encountered, but rather foreshadows the remainder of the blue notebook. Yet, given the novel's structure and the fragmentation of the notebooks, it is impossible to say whether this relationship happened in the past or the future.

Ella visits her father, who is as solitary and unchanging as always. Ella wonders what her parents' marriage must have been like and finally asks—her father is alarmed, apparently having forgotten her mother, whom he says was "altogether too good" for him, but lacked "all that sort of thing," which Ella gets him to clarify was "sex, if that's what you call it." Ella asks whether he tried to "teach her," but he says he just "went out and bought myself a woman. What did you expect?"

Ella's parents' relationship, it seems, was yet another failed marriage, based on obligation and miscommunication. Her father is almost unable to talk about sex, and was clearly unwilling to address it with her mother. Curiously, while the reader encounters Ella's father here, Anna never reveals anything about her own parents or upbringing.

Ella's father says that Ella was justification enough of his marriage. Family seems "pretty unreal" to him; he has never *felt* "blood ties." They agree they have a bond, but it must be something else besides blood. He claims that God, "whatever that may mean," is the most important thing for him, and that "people should leave each other alone." He knows nothing about Ella's life and does not want to. She insists that her affair was more important than her marriage; he says the same of his. Ella's son, her father says, will "turn into a cannibal like everyone else." He insists that "people don't help each other, they are better apart," and ends the conversation.

Much like Tommy at the beginning of the book, Ella's father is satisfied as a hermit; like Ella, he sees how people often sell themselves short by following the usual rules of social organization (especially family and marriage). Unlike Ella, though, he has completely lost faith in human connection. He thinks that all relationships lead to mutual destruction—that people ultimately offer one another nothing and can only be whole on their own.

Alone, Ella remembers her mother running when her father kissed her; he spent his days alone with books, stuffing drawers with unshared writings, which would eventually surprise Ella. When she asks if he writes poems, he is astonished and brings her a sheaf of them, about isolation and adventure, mostly from the perspective of soldiers from history. Like Ella, her father never thought of publishing; he has read her novel, but thinks suicide an unworthy topic—everyone considers it, but Ella was wrong to write about it, he explains.

Anna reveals that Ella's father, too, is a writer and turns his own experiences of war into literature—but only by exploring other figures (like Anna through Frontiers of War*), and never by confronting himself head-on (like Anna in her newer fiction, or Lessing herself in* The Golden Notebook*). His distaste for Ella's novel about suicide suggests that he thinks there is a profound danger in spreading one's own tumultuous ideas—a notion that echoes Anna's anxieties about making her notebooks public.*

Ella's father thinks that Ella is especially wrong to demand happiness from life (he says it is because of her communism). She insists that people can change, but he refuses to think so. In trying to write thereafter, she continues to get stuck in "patterns of defeat, death, irony" but eventually decides to "twist it into victory": a story about a man and woman "both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits." She waits for the story to form itself inside her.

Ella's father is certainly a "latter-day stoic"—he seeks satisfaction without hope. The "patterns of defeat" here clearly refer to Anna's own failures to write, and indeed this proves the end of Ella's story in the yellow notebook—the suicide of a novel, as it were. However, Ella's proposed story also foreshadows the end of the blue notebook: the Anna in the blue notebook writes the yellow notebook, which writes the blue notebook. Author and subject are muddled, fact and fiction are indiscernible, and the "true" Anna—the one behind the texts she creates—must exist but cannot be pinned down neatly.

For eighteen months, the blue **notebook** consists of short, factual notes, such as one expounding most of the concrete dates in Anna's life (birth, death, Africa, marriage, joining and leaving the Party). This is all crossed out, and below it, she writes rapidly, nearly illegibly, that "all that is a failure too," for it seems more false than any of the other notebooks, worse than even the day-long description of September 15, 1954.

Anna continues trying to make an accurate record of the truth in the blue notebook; as her intensive description of a single day fails, she tries to simply note the undeniable, basic facts of her life. But this also turns out to be false, as it offers a deceptively bare picture of her experiences. Somehow, fiction continues to express truth more easily than objective facts do.

This question of truthfulness is not literary—it's like psychoanalysis. Anna remembers telling Mother Sugar that the procedure seems to reduce one's knowledge to the infantile "intellectual primitivism" of myth and emotion. Mother Sugar smiled at this suggestion, Anna remembers, and not at her critical analysis of her emotions. During this session, which happened years ago, Anna had told Mother Sugar that neurosis might mean "being highly conscious and developed," accepting the conflicts that others block out in order to feel whole and sane.

This psychoanalysis session offers Anna's most incisive and direct theory of mental unity and breakdown: many people maintain the appearance of unity through self-deception, by clinging to convenient myths that can't capture the whole story. This makes psychoanalysis not a means to self-realization but rather one to this self-deception. Anna sees her own divided consciousness as evidence of her simultaneous desire for these myths (communist revolution, liberation through romance, and freedom as a woman) and recognition that they are false.

Anna continues recounting the old psychoanalysis session. Mother Sugar asks if Anna is "better or worse" from analysis, and Anna says that she does not want to be "better at the cost of living inside myth and **dreams**," that she is less in conflict, but perhaps not *morally* better. For a moment, as Mother Sugar frowns, Anna feels like they are having an authentic moment, outside the context of the analysis. Anna explains that, were she describing a dream, Mother Sugar's smile would signal "the pleasure of recognition, of a bit of rescue-work, so to speak, rescuing the formless into form," naming something—but also negating pleasure, like the joy of dreams, "safely held in the story," which can never be matched in waking life.

*Instead of forgetting one half of the battle between myth and reality, and therefore falling into the juvenile naivety of people like Marion and Rose Latimer (myth) or the hardened, withdrawn cynicism of people like Molly and Ella's father (reality), Anna insists on trying to resolve this contradiction on her own terms. "Naming" and dreams are both ways of reinterpreting reality through myth, turning the formless chaos of real life into something orderly but false. The lingering question is whether art necessarily does this, too—*The Golden Notebook *can be seen as Lessing's attempt to create art that captures reality's chaos and contradictions rather than packaging it into order.*

Anna asks whether Mother Sugar thinks she is "ready for the next stage," by which she means the one where "I leave the safety of myth and Anna Wulf walks forward alone." Mother Sugar makes a joke about Anna's communism, and Anna says that Mother Sugar seems to think individuation is about recognizing one's experiences as aspects of universal human experience, in order to place them as archetypes or pieces of history, which allows one to disavow one's individual ownership over them. Anna has learned to feel through analysis, but then she is asked to "put it away, put the pain away where it can't hurt, turn it into a story or into history." She refuses: she is "free and strong" because she has done this, "and what now?"

To "leave the safety of myth" is to confront the contradictions and chaos of real experience without the crutch of stories or archetypes that make experience easy to interpret in terms of universal ideas about what all people must be. Mother Sugar and communism (Freud and Marx) both insist that Anna see her individual experience only in terms of these greater myths. This means denying her individuality—the unique blend of experience that exceeds formulas—and her freedom—roughly, the ability to choose her life, rather than being forced to live out a universal archetype.

Anna repeats that she wants "to walk off, by myself, Anna Freeman," living in a way women have never been able to. Mother Sugar reminds her that women have achieved art, independence, and sexual freedom in the past. Anna insists her unique accomplishment is her refusal to see herself in the terms of history, to simply fulfill "the old **dream** of the golden age" or any other dream—she wants to cut off the "old and cyclic" from the new and creative in herself.

In reasserting her desire to "walk off," Anna makes one crucial change: she uses her maiden name, Freeman, rather than her married name, Wulf. Not only does this represent her refusal to define herself in terms of marriage and insistence on enjoying the freedom of a man, *but it also plays on the novel-within-a-novel* Free Women, *which can be seen as Anna's fulfillment of this quest for freedom.*

Mother Sugar frowns, but assures Anna that she fully believes in people's potential to change. However, Anna insists that Mother Sugar's actions—her smiles and frowns—belie this belief. Anna says she thinks people's cracks are proof that "they are keeping themselves open for something."

Mother Sugar's belief in "change" is just another archetype of psychoanalysis—she apparently only believes that people can change in prescribed ways, moving from chaos to myth but never achieving unity through chaos—perhaps "cracking up" is precisely a way of achieving wholeness.

Mother Sugar says that Anna should be writing, instead of saying this all to her—she could even write their sessions down. Anna suggests that the context of their relationship means she can say things she could never simply say to a reader—Mother Sugar asks whether she might be able to write for a minority. This goes against Anna's principles, but regardless, it is still a problem of form, because people "can't stand formlessness." Yet she does not "hold the aristocratic view of art," although Mother Sugar thinks the fact that she only writes for herself is aristocratic. But Anna reminds her that people around the world are "writing away in secret books, because they are afraid of what they are thinking." Mother Sugar asks if Anna is afraid of what she is thinking and reaches for appointment book; the session is over.

Anna finds herself caught up in two more contradictions. First, she is so distraught with the art world's elitism and concerned about writing socially valuable "communal" art that she does not reveal her writings to anyone, for fear that they will fail to meet this standard. Secondly, her hope for "communal" art is precisely the hope to write a universal myth or story of the sort she has just rallied against. To resolve this contradiction, she must make her most private, individual feelings—her own genuine art—available broadly to the world (which is, of course, why the reader has access to her journals).

After drawing a black line, Anna recounts buying the table for her **notebooks**; she never planned to have the four notebooks she has today, but since moving to her flat, she has given them room in her life. Moving has also led her to read through the books for the first time, which reminds her how much Michael's rejection impacted her. She is also "disturbed" because she cannot recognize herself in her writing due to her "sterility" and critical tone. The "record of facts" in much of the blue notebook feels alien—words are increasingly "a series of meaningless sounds" whenever she thinks, or when she looks back at the things she does manage to write.

Anna's table is a small step from keeping her notebooks completely private to bringing them into the broader world, just as her move out of Molly's flat is step towards bringing her notebooks (her divided mind) out of hiding and taking them seriously. Anna transitions from writer to reader, echoing the sense of confusion and chaos that confronts many readers of The Golden Notebook.

Anna realizes that she is breaking down—if "words are form," then she is becoming formless, nothingness, her intelligence dissolving. She has a recurring nightmare, which Mother Sugar made her realize was about "joy in spite." At first, she **dreamed** that her Russian vase had an "anarchistic and uncontrollable" personality and threatened "everything that was alive." Usually, it was an old man or woman. Mother Sugar could not get her to see anything positive in it, although she realized she should not fear it—which she tended to do even before she started to dream. Anna felt it unfair that it should be her responsibility "to force this thing to be good as well as bad." She had the dream again last night, and it was more terrifying than ever, because the force was in a trusted friend, which means it was also her.

With Mother Sugar, Anna desires the breakdown of form; here, like readers who prefer a coherent narrative, Anna despairs at it—as words lose their meaning and stop referring to things in the ordinary way, she "walks forward alone" but encounters only chaos. The reader already knows that dreams are convenient myths, yet this joy-in-spite dream is unique because (unlike even many of Anna's nightmares) it gives her no comfort, only a sense of terror. Mother Sugar's suggestion that she let the dream be "good" represents an easy way out through misanthropy: to give up on other people, to take pleasure in her comfort in the world and superior knowledge of it, rather than trying to change anything or help people.

Anna says she will write about "the experience to which the **dream** related," but simply draws a black line and writes that she does not want to. Most people "have a sense of shape, of unfolding, in their lives," and she can "name" her past selves, but… she trails off without finishing her idea and draws another black line.

Depending on how one interprets Anna's black lines, they are marks of profound strength or weakness. She seems unwilling to let the dream stand in for her reality and names stand in for her past (that is, to let myth usurp individual experience), or perhaps is unable to confront reality through writing (or both).

Anna remembers going to a political meeting at Molly's house a few weeks before. A Jewish intellectual, Comrade Harry, managed to go to the Soviet Union and learn about the regime's horrific anti-Semitism, but at the meeting he tries, as usual, to hide the worst of it from the British Party. He does not even mention it until most of the attendees have left for the meeting's "closed" second phase. An American named Nelson gets up and accuses Harry's mendacity of destroying the West's communist movements.

Notably, a similar character named Harry came up in Anna's fictionalized journals in the black notebook as her self-indulgent, elitist alter-ego's conversation partner. Like Comrade John, Harry is dishonest and interested only in protecting the Party's interests, not in the truth—but Nelson makes the same criticism that Anna feels, showing the courage to speak out in the Party that she has always lacked.

Anna ends up sleeping with Nelson, but feels unable to write about it and draws another black line. Then she continues her recollection. Nelson genuinely asks her about her life—he seems so "grown-up," unlike the rest of the other men who are chasing her, and she realizes "how easy it is, living deprived, to forget love, joy, delight." He is already leaving his wife, and he gets along with Janet immediately.

Again, Anna's self-reflection falters: she overcomes her initial unwillingness to write down her experience (but whether this represents her weakness or courage is up to the reader). Nelson has the self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and fatherly geniality that Michael lacked. Nelson initially seems like the perfect man for Anna, which is perhaps why she finds it so difficult to write about their relationship.

That night, Nelson is nervous and talkative, and he leaves abruptly at midnight. The next morning, he is normal again, but it soon becomes clear that "he had a mortal terror of sex, could never stay inside a woman for longer than a few seconds, and had never been different." Yet they develop a trust, and Anna convinces herself she can "cure" him, even though she knows she is really following women's "deep instinctive need to build a man up."

Whereas Anna and Max (or Willi) had neither sex nor love, and then Anna and Michael had sex but not love, Anna and Nelson have love but not sex. Just like the actor Julia slept with in the yellow notebook, Nelson's underlying sexual anxiety suddenly blocks off his emotions and Anna recognizes that the dysfunction is only his to resolve.

After a week, Nelson becomes "driven by a shrill compulsive hysteria." The second time they sleep together, he speaks out against all women, then disappears for two weeks, leaving Anna distant and depressed and occasionally calling to make excuses (to "women," not to her). Then he visits, seeming perfectly charming, and Anna agrees to come to his home for a party, since she has decided they would just be friends.

Nelson has a split romantic personality: he is everything Anna wants but hates women because of his own problems, and then treats her solely on the basis of her gender even though he is perfectly capable of relating to her as an individual.

Anna is "ashamed and humiliated" to see Nelson's huge but "tasteless, anonymous" flat, full of friendly, rich, and uninteresting Americans. Nelson's wife is attractive and stylish, seemingly self-assured but, under the surface, clearly anxious and paranoid about her husband, who never returns her continual stare. The Americans traffic in self-deprecating humor and cover up Nelson's obvious tension with his wife. They also drink excessively, and Anna follows suit, becoming the drunkest person there. She observes a couple, "a tiny blonde woman" who drinks four double scotches in an hour and her "big ugly dark" husband, whom she infantilizes and begs to stop drinking. This is clearly "the basis of this marriage."

The marital relationships on display here are all founded on power imbalances: Nelson clearly mistreats his wife much as he did Anna; the blonde woman "mothers" her husband just as Mrs Lattimer "mothered" Stanley in the black notebook. As during the red notebook's canvassing and the black notebook's pigeon hunt, humor becomes a way for everyone to simultaneously acknowledge and diffuse (but not truly resolve) their tension. The alternative, of course, is Anna's model: confronting tension and division, even if it means risking madness.

Nelson's wife, and everyone else, seems "in some permanent, controlled hysteria," the same as English couples, but self-aware about it and willing to "name" their problems to avert pain. Around midnight, Nelson, his wife, and the blonde's husband, Bill, get into an argument in front of the whole room, which simply laughs away the tension. In the corner, Nelson and his wife joke their way through an argument about his career (which she thinks is stagnant) and her incessant worry (which he finds intolerable).

The Americans' humor is a form of "naming," like psychoanalysis, that Anna sees as based in willful ignorance. Yet this is arguably a better coping mechanism than English couples': repression and denial. This recalls the difference between Paul and Jimmy's attitudes: Paul mocked everyone to avoid having to take any firm stand, while Jimmy brooded and drowned his misery with alcohol.

Everyone else starts dancing, and Nelson decides to dance with Anna instead of his wife. As a joke, he even propositions her in front of everyone, but Anna can see from his wife's expression that they have probably already fought about her. Despite this, she kisses Anna's cheeks on her way out, and Anna realizes that Nelson and his wife share "the closest of all bonds, neurotic pain-giving." Anna feels acutely certain that Nelson will never leave his wife.

Anna sees that, while she can do nothing to resolve Nelson's neurosis, at least his wife validates it; as when she recognized her desire to be controlled by Richard and insisted a "real man" created a "whole area of tension" in Free Women, *she sees that these American couples function precisely by indulging one another's perverse and contradictory desires.*

The following evening, Anna gets stuck on the image of a man and woman wandering around a rooftop. He tells her he loves her, but she is terrified—he just "wanted to hear how it would sound," and she really loves him, which nearly drives him to jump off.

While this episode obviously points to men's insincerity towards and manipulation of women, it emphasizes their profound vulnerability: the man, not the woman, is most deeply hurt, perhaps because he receives love he knows he is incapable of giving.

That morning, Nelson calls to tell Anna he wants to marry her, but then starts yelling at her, as if at his wife or analyst (who was on vacation). After an hour, he calls again, his normal self, but insisting that Anna tell him he has not hurt her. He says he can "imagine really loving someone," which would be a "blueprint for the future," and Anna is charmed. After their conversation, Anna wonders how men can talk to women in the way Nelson just did—to hurt them and then demand to be assured that they hadn't, to create "a parody of meaning." This is when Anna has the nightmare about Nelson, the friend who turned out to have "the smile of joyful spite."

Nelson completely cracks up into the two halves of his personality: one that recognizes the potential of love—or at least pretends to recognize it in order to lead Anna on—and one that takes joy in spite. He ends up parodying himself, even if his first half is sincere, because meaning requires psychic unity—which is, of course, the core of Anna's struggle to write. Clearly, Anna's image from the night before is about Nelson.

While the **dream** has not repeated, Anna has rejected a man she met at Molly's house, for she is afraid of failing again. After another black line on the page, she describes this man, De Silva, who had returned to his native Ceylon from London years ago after failing to make a living as a journalist. His family and wife did not get along, and all of the sudden he returned to London on a whim and borrowed money. He is "cool, detached, witty," and has since found another job; he propositions Anna, and she refuses, as she would refuse any man, but invites him to a dinner. At the dinner, he insists his wife is suddenly no longer planning on moving to London but now hoping to stay in Ceylon.

De Silva's collected manner contrasts strongly with his evidently fickle life decisions—whereas Nelson is caught up in his changing emotions, De Silva keeps them at a distance. He is also indifferent to others' emotions—as proven by his willingness to abandon his family—and the truth. Again, Anna confronts the two ways out of her division through Nelson (who passionately believes in myths he cannot reconcile) and De Silva (who gives up on emotions and love).

After dinner, De Silva insists on telling Anna a story. High on marijuana, he once walked up to a girl in the street and asked if she would sleep with him. Surprisingly, she said yes. He asked that she let him pretend to be "desperately in love with [her]," but ignore it; he said it was fascinating and wonderful, but she could not stay in her role. He felt he had "never been so in love. But she kept spoiling it by responding." The girl was angry, of course, but he did not care and never saw her again.

De Silva is able to feel love for the girl only when he assures them both that his emotions will not be genuine; he wants love to be unilateral and, like so many men in this book, only cares about his own experience during sex. He seems to fundamentally fear authentic feeling and vulnerability; of course, the fact that he tells Anna this story about his heartlessness further suggests that he measures his sexual conquests by the extent to which he can manipulate women.

Later, De Silva tells another story, about his friend B.B., permanently unsatisfied with his marriage, who was sleeping with his cleaning woman. The cleaning woman told De Silva that she loved B.B. but was only with him "because his wife isn't good for him." De Silva slept with the woman, too, and then B.B.'s wife came back, delighted to find him visiting. He told her about B.B.'s affair and she was furious. De Silva says he did it just "to see what would happen, that's all," and smiles the exact same smile from Anna's nightmare. However, his desire "to see what will happen" is something Anna shares, like the feeling of "it didn't matter to me."

De Silva clearly takes joy in spite: he relishes the opportunity to ruin one of his best friend's marriages and sees B.B.'s wife's devastation as proof of his own power. Like Paul Blackenhurst, he exemplifies dangerous half of dissolution: enjoying one's own power to destroy order. Yet Anna sees this mindset's appeal: it insulates people from injury, since they refuse to be vulnerable.

Anna spends the night with De Silva "because it didn't matter." At times, he seems like a desperate infant, and they are both "friendly and detached" in the morning. But he grows "angry and vicious" when she says she does not plan to have sex with him again. She suggests that he would not care whether they slept together again; he insists that he does indeed care, but she dismisses him regardless.

In sleeping with De Silva "because it didn't matter," Anna seems to be trying on his perspective toward people and emotions—she is able to make herself feel nothing, but De Silva's fury when Anna rejects him proves that his attitude does not truly resolve emotional turmoil. Other people do not matter to him, but his ability to control *other people is the most important thing to him.*

De Silva calls later and asks to have "a friend of mine" sleep in Janet's room. Anna is confused, then calls him back to clarify, and he confirms that he was planning to sleep with a prostitute in Janet's room, so that Anna could hear them have sex. He wails and cries like a child and asks for forgiveness. Then he sends two letters, one detached, one "the hysterical wail of a child." Anna sees him as "incarnate, the principle of joy-in-giving-pain." He appears in her nightmares, and soon Molly calls to inform her that he left his wife and children well before moving to London. Anna later meets B.B., who speaks well of De Silva, even though he is not paying his wife's allowance and still likes B.B.'s cleaning woman.

De Silva's impotent bid to hurt Anna just leads him to further realize his fundamental powerlessness over her; he reveals that he, like Nelson, remains psychically split. Ironically, he was afraid to admit that he was single (presumably because this suggests his weakness, or need for women), even though Anna's frustration with men revolves largely around their tendency to leave their mistresses for their wives. And B.B., now divorced, seems to share De Silva's lack of empathy.

FREE WOMEN: 4

Exhausted and irritated that Ronnie has seemingly moved back into the flat without permission, Anna waits for Molly and Richard to come over. They are coming to discuss Marion, who has already begun renting Molly's spare room. Marion had left Richard and their children, seemingly without realizing it, by simply never returning home, where Richard's "secretary Jean was practically installed already."

Like Anna in various situations throughout the novel, Marion takes decisive action—ending her marriage—as though by accident; her divorce is the byproduct of her new happiness more than a means to it. While everyone else seems to be reaching a new familial equilibrium, Ronnie returns to overthrow the order Anna had tried to establish.

Then, Tommy and Marion went to a meeting and protest for African independence, and Tommy was arrested when he did not follow police orders due to his blindness. Marion attacked the policeman, "shrieking hysterically," and ended up in the papers. Richard called Anna to accuse everyone of orchestrating the scandal to take him down—she hung up on him and soon picked up a call from Molly, who complained about Marion and Tommy dominating the house and the next generation's apparent inability to confront chaos.

While Tommy and Marion's farcical arrests at the protest were both due to their own shortcomings rather than the danger their politics posed to the order of British colonialism, they at least act *(even if foolishly), quite unlike Anna and Molly. Richard, as usual, can tolerate neither the others' politics nor their happiness, and Molly feels her sense of control dwindling as Marion has completely replaced her relationship with Tommy.*

Going to talk with Marion and Tommy, Anna giggles the same dark giggle that Tommy did before shooting himself—she wonders what happened to the part of Tommy that giggled, and then what Tom Mathlong would advise her to do. She remembers watching the demonstration, which was "fluid, experimental," unlike the Party's old, well-organized protests. The protestors and police did not know what to expect; young men were proud to be arrested. She opens Tommy's door, and he tells her that Marion is upstairs but not to go—which she does anyway, despite having nothing to say to either of them.

Anna had described Tommy's old giggle as "harsh, uncontrolled, and malicious"; she seems to have switched places with him, as he became the wide-eyed revolutionary and she the detached cynic. She observes the demonstration from above, as though a passive but omnipotent observer, which reflects the sense in which she seems to understand the cycles of communist protest and disillusionment much better than those caught up in it.

Marion is delighted to have been arrested and drawn her family's ire; Anna wonders what, if anything, was wrong with this, and looks around the flat, where she used to live and which is still full of painful memories. These memories start to go dead, with "words like love, friendship, duty, responsibility" suddenly seeming "to be all lies." Marion brings tea, and Anna tells her about Tom Mathlong, who felt no discouragement or doubt about his independence struggle until he gazed out upon London and thought, "do you realize how many generations it takes to make a society where buses run on time? Where business letters get answered efficiently? Where you can trust your ministers not to take bribes?"

Marion's newfound political zeal and naivety about organized resistance have also led her to replace Anna in Molly's flat; Anna recognizes that she cannot conjure up the emotions from her past, much as she does during her present-tense commentary on the recollections in her black notebook: at best, memory and literature (which Anna insists is a retrospective art form) can only imperfectly and fleetingly express experience. Of course, Anna's resignation about the past parallels Tom Mathlong's reservations about politics: both confront the limits of their own will to call the world into order.

Anna calls Tom Mathlong "a sort of saint," and her voice cracks as she thinks she is going hysterical—"saint" is not her kind of word, but she repeats it. She starts crying, remembering that Mathlong expected to spend much of his life in prison and thought little of himself as a political leader. Anna also thinks that she would "feel quite sick at all this sentimentality" if she were observing their conversation. She insists that "we shouldn't make what he stands for look cheap," realizing she is doing precisely that.

Anna's cracking voice clearly demonstrates that she is starting to "crack up," as she fakes a reverence for Mathlong in order to sustain Marion's fantasy of him. She sees that Mathlong—who never actually appears in the book—is much more powerful as an idea than an individual, but that politics requires such myths to function.

Marion asks about the other revolutionaries, and Anna mentions Charlie Themba, who "cracked up" lately: he had a breakdown that nobody recognized until it was too late, when he had started writing letters accusing his co-conspirators and friends of plotting against him. He sent one of these letters to Anna, who reads it to Marion.

Charlie Themba is clearly a foil for Anna, who has long ago started distrusting her own comrades—Anna seems to be wondering which is truly madness: the Communist Party or her suspicion of it. While Mathlong had no expectation of achieving his political goals, Themba's failure to do so drove him to insanity.

Marion declares that she hates and could not return to Richard, and then fills a glass of whiskey and said she hopes to stay with Tommy, who has started methodically working his way up the stairs. He joins them and suggests Marion start supper, so they can eat before the big meeting they are planning to attend. Marion tells Tommy that "Anna thinks we are going about things the wrong way," and for the first time his mouth quivers—he looks uncertain and vulnerable, and he asks why. Anna suggests he and Marion "study everything and become experts" rather than running around to protests.

This seems like Tommy's only moment of vulnerability in the entire text—he does not flinch when his suicide attempt fails and leaves him blind, but he is visibly distraught at Anna's criticism. While Anna seeks to shield Tommy and Marion from the pitfalls of political naivety—disappointment, punishment, or insanity—her insistence that they think rather than act is also ironic, since Tommy has spent virtually all his time reading in his room since his accident.

Anna proposes Tommy and Marion go on a vacation and affirms that he is good for her, but reminds him that her divorce from Richard will be difficult, and also not "to be so hard on us." Tommy jokes that he knows what Anna is thinking: "I'm nothing but a bloody welfare worker, what a waste of time!" She laughs, and he says that "people need other people to be kind to them," and that all anyone truly wants is "just one other person I could really talk to, who could really understand me, who'd be kind to me." Anna asks how he was treating Molly and sees "the blood come up in his face." Tommy clearly wants Anna to leave, and she does, feeling that they have surpassed "some barrier," "that now everything would be changed."

Anna implores Tommy and Marion to scale down their ambitions, and Tommy's call for "just one other person [...] who could really understand me" is the novel's clearest statement about the purpose and potential of love—which, clearly, need not always be romantic in nature. In fact, the novel's communists seem to be ignoring their personal relationships in order to fight for change in more distant places—just as Anna manages to resolve Molly, Tommy, Marion, and Richard's conflicts but never her own.

When Molly and Richard finally come to Anna's flat, they are not arguing but "almost like friends." Anna tells them Marion is definitely leaving, and that they should send her on vacation with Tommy, perhaps to go "investigate conditions" at one of his projects. She tells Richard to talk with Marion, and Molly with Tommy. Richard thanks Anna, and Molly is happy to see "all this politeness" among them.

Astonishingly, Molly and Richard get along for the only time in the entire book, and everyone seems satisfied with the family's agreement. Free Women *appears to be reaching the resolution Anna's notebooks have—and never do—achieve.*

Anna sits next to her sleeping daughter, feeling her "usual surge of protective love" but wondering why she seems to think Janet will not end up "incomplete and tormented and fighting" like everyone else. Anna tells Ivor to vacate the next day, but she knows he will bring her flowers and an apology instead, which he does. She hits him in the face with the flowers, for "she had never in her life been angry like this." After a few minutes, he walks out with two suitcases and pays her the five weeks' back rent he owed—with interest.

Anna's own personal turmoil remains unresolved, and while it is still unclear precisely why she insists on evicting Ivor and Ronnie, by brutally rejecting Ivor's overtures of kindness she both reclaims control of her household and suggests that a deeper turmoil belies the story's apparent resolution. She faces the contradiction between her love for Janet and her knowledge of everyone's misery, and then rejects Ivor's overtures of kindness as though to protect Janet from the illusion of happiness.

THE NOTEBOOKS: 4

The remainder of the black **notebook**, now without the division between "*The Source*" and "*Money*," is full of newspaper clippings about suffering in Africa in 1955-1957, as well as a single entry from September 1956: Anna **dreams** there is a television film being made about the people she knew at the Mashopi Hotel. She never sees the script, but they are filming on site, and she watches the story shift as the actors (including herself, "but not as I remembered her") speak lines she does not remember and build relationships unlike the ones they really had. The cast and crew finish and go inside to drink; she asks the director why he has changed her story, and he insists he "only filmed what was there." She decides "he was right, that what I 'remembered' was probably untrue." She declares the notebook over and this dream, if it must be "named," to be "about total sterility."

With Anna's newspaper clippings, the black notebook comes to an abrupt end; her dream jarringly undermines the reliability of all her memories of Africa, which might as well be fiction, to her as much as to the reader. The television film is not only a kind of fiction, but precisely the genre that threatened to completely distort the meaning of Anna's novel Frontiers of War*; and yet this fiction seems to hold the "real" truth in a way that Anna's memories do not, just as Anna can recount her experiences more faithfully through the yellow notebook's fiction than through the blue notebook's bare facts.*

The red **notebook**, too, is full of news in 1956-1957: Anna underlines the word "freedom" wherever she sees it and counts 679 mentions at the end. There is also just one entry. A friend named Jimmy has returned from a teachers' delegation trip to the Soviet Union, during which he met a teacher, Harry Mathews, who had quit his job to fight in Spain, gotten injured and become disillusioned with the Communists, and joined and left the Trotskyists, too, which made him and Jimmy mortal enemies. He ended up teaching "backward children" and performing casual acts of heroism in London. He met a widow, who ended up dedicating her life to him—meaning the children he taught.

Although the reader does not see Anna's newspaper clippings, she likely underlines "freedom" in order to show how the word is used differently in different contexts, usually to reinforce the political ideology of whomever is writing (to the Soviets, capitalism is a form of slavery, while to the West, the Soviets trample on their citizens' freedoms). Harry appears again, but it is unclear whether he is the same Harry as the one in the black notebook or the Party meeting where Anna meets Nelson (just as it is unclear whether this Jimmy is the Jimmy from the black notebook). Here, Harry is a selfless, working-class hero straight out of communist clichés.

Secretly, Harry was learning Russian to study Soviet history and propaganda. He is humorless, waiting patiently for the Soviets to "all suddenly and at the same moment see the light" and realize they needed his help. So he is overjoyed whenever a new scandal arises, when Stalin dies, when Jimmy decides to invite him with the delegation—which suggests to Harry that "the Party itself" is inviting him to advise them.

Although Harry seems to keep his communism completely secret (much as Anna keeps her writings private), he has an absurd faith that the world will recognize and reward his efforts, which leads him to ironically rejoice when the ideology he believes in fails. He is deeply invested in the communist myth that his personality also represents.

The Soviets find Harry revolutionary but perplexing, and when he finally learns on the last night that Jimmy invited him, not the Soviet leadership, he insists on giving the group's translator a night-long lecture on the Russian Communist Party's history. She leaves in the middle of the night, briefly, and he is convinced he is about to be sent to a Siberian prison—she comes back with tea, but soon falls asleep, and they are both ashamed. He is "silent and rather ill-looking" on the trip back to London. The red **notebook** ends with a double black line.

Harry's story is a cynical retelling of the parody story gummed into the second part of the red notebook: whereas that story's protagonist was in awe to meet Stalin, Harry is devastated to realize that his genuine commitment to equality makes him more a threat to the Soviets than their savior. If he is the same Harry from the blue notebook's Party meeting, he presumably chose his Party loyalties over his free thought when he returned to London; Anna ends the red notebook with the same sense of disappointment that started it.

The yellow **notebook** opens with Anna's notes for a series of short stories. First, a woman "deludes herself about the nature of" a younger man who views her as "another love affair merely." In the second short story, a man woos a woman with "grown-up language" that does not reflect his true emotions. Recognizing this, she still cannot help but love him.

The Shadow of the Third *is cut short with no resolution; Anna seems to be searching for a different story to make sense of her imbalanced relationship with Michael—or perhaps another affair in which she repeats her mistakes, falling for gestures that she now recognizes as insincere.*

In the third story, Anna notes that "nice women" fall for "unworthy men" who "name" them or "have an ambiguous uncreated quality" that "nice" men lack, for "nice" men "are finished and completed and without potentialities." The story would concern Annie, Anna's friend from Africa, "a 'nice woman' married to a 'nice man.'" She fell for "a hard-drinking womanizing miner" who joked that she was "born to be the wife of a pirate," then died from his alcoholism—Annie wrote Anna, saying, "the meaning of my life has gone." In England, this would be "the nice suburban wife in love with a hopeless coffee-bar bum, who says he is going to write, and perhaps does," narrated by the "entirely responsible and decent husband."

Anna begins to theorize her love for men who do not love her back: she wants to create something out of them, to affect them in the ways they affect her; Annie falls for this ploy, throwing away security to save the man from himself (which, predictably, she fails to do). But this is not quite a foil for Anna's relationship with Michael—she never sought to change him—and suggests that she is talking about someone else, which is entirely possible since notebooks covering roughly the same time period are always presented one after the other (black, red, yellow, then blue).

In the fourth story, a woman falls in love with a man, falls sick, realizes it is his illness, and learns about it through its reflection in herself. In the fifth story, a woman in love "against her will" wakes up in the night to hear her man say, "no, no, no," but she does not know to what. Upon waking, she asks, "is that your heart beating?" and he replies, "no, it's yours."

In these stories the woman begins merging with the man she loves, losing any sense of distinction between him and herself. She understands herself only through him—he can access a part of her that she cannot.

Anna's sixth story details an affair between a woman seeking love and a man seeking refuge. He leaves for a day, but accuses her of being "very permissive." At night, he wants sex only because she first refuses, and afterward she admits that she knows he was with someone else. He says that it should not matter, because "I don't take it seriously," which leaves her feeling "diminished and destroyed, as if she does not exist as a woman."

This is another story about men like Nelson and De Silva, who demand a loyalty they cannot offer in return and use their other affairs to shield themselves from vulnerability; they sever all connection between love, emotion, and sex.

In the seventh story, "a wandering man" allows himself ambiguous words and emotions with a woman whose kindness, for the time, he needs. They have predictable sex. She says she loves him; he leaves and writes, "Left London. Anna reproachful. She hated me." A few months later, either "Anna married, good" or "Anna committed suicide. Pity, a nice woman."

This man is simultaneously unable to voice his need for human connection and afraid to actually form that connection; Anna finally inserts herself explicitly into her story, offering two alternatives that suggest decisive action—but not necessarily moral courage.

In the eighth story, a woman artist, living alone, structures her life "around an absent man for whom she is waiting" and stops producing art. A new man, "some kind of artist" who has not yet started making art, comes around and begins feeding off her artistic energy. He becomes "a real artist, fulfilled" as "the artist in her [is] dead." So he leaves her, needing an artistic woman for his own art.

Men's parasitic reliance on women's domestic labor and emotional support here translates into the realm of art; while Anna imagines building a man up in order to also pursue her own art, in this story her protagonist does so only at her own expense.

The ninth story is "a short novel." In it, a blacklisted American, an early critic of Stalin, moves to London. The other blacklisted artists reject him, even as they come around to his viewpoint. They decide that he must be an F.B.I. agent, and he commits suicide.

People with opposite roles cannot recognize their shared beliefs—they can only reconcile their agreement with their old enemy by declaring that he must be possessed by some alien force.

In the tenth story, which should be a film, a person has "lost a sense of time." Anna would "never have a chance to write it, so there's no point thinking about it," but she does anyway. Having lost a "sense of reality," the man actually "has a deeper sense of 'reality' than 'normal' people." Dave told Anna that she should not let Michael's rejection—years old by now—affect her, since "who are *you* if you can be broken up by someone being fool enough not to take you on?" He was, of course, "talking about himself," becoming Michael, shattering Anna's "sense of reality." At the same time, she felt more lucid. "This art of comment" goes in the blue **notebook**.

As Anna moves closer toward insanity, she finds her notebooks beginning to meld—yet she insists on sustaining their proper separation in order to keep herself sane. This story must be a film because, as Anna has argued previously, film tells stories in real time rather than retrospect—and, indeed, Anna's obsession over Michael continues to define her "sense of reality," destroying her "sense of time" in the present as her mind remains saturated with the past.

The eleventh story is another "a short novel": two people, one of whom passes their neurosis to the other—like when Mother Sugar spoke about a psychologically normal family that felt neurotic because of their totally neurotic, but seemingly normal, mother. She said that often "normal" family members pass their neuroses to others, who adapt to the "normal" person's strong personality. This also goes in the blue **notebook**; Anna "must keep them separate."

Anna continues struggling to separate her life from her fiction—especially as these stories increasingly look like straightforward accounts of her own experience.

In the twelfth story, a man commits infidelity because he wants "to assert his independence of the married state." He "accidentally" leaves proof for his wife to find, but this is the point.

The man is proving his "independence" to his wife as much as to himself—he is establishing a pathway out of emotional intimacy.

The thirteenth story is "a short novel, to be called 'The Man Who Is Free Of Women." In it, a middle-aged man—if American, then divorced, but if English, then simply disconnected from his wife—has "a couple of dozen affairs, three or four serious." The serious ones, "really marriages without formal ties," end instead of becoming marriages. His ex-mistresses are marrying, but he remains dependent on them, like "kindly nannies or nursemaids," as he continues to take much younger mistresses.

While this man is free of any woman in particular, he is clearly dependent on women collectively for his emotional sustenance—this may be a reference to Richard, who continues to rely on Molly, Anna, and his mistresses even though he has moved on from all them. Unwilling to make himself vulnerable to any single woman, he takes a little from many, but never achieves the full emotional independence he seeks.

The fourteenth story is "a short novel": a man and woman both know they are reading one another's honest diaries, then begin lying in them to deceive the other and keeping secret diaries, locked away. An argument reveals these private diaries, one accuses the other of having read it, and they leave one another.

With the dissolution of the barrier between self and other, the fully private and the merely intimate, truth and falsity also collapse into one another—Anna is also directly challenging the reader's probable assumption that her notebooks are the closest one can get to her true interior self.

The fifteenth is a short story about an American man and English woman, who both want "to be taken" and reach an "emotional deadlock" in their relationship. The story becomes a comparison of cultures. In the sixteenth story, a man and woman who are "both sexually proud and experienced" discover they dislike one another, which proves their dislike for themselves. They become friends, then genuine lovers.

These stories explore the potential and pitfalls of relationships between similar people: while these similarities prevent them from truly fulfilling one another's emotional needs, they also offer a mirror through which people can overcome those needs by recognizing and accepting their insecurities in the other.

In the seventeenth story, a man gradually loses interest as a woman builds it; she finds another man, which makes the first man want her again, but she freezes because she was with the second man before gradually falling back in love with the first man, who promptly leaves her for someone else. The eighteenth story is like Chekhov's "The Darling," except the woman changes more rapidly, mirroring "one man who is a psychological chameleon," adopting different personalities throughout the day.

Men remain more interested in conquest than love; this conquest is so absolute in the latter story that it completely determines the woman's identity, which becomes nothing more than a mirror of the man's.

Anna calls the nineteenth story "The Romantic Tough School of Writing." Three friends are out on a cold Saturday night in New York. They fight, knocking each other out, laughing and enjoying themselves, proclaiming their love for one another. A woman walks by; staring at "her round-ball butt," Buddy says he loves her and sets after her, abandoning the others for "the frame-house funeral." The others proclaim their love for each other—one punches the other in the face, then holds him tenderly. Anna says she has "gone back to pastiche," so "it's time to stop," and the yellow **notebook** ends.

This last story is unique: it is the only one with a title, imagined from a male perspective, and is actually written rather than merely planned. The men seem unable to distinguish between play and conflict, love and violence, or pleasure and pain; this kind of masochistic male bonding undoubtedly affects men's treatment of women, yet Buddy abandons his friends because of his sexual appetite, even if he clearly dehumanizes the woman but appears to respect (however perversely) the other men. In calling her work pastiche, Anna is parodying men's writing; but it's unclear whether her adoption of the male perspective stems from success or resignation.

The blue **notebook** includes no more dates, but is not one continuous entry. Anna tries to rent her upstairs room. Two girls come by, but Anna does not want girls, and the men all expect something from her, whether sex or mothering. Anna decides not to rent the rooms at all. Instead, she will "take a job, move to a smaller flat, anything."

The blue notebook begins to blend together in a continuous stream that jumps days at a time; its integrated form parallels Anna's spiral into madness but also increases the gap between her experience and the reader.

Janet is disappointed that Ivor has left, and she wants to go to boarding school—Anna feels "sad and rejected, then angry with myself that I did." She thinks about Janet's character; the girl is as normal as one can be, except for Anna, Molly, and Michael's influence. By going to boarding school, she means to say that she wants "to get out of the complicated atmosphere," which is likely due to Anna's depression—she hides it, but Janet must know, and Janet is the only thing anchoring Anna to normalcy. Another production company has bought *Frontiers of War* for a film, so there is enough money, and Janet will leave shortly.

Anna is frightened both by the possibility that Janet will end up broken like her, Molly, or Tommy, and by the increasing likelihood that Janet will grow up to be conventional and happy, entirely unlike them, with no enduring mark of their influence—which makes Anna both a successful and failed parent. Realizing that her life only has a semblance of order because of her obligations as a mother, Anna seems to already know that she will descend further into madness.

Molly calls to propose a tenant, who is a blacklisted American—Anna worries that he would be writing a novel, getting psychoanalysis, and complaining to her about his "awful American marriage." Molly warns that Anna might end up like other ex-Communists, lonely and working in dreadful industries like advertising. Anna agrees to give the man a chance—Molly says he is "brash and opinionated" like the rest of Americans, but Anna feels that Americans had lately become "cool and shut off," good-humored and afraid of intimacy, "measured, shrewd and cool."

Molly is precisely one of the miserable ex-Communists she fears Anna might become, and Anna has also long since moved out of her flat and away from her supervision. But Molly still clearly plays a maternal or sisterly role for Anna. The women's attitudes about Americans parallel their own personalities—aloof Anna thinks Americans are reserved, and boisterous Molly think they are gregarious. This also suggests that England and America are cultural mirrors for one another, just as Anna's relationships are mirrors that allow her insight into herself.

Anna begins feeling how she had during her time with Mother Sugar seven years before—unfeeling and indifferent to everyone but Janet. When she quit psychoanalysis, she told Mother Sugar, "you've taught me to cry, thank you for nothing, you've given me back feeling, and it's too painful." In fact, "people everywhere are trying not to feel," trying to be "cool," especially in America. It is as though they think, "in a world as terrible as this, limit emotion." Mother Sugar wanted Anna to fight terror with optimism; she thinks people instead freeze up because they fear recognizing terror, because they understand that "they are in a society dead or dying" and that their emotions are controlled by "property, money, power," and work. Anything is better than the refusal to feel, even the insistence on feeling halfway.

What Anna gained from psychoanalysis seems to be the opposite of what Mother Sugar wanted to offer her: while analysis was ostensibly about finding satisfaction and wholeness by reducing one's life to myths, in fact Anna learns to feel her pain again only by recognizing the limits of these myths and the self-deception that Mother Sugar's optimism leads her into. She finds the courage to feel and to pursue the truth of suffering, even if she can never fully express or access that truth through language (which, like myth, relies on order and form, so can never represent the world's disorder and formlessness).

Janet comes upstairs from school, at which she chooses to wear the optional, ugly uniform—a decision Anna finds remarkable and troubling. Janet has gone from "a dark, lively, dark-eyed, slight young girl, alive with new sexuality, alert with the instinctive knowledge of her power" to just another identical, uniformed schoolgirl. At least she would not make herself vulnerable to "frightened men who measure out emotions like weighted groceries"; Anna is pleased at the "triumphant malice" of saving Janet for some potential future in which men truly value her.

Anna's pride in her own moral courage contrasts with her delight at realizing that Janet will likely grow up unable to truly feel, too comfortable and sheltered to recognize the suffering that surrounds her. While Anna worries that this kind of disconnection makes genuine love impossible, she knows that most men are already incapable of it, and so feels that Janet would not be missing out on much.

Saul Green, the American, delays his arrival because he is in the countryside—Molly calls to tell Anna that, actually, a friend is "showing him Soho," and that Tommy did not like him. She finds it strange that, as a socialist, Tommy's friends are "respectable and petit-bourgeois." Including "that ghastly wife," who complained that Mr Green had no job; this all means Anna should be inclined to like the man.

Mr Green's thinly veiled excuse suggests that he has little respect for Anna. Tommy increasingly resembles Anna and Molly, with the contrast between his beliefs and his own comfortable elite life—perhaps this reflects the fact that the Soviet version of Communism played a less significant role in his leftist politics.

Anna laughs, thinking about how Janet's departure to boarding school makes her feel "listless and idle." It also makes her start yearning for Mother Sugar to save her—"from what? I don't want to be saved." She relearns how to be comfortable with time, to lose track of the clock and follow the light instead. As in her childhood, she starts playing "the game" at night, naming everything in her room, the house, the street, London, England, out to the rest of the world—creating it all in her mind, trying to achieve "a simultaneous knowledge of vastness and of smallness." It is harder at her age than before.

Anna sees that Janet, like psychoanalysis, imposed a defined order on her life that allowed her to go through the motions of her days without questioning her true motives or desires. The "game" is about learning to comfortably hold contradictions together, rather than losing perspective by focusing too much on the miniscule or macroscopic (like the daily romantic problems and the horrible news from afar that both, at different points, lead Anna to a kind of moral paralysis).

Saul Green comes to visit, finds the apartment "fine, fine," and moves in. Anna mentions his day in Soho, and he looks offended and gives a long-winded, improbable explanation. She mentions that she would be leaving soon and that he could bring girls to the room, which he scarcely looks at. Anna has never experienced "as brutal a sexual inspection" as the one he gives her on his way out. She comments, "I hope I pass," and he replies, "fine, fine." They have coffee, and he makes her uncomfortable, with his oversized clothing and paranoid eyes. They have an exceedingly awkward conversation until Anna mentions Molly, and he immediately changes, proving "extraordinarily acute about her character and situation," like no man but Michael could have done, "naming" her so pleasingly.

Of all the book's characters, Saul Green most of all resembles George Hounslow, the brutish but sincere roadsman from the Mashopi Hotel. Like George, Saul's actions reveal truths his words fail to hide; this conflict gives him the tension of a "real man." Anna has long spoken about her desire to be "named"—to be called into a definite role, or confined to a myth. Unlike with the other men who "name" her to claim her as their sexual object, the "names" Saul gives her seem accurate: he appears to understand her rather than try and distort her for his own purposes, even though he is sexually interested in her.

Anna begins including numbered asterisks in her account. (*1) She asks Saul about herself, and he lectures her frankly and understandingly about her lifestyle, "naming" her "on such a high level (*2)" that she feels like a small girl. He talks through her laughter, as though she were not there. She has to send him away, for a man is coming to try and buy the rights to *Frontiers of War*, which Anna does not end up selling him. He keeps trying to raise the price, and she laughs in his face.

These numbered asterisks correspond to the stories from the most recent section of the yellow notebook. Those stories are revealed as fictional accounts of Anna's relationship with Saul, but subdivided into its parts; the reader can attempt to predict the course of their relationship from these stories, but Anna also noted that these stories were failures, much like her attempt to describe her relationship with Michael through the relationship between Ella and Paul in the yellow notebook.

Saul grows offended and defensive when Anna sends him out for this meeting, but he later proves deeply understanding about her project—he left Hollywood because nobody "was capable of believing that a writer would refuse money rather than have a bad film made." In America, he said, it is much harder not to give in; he lectures her in a sexy pose straight out of Hollywood movies. She notices that he is now wearing clothes that fit, but "still looked wrong." She comments on his new clothes and realizes that his face is unhealthily pale. She finds it so peculiar that he could be "capable of such real perception about women" yet seem to treat her as a "sexual challenge."

Like so many of the other men Anna sees, Saul is fractured by the contradiction between his incisive, welcoming, and understanding self and his clumsy, manipulative, and violent one. Even while he completely ignores Anna, he certainly also reminds her of herself: he worries about whether art can express the truth or is merely becoming a commodity, and he seems genuinely sick because of his internal divide, unlike all the men who repress it to keep up appearances. His sickness reminds Anna of her own.

Anna "spent today playing the 'game,'" hoping to defeat her depression through self-discipline. She might even get a job. Molly calls to tell Anna "that Jane Bond has 'taken a fall over' Mr Green," a mistake (and a warning) (*3).

Success in the "game" means holding opposites together, turning division into tenuous unity, which is why it promises to cure Anna's depression—but her compulsive "game" playing also looks insanity.

Another morning, Anna wakes up with a stiff neck and difficulty breathing, feeling a knot in her lower stomach. She calls Molly, who consults a book and confirms that Anna is "suffering from an anxiety state," but that she has nothing to worry about. However, "tonight (*4) it is very bad. Extraordinary."

Like she had through her sessions with Mother Sugar, Anna goes from an inability to feel anything to an overwhelming feeling of pain—but her ability to confront it instead of blocking it out seems like progress. This anxiety is probably connected to Saul: it is the "air of tension" that Anna thought "real men" might give her.

Jane Bond calls in the early morning for Saul Green today, but he does not come to his door when Anna knocks—he is fast asleep, so she comes and touches his shoulder. He is pale and cold—she thinks he may be asleep—but he wakes with a start and holds Anna around the neck, seemingly terrified. She goes downstairs for coffee; he joins her after the call with Jane and talks to her about raising a child. Anna notices how often he says "I, I, I, I, I." He speaks over her interruptions—she realizes that he is the cause of her anxiety and decides to take a bath. He flinches and "scramble[s] off his chair" when she says this; she tells him to relax, and he is clearly straining his whole body in his fight for self-control.

Whereas Saul is usually boorish, aloof, and hotheaded, on this morning he is vulnerable and frozen. Then he returns to the distastefully egotistical man Anna first met. He is clearly divided, both in this sense and in his fight to control his own body, but in repeating "I, I, I, I, I," he forcefully insists on his own unified identity, ignoring Anna and trampling on her own ego when she is already progressively losing her sense of self.

In the bathroom, Anna fails to play "the game" and realizes she is "going to fall in love with Saul Green." She has dinner with Molly and talks about Saul but feels increasingly possessive over him. At home, Anna and Saul argue about politics and how he never answers questions, and she "went to bed deciding that to fall in love with this man would be stupid."

Anna recognizes her love in advance—as in a tragic prophecy, her knowledge precedes her feelings, which she feels powerless to stop. She seems to be feeling the impulse she cited in the yellow notebook: the desire to create something out of a man's unrealized potential.

Whenever Anna makes coffee or tea, Saul walks about with a sense of "loneliness, isolation, [...] like a coldness around him," which invariably leads her to invite him to join. This time, he is talking about his "friend" in America, who is tired of affairs—Anna knows he is talking about himself, and when she mentions that his "friend" must be well-read, he flinches. Anna can start to feel these reactions of Saul's in her own body's anxious responses.

Like his initial, overwrought excuse for why he could not view the apartment, this lie of Saul's is thin, the result of compulsion rather than a deliberate need to hide his affairs—the "friend" that is really part of himself also points to the schism in his identity. His anxiety seems to surface when Anna forces him to confront his contradictions, like when she catches him here; but his divided self also begins to infiltrate her, as in the stories about neurosis that Anna planned in the yellow notebook.

Later, when Saul brings the "friend" back up, Anna asks about why he always talks of "*getting laid*," in the passive voice, despite his feelings "about the way language degraded sex," as he proclaimed the other day. They are angry at one another, and Anna accuses Saul of having an unhealthy attitude about sex. Frustrated, he insists that he is "the only American male I know who doesn't accuse American women of all the sexual sins in the calendar." They turn to politics—Saul is a "prematurely anti-Stalinist" communist, reviled by Hollywood and European communists alike, but not bitter about it. They joke about his clothes and she writes, "I am hopelessly in love with this man."

Anna specifically points out that, despite Saul's cavalier attitude toward women and sex, he talks about it as something that happens to him rather than something he does—this recalls Ella's reflection on the difference between being a sexual object and "giving pleasure" in the yellow notebook. Saul at once wants to be "taken" and refuses to be vulnerable to the women he sleeps with. The irony of Saul's politics is that he was ostracized for having the right beliefs too soon—of course, with her resignation about communism, Anna is not surprised.

Anna wrote the above entry three days ago, but has lost all sense of time in her love, which finally consummated itself a few days before when Saul sullenly suggested they "be good to each other" (*5). She has forgotten everything about being with, and being in love with, "a real man" like Saul.

Anna confirms that Saul is the kind of "real man" she has sought; since many of her entries are so short, the stories she planned in the yellow notebook can offer context that is lacking here (story five about the man showing the woman that her own heart is the one she hears beating).

A week later, Anna writes that she was (*6) and is still "so happy, so happy." She feels "a calm and delightful ecstasy," one with the universe's "confident energy" (*7). Saul, too, is relaxed and inapprehensive (*8).

Saul and Anna seem to have brought each other genuine happiness—something Anna has not reported feeling since her night with Paul in Africa, more than a decade before.

Anna "read the last paragraph as if it were written about someone else," for Saul did not come to her that night. She felt snubbed, and he looked tense at coffee the next morning. They made love that afternoon, but "it wasn't real love-making." It was one-sided, his decision.

Anna continues to feel like multiple people in a single body—but instead of keeping them sequestered in different notebooks, she now begins to directly confront her divisions.

Some length of time later, Anna describes the previous night: Saul offers a long story about needing to go somewhere, but Anna "didn't want to know and that in spite of the fact that I had written the truth in the yellow diary." He accuses her of being "very permissive" and gives her "a blind look" while she insists that "the word permissive is so alien to me." When he returns at night, having just been with another woman, he claims, "it doesn't mean anything." Anna sees him this morning and him now as two different, irreconcilable people—and then the third Saul, "brotherly and affectionate," tells her to go to sleep. She does, seeing two other versions of herself—"the snubbed woman in love" and "a curious detached sardonic Anna, looking on." She has the nightmare about "the old dwarfed malicious man," this time with a menacing erection.

It appears that Saul wants Anna to act possessively so that he can scorn her; of course, she does *feel deeply possessive of him, but she decides not to reveal her true feelings, at once effacing her authentic self and protecting them both from Saul's violent desires. Although she has long felt divided, Anna starts to see an analogy between her and Saul's senses of internal division. The joy-in-spite dream is clearly about Saul's apparent pleasure in sleeping with another woman. But, whereas previous male characters' insistence that sex does not matter to them in fact proved to Anna (and Ella) that she was insignificant to them, too, here Saul seems to "mean [no]thing" by sex precisely so that he can soothe his anxieties and return to his tender self for Anna.*

In the morning, Anna can smell fear on Saul's neck—she falls back asleep and **dreams** that she is the malicious man. Saul is still cold in the morning and smiles at her, "yellow and terrified," before "[making] love to [her], out of fear." Anna responds by "loving through terror."

Anna and Saul's relationship is based on mutual breakdown as they dissolve into one another, which is why they are terrified of their love; this might also explain why Anna has the joy-in-spite dream about herself (which might really be Saul).

Saul avoids Anna for a week, and she feels an unfamiliar "terrible, spiteful jealousy." They have a hostile argument, and he comes downstairs to tell her that he, unlike her, is not happy—that she is using him. She says that he is using her, and they share "a real laugh, not the hostile laugh."

Anna and Saul realize that their anxieties are parallel—they are both afraid of being used and hurt and convinced that the other does not need them.

Anna and Saul talk about politics, the cruelty of America and McCarthyism (*9), how Saul was forced to resign when his boss found out he had been a Party member in the past—the same boss later cried about his guilt, but Anna reminds Saul that they all have different public and private attitudes, that they all fear looking like a traitor. Saul accuses her of "middle-class talk," a weaponized remark that surprises her. He talks about loving England, where he can be open about his communism—"stock from the liberal cupboard, just as the other remarks were stock from the red cupboard." Anna explains that British liberals are defending McCarthyism. Saul soon walks out, and Anna laments how few people have "the kind of guts on which a real democracy has to depend." She is disappointed in the easiness of believing that freedom and liberty will always endure.

The American persecution of communists ironically follows the Stalinist playbook, forcing people to sacrifice their private beliefs in order to profess the correct dogma publicly. Like Marion, Saul also plays various roles in his political speech, even taking up the liberal ideology that led to his expulsion from the United States. Anna contrasts this kind of political role play, in which one's beliefs depend on context and convenience, with real moral courage—which, of course, she lacks just like Saul. This moral courage requires balancing a realistic pessimism with a resolute commitment to action—it is the alternative to naïve idealism and hopeless resignation, the way out of Anna's cycle of inspiration and disappointment.

Saul comes downstairs and they comfort each other. He rambles on about his parents, goes upstairs to work for all of five minutes and comes back downstairs to ask about "a friend's" parents. He is surprised when Anna knows he is talking about himself (*10)—she realizes that "he had genuinely forgotten he had told me," and actually that he does this all the time.

Saul completely lacks a stable ego—he is unable to keep hold of his ideas or memories for more than a few minutes and repeats his thinly veiled talk about a "friend," which Anna can easily see through.

Anna shuts herself in the big room, signaling that she is "not to be disturbed." Sweating, anxious, reminding herself that "this isn't my anxiety state" to no avail (*11), she fails "the game" and hears Saul traipse around the house. She calls Molly, who mentions that Jane Bond is still in love with Saul—Anna realizes his "walk" last night was a visit to her, and just then he knocks to tell her he is going for another "walk." She says something irrelevant, feeling sick and unable to kick him out even though she wants him to leave; she realizes she has to detach from him.

Anna is frightened to realize that Saul might drag her down into utter insanity, completely destroying her sense of self; by locking herself in the room alone, she tries to secure her independence from him, but she is also sickened precisely when he leaves to see another woman (which signifies a break in his affections, too).

When Saul returns from his "walk," he goes to the bathroom (*12) and Anna finally manages to ask him to leave when he comes into the bedroom. He says no and holds her "so simply and warmly that I immediately succumbed." He calls her oversensitive and she feels ill, unable to think—he tells her to make him supper, because "it'll be good for you" (*13). She does.

Saul again secures Anna's affection and trust by conveniently returning to the best version of himself when he gets home. His insistence that Anna make him dinner represents his seemingly absolute power over her—it is patronizing and forces her into the same gender roles she has sought to escape by refusing marriage.

Jane Bond calls early in the morning, and Anna hides in the bathroom while Saul talks with her. He goes to visit Jane after breakfast, and Anna looks through his papers, rationalizing her violations of his privacy. She finds letters from girls in America and Paris who complained that Saul did not write back. Then she discovers his diaries (*14) but finds it strange that he keeps them in chronological order. They are full of details about work and love, his loneliness and detachment—she tries to square this "self-pitying, cold, calculating, emotionless" Saul with the man she knows. Then she remembers that she cannot see herself in her own **notebooks**, and she realizes that writing about one's actual self (not one's projection of oneself) always looks "cold, pitiless, judging" and lifeless after the fact. While reading Saul's diaries, Anna alternates between anger and delight.

Anna attempts to understand Saul's past by decoding his diaries—this is exactly what the reader is forced to do with Anna, and in both their cases, their private writings clearly do not fully capture their identities. Anna cannot determine whether the Saul who writes the diary is closer to or further from the Saul she knows, and she struggles to imagine how any writing could ever approximate experience. Through Saul's letters to other women, Anna can recognize his impulsive flight from intimacy as a longstanding pattern; of course, she cannot see how he may have treated them in person, before abruptly scorning them.

Then, one of Saul's diary entries frightens Anna because it corroborates what she has already written in the yellow **notebook**. Actually, there are three entries. Saul writes that he wants to leave Detroit because "Mavis [is] making trouble." Then, Mavis visits him while he has another girl over. Then, he gets a letter that "Mavis cut her wrists with a razor. They got her to hospital in time. Pity, a nice girl." He never references this Mavis again.

Anna is as astonished at her own apparent foresight as she is at Saul's indifference to Mavis's well-being; he seems unable of appreciating the extent of his effect on women, and this confirms her suspicion that he flees from them when he is most needed.

Infuriated, Anna jumps to Saul's writings about her. He writes that he has decided not to stay with another girl he was sleeping with. At first, he writes that Anna is unattractive. Soon, he says he liked her "better than anyone" but does not like sleeping with her. He complains about Jane Bond, with whom he has apparently broken things off—he is now visiting a different woman, Marguerite, instead. Anna feels "a triumphant ugly joy because I've caught him out." (*15) But she is deeply wounded to read that Saul did not enjoy sleeping with her: she feels deceived and ashamed. She comes downstairs and writes this entry in her blue **notebook**.

While Saul almost never directly reveals his feelings to Anna, his journals express a seemingly coherent perspective on their relationship. Saul has difficulty reconciling his love for Anna and his sex with her—yet Anna is more hurt by his disinterest in sex with her than his relationships with other women.

Anna looks again at Saul's diary and realizes that he wrote the entry about not enjoying sex with her during his week of sulking. She says she understands nothing.

The timing of Saul's note suggests that he may have been in a particularly critical mindset, and that his entry might not be an accurate picture of his feelings toward Anna.

Anna recounts the day before. She asks Saul whether he is sick, and he wonders how she can tell; he is trying not to burden her with it. But then he accuses her of "sound[ing] like a bloody psycho-analyst." He eventually apologizes and changes the subject. Anna calls the doctor to ask about Saul; he implores her to make an appointment, unable to believe she is truly asking about "a friend." She argues with Saul about it, and they have "hard violent sex, like nothing I've ever known before" (*16).

Ironically, just as Saul asked about a "friend" when he was really talking about himself, Anna's doctor assumes that her complaints about a "friend" must be about herself; yet clearly she is ill, too, with their shared madness.

Today Saul criticizes Anna in bed and they debate whether there are different, perhaps national, styles of sex. Spending their days alone in the flat, Anna knows that she and Saul "are both mad." She is permanently anxious; all his movements provoke her anxiety, including when he goes out for a walk.

Saul and Anna continue losing all sense of who they are; yet they also fixate on their differences, with their search for national styles of sex suggesting an attempt to "name" away their differences through reference to broad archetypes.

Today, Saul returns and Anna knows he has just been with a woman; he tells her that, unlike her, he does not "[take] fidelity for granted." She nearly tells him to move on, but ends up affirming that fidelity matters to her. In his diaries, Saul writes that Marguerite is tired of him and that he has moved on to Dorothy. And yet he and Anna remain friendly, most of the time, except for when "the friendliness switches to hate in the middle of a sentence."

As though to hold themselves together (and apart from one another), Anna and Saul draw a clear line between their values. Instead of fleeing confrontation, for the first time, Anna directly states what she needs from Saul (fidelity), acknowledging that she is much more of a wife than a mistress.

Anna goes to visit Janet—she knows Saul is with Dorothy at the same moment. Janet seems happy, and Anna just as soon reverts to her new, tense self on her way home. When she arrives, she goes to the bathroom, where she is physically sick from her anxiety for the first time in her life. Saul is home; he can see her suspicion and wonders, "what are you trying to find out?" She realizes she is frightened because of his hatefulness. He brings her jazz records, which she finds "good-humoured and warm and accepting," unlike their relationship.

Anna says remarkably little about Janet's new life—it is utterly conventional, their relationship no longer returns Anna to normalcy (instead, it seems to remind Anna about the normalcy she cannot have, but also does not quite want). Anna's pain crosses the boundary from mental to physical, and she throws up in the bathroom as though trying to expel Saul's influence from her body.

Anna says that she and Saul should separate for the night; he is shocked, quickly grows defensive, and then makes a joke out of it. And he still insists on getting into bed with her later that night—she asks what they are *really* fighting about. He says it is their craziness, that they will look back on their time together as "a fascinating experience." They fall asleep. In the morning, Saul is cold and asks what Anna **dreamed** about—it is "the terrible dream, but the malicious irresponsible principle was embodied in Saul."

When Anna insists on drawing an emotional boundary with Saul, he recoils and cannot give up having his way. He acknowledges his insanity, but does not let Anna help him fully confront it. In talking about how they will remember their relationship, he both promises that their relationship will end and comments on the structure of literature, which Anna has remarked judges events retrospectively, from an outside perspective, even when those events are remembered. It is thus unsurprising that Saul's recourse to a perspective outside his own is what finally turns him into the figure of joy-in-spite.

Anna goes downstairs to make coffee; Saul goes out, waiting for Anna to say something on his way down. She listens to his jazz records, and when he returns, triumphant, she says nothing because "there's nothing to say." Saul wonders if he wants to be punished and notes that he likes neither himself nor her. He asks if Anna knows what he's doing, and she admits to reading his diary; Saul calls her jealous and says he has not "touched a woman since I've been here." He yells at Anna—"I, I, I, I, I"—until he suddenly falls silent and asks what is wrong with her; he proclaims that sex "just isn't important." Anna gets him to admit that he knocks women down, and then realizes that "the whole thing, this cycle of bullying and tenderness, [is] for this moment when he could comfort me." She leaves for a cigarette.

Anna continues realizing and utilizing her power to make Saul confront his demons by refusing to give into his sadistic side—she learns strength by realizing that it can heal them both. And so she appears to be gaining the upper hand in their relationship, especially by refusing to admit the hurt his infidelity causes her. This leads to a breakthrough: Saul finally admits his underlying misery. Contrary to the joy-in-spite nightmare and unlike with previous men, Saul takes joy in healing Anna and so needs to continue causing her pain; he also talks about the unimportance of sex to justify, rather than deny, his feelings for her.

Back inside, Anna explains what Saul is doing in terms of his "mother-trouble"—he has to outwit her, but is frightened at his violent impulses, which leads him "to comfort and soothe" her. She asks why he is not angry, for she is naming him, and he should be ashamed of himself, "at the age of thirty-three."

Anna's ability to "name" Saul distances her from her pain by reminding her of her emotional strength; again, love figures as the unbalanced, incestuous neurosis of a mother and son.

Anna and Saul have sex, coldly, and she feels "he's making love to someone else." Saul starts talking in a Southern accent, and she tells him he is "getting us mixed up." He is shocked and rolls over; he asks Anna to "take me easy," and she replies, "then that defines you." Shocked, fighting himself, he asks what is wrong with him—Anna reminds him that they are both "inside a cocoon of madness," and he insists that she is "the sanest bloody woman I've ever known." For a long time, they lie there, silent and calm, with the angry versions of themselves "in another room somewhere."

Saul quite literally takes on a different persona, having lost track of his Anna's identities. Anna continues to induce crises of anxiety in Saul by naming and defining him—she seems "sane" to him because she has the power over his identity that he lacks. With the ability to name and injure now reciprocal, it becomes clear that Anna and Saul can mutually heal one another in a way they cannot heal themselves.

(*17) For a week, Anna and Saul are happy. They are alone, and Anna feels no need to write anything, until now—when "a switch has been turned in him." Saul comes downstairs, restless, and says he should go out. They anticipate the entire fight they will have, and Anna feels her anxiety take over, her "week of being happy slide away." She wonders whether she could be happy for Janet, who would need it that summer.

Anna again shows that she is more likely to record her dissatisfaction than her moments of happiness with Saul; like Anna with communism, she and Saul learn that their cycles of tranquility and conflict predictable, and this knowledge allows them to conceive an alternative to the cycle rather than remaining caught up in it.

Saul decides not to go out and heads upstairs to work, then comes down and waits for Anna a few minutes later and says he had "never been like this before, so tied to a woman I can't even go for a walk without feeling guilty." She declares it is not her fault that he has not left for a week; he tries to convince her that it has only been two days, both because he cannot remember and because "he hated the idea that he had given any woman a week of himself." Anna insists it has been a week, and Saul grabs and shakes her, saying, "I hate you for being normal," and realizing that she remembers everything he has said and done to her. Ana sees herself through Saul's eyes, as "inexplicably in command of events" because of her memory, which made her feel like a prisoner.

Saul finally admits that he has grown dependent on Anna—she has become part of his conscience, able to influence his thinking, give him anxiety, and regulate his values in a way no woman ever has. His strange perception of time also reflects his mental breakdown, and recalls Anna's declaration that her sense of ordered time and regimented obligations was keeping her sane before Janet left for boarding school. Yet Anna also sees this madness as a form of freedom from the memory and history that continue to determine her sense of self.

Saul orders Anna to bed, then begins touching her over her objections. When she starts crying, he suddenly becomes tender, but their sex is "an act of hatred, hateful." She at once feels freed by his cruelty and hates him for it. She suggests he see "a witch-doctor" but he decries the prospect of psychoanalysis with another "shouting, automatic I, I, I speech." Furious, he leaves—and then knocks on her door to say he wants to take a walk before running down the stairs. Anna notes that her writings erase "the happiness, the normality, the laughter" and only leave "a record of two people, crazy and cruel."

More disturbing than Saul's sexual violence toward Anna is her sense of freedom after it; she recognizes that he injures her out of his own emotional fragility that drives his violence. Saul's attempt to consolidate his identity through "I, I, I" is much like psychoanalysis for Anna—both fail, but expose genuine feelings of tension and conflict that the characters must instead learn to embrace. Anna again reminds the reader that her notebooks cannot offer a full picture of her relationship with Saul, since there she finds nothing notable to write about their periods of normalcy.

Anna slowly drank whiskey last night in an effort to ease the tension in her lower stomach. She thinks she could become an alcoholic, which is the most shocking part of her relationship, yet "nothing, compared to the rest." Toward Saul, she feels jealous, then frightened, then worried, jealous again, and hateful. She goes to his diary. Written today: "Am a prisoner. Am slowly going mad with frustration." She feels like their week of happiness is suddenly being revoked. She starts to think Saul should choose other women, that another woman could give him what she could not. Perhaps, as Mother Sugar suggested, this is a homosexual impulse.

Saul and Anna both *feel imprisoned by their relationship—Anna by Saul's cruelty, Saul by the need to answer for it and his unwanted emotional attachment to Anna. Of course, Saul is already seeing other women, which suggests that Anna offers him something unique—perhaps precisely the accountability he needs.*

Anna realizes (*18) she is becoming part of Saul and looking for the same mother figure he lacks. She is frightened to feel one with him and knows it would be in step with his pattern for him to leave her. She feels unable to see herself, uninformed about the world—she reads the week's newspapers, but their contents are unsurprising and predictable. She finds "a new knowledge," a version of "the game" born of terror: she imagines living the wars in the newspapers, knowing that "cruelty and the spite and the I, I, I, I of Saul and of Anna were part of the logic of war."

As their senses of self break down, Saul and Anna get ever closer to dissolving into one another and losing all sense of the boundary between them. This same sense of violent dissolution, which Anna wrote about extensively in the black notebook, continues to dominate the world and perhaps accounts for her obsessive newspaper-clipping collections. Her new version of "the game" depends on seeing this fundamental principle in herself and the world at the same time.

However, words and writing do nothing to capture her "knowledge of destruction as a force." Anna worries about war, fears for Janet, falls "limp with exhaustion" and gets into bed, feeling momentarily sane and imagining how Saul must occasionally feel the same. Anna hears him outside and notices "a surge of fear and anxiety," plus utter hatred for him, then yearning; she follows him to bed and can tell that "he had been stumbling about the streets, ill and lonely, from the way he held me."

Words and language hide instability through the illusion that they directly refer to the world instead of merely approximating it, which is partially why Anna's blue notebook grows increasingly ambiguous and contradictory as her relationship with Saul develops. In wandering around London, Saul tries to find himself outside his relationship with Anna but realizes that he cannot—his identity is pinned to hers.

This morning, Anna reads the newspapers, unsure which version of Saul would come downstairs. In the last three days, she has been "inside madness" and Saul has looked like "all his energies were absorbed in simply holding himself together." He is at his limits, requiring attention and care. They talk about politics, but he is only "talking to hold himself together." He parrots a wide range of political ideas—she asks a question and he strains to answer, if there is even a real "he" inside him, a single true self "more himself than the others." They have, for once, a sober and logical conversation, until he lapses back into madness and she has to shake him out of it.

Saul is on the brink of losing his battle for unity, but this is actually a good thing because he lets down his guard, allowing Anna to finally help piece him back together. The total dissolution of his identity creates the potential for salvation through love, transformation through the admission of failure. As Saul falls apart, Anna begins to look more sane than ever—if only for a few brief moments.

Anna stands by the window, thinking of Janet, feeling herself further descending into chaos. She tries to "summon up younger, stronger Annas," the Annas from Africa—and she becomes Tom Mathlong and Charlie Themba, and herself again. After a time, she returns to herself and finds Saul in bed. She holds him, wakes him up and lets him fall back asleep, holding him and seeking to warm him up, feeling "no reason why I should be mad or sane. She has the nightmare again, and she is "the malicious male-female dwarf figure, the principle of joy-in-destruction," but so is Saul, and they are in love, kissing, "celebrating destruction." She awakens "filled with joy and peace" and wonders if she has finally "**dreamed** the dream 'positively,'" as Mother Sugar always hoped for her.

Realizing that she, too, has multiple personalities within her, Anna tries using them to cobble herself together—as with Saul, her fracturing starts looking like a way to save herself as well as a symptom of her illness. Her reminiscence brings her completely into chaos and out of reality for a while, but she emerges rejuvenated; Anna and Saul seem positioned to overcome their madness by embracing it, rather than resisting it. Anna's new dream is ambiguous: could her happiness be the result of finally resigning herself to taking joy in spite, or does the positive version of the dream mean that the dwarf figure now represents something else?

Saul wakes up abruptly and yells Anna's name; they have sex and he goes out, while Anna lies with a great joy on the bed. In what may or may not be a different entry, Saul is upstairs and Anna is frustrated, feeling that she is "denying life itself," betraying womankind. Saul goes out, and Anna ceases to care. She begins "making images, like a film," in her mind: she is a communist prisoner in a communist jail, a soldier and student and peasant in different revolutionary struggles around the world. She imagines herself as Tom Mathlong, whose detachment is uncommon, but essential for successful revolutions. Anna falls asleep and wakes in the early morning, but Saul is nowhere to be found, and she feels "dissolved in the hateful emotion, the woman-betrayed." He comes in and goes upstairs, but she does not follow.

Anna no longer lets Saul's departure hurt her and starts experiencing the world from other, more distant viewpoints, integrating herself with events across the world as in her "game." The shift to film is key: Anna has written multiple times that film is closer to actual human experience because it happens within the flow of time, whereas literature is detached from space and time (even when it focuses on specific events). Mathlong's emotional detachment points to the paradox of political action: to an extent, people must block out empathy in order to get anything done.

In the morning, Saul chastises Anna for letting him sleep in and insists he missed his business lunch, which obviously could not have been the case. Feeling sick, Anna goes into her room and sets out the **notebooks**; Saul follows her and accuses her of "writing a record of my crimes!" He asks why she has four notebooks, and she says she will henceforth keep only one—which she only realizes in the moment. He wonders how, although they are multifaceted and complex people, their relationship has condensed them into "one small thing"—Anna's jealousy. He says he will not be trapped and soon leaves the house. A part of Anna follows; she knows he walks until he finds a bench or stoop, sits on it and feels "the cold of loneliness."

Saul and Anna's tumultuous arguments resume; he imagines that her notebooks must revolve around him, which is indeed true—he dominates the blue notebook to the exclusion of everything else, which so threatens him because he conveniently forgets his "crimes." Like Ella's fictional protagonist committing suicide in the yellow notebook, Anna decides abruptly to consolidate her notebooks—which no doubt represents a decision to consolidate her identity—but seems to have been planning it forever, unconsciously. Yet she and Saul draw a clear distinction between consolidation and becoming "one small thing"; Anna's sort of consolidation, like her "game," requires holding tensions and contradictions together rather than blocking out what is inconvenient. She gains a unified identity by expanding her horizons to include her divisions, rather than shrinking her horizons to exclude them.

Anna looks into the blue **notebook** but cannot write, so she calls Molly. However, Anna realizes she "could not talk to her," with her sullenness fighting Molly's enthusiastic report that Tommy is about to lecture about "the Life of the Coal-miner," and maybe join rebel fighters in Algeria or Cuba. His wife is opposed to the idea, but Molly does not object, although Tommy did blame her for it—he decided he could not fight, since he had to lecture.

The paradox of this entry is that while Anna did, indeed, end up writing in the blue notebook, it is entirely unclear what she originally hoped to write (but could not). Tommy's political activities are still inconsistent with those in Free Women, *indicating that the book's narrative tension has also not been resolved. Tommy seems caught between inspiration and resignation—like Anna, he is unwilling to put his body on the line and only commits to revolution as an intellectual. He even becomes an expert on coalminers despite only working in the mines briefly, to avoid military service; while he might be advancing the revolutionary cause, he is still clearly not a sincere member of the working class.*

After their conversation, Anna feels the floors and walls moving, and momentarily stands in empty space—she walks carefully to the bed, where she sleeps and sees her body lying down, then watches people she knows come "try and fit themselves into Anna's body." First are the people from the Mashopi Hotel—Paul Blackenhurst, dead, invades her, and Anna struggles to inhabit her body as she watches Paul's dead smile on her face.

For the first time, Anna's madness is not just cognitive, but also perceptual—in bed, she comes to view herself as though she is a third-person observer. The others entering her body represent not only her sense of divided selves but also how her identity remains indebted to those who have influenced her in the past.

When Anna succeeds in entering her body, she has returned to the Mashopi, with everyone surrounding her; she tries to write in the **notebook**, but finds herself holding a gun. She is an Algerian soldier fighting against the French, willing to kill and torture, knowing that the revolution will lead to "new tyranny" but is still necessary. Terrified, she finds herself flying through Algeria, ecstatic.

Anna sees that revolutions follow the same cycle of inspiration and pessimism as her own involvement in politics, but also starts to believe in the cycle despite its tendency to failure. In other words, perhaps the whole cycle of inspiration and depression, revolution and repression, means two steps forward and one step back.

Anna is in the old "flying **dream**" about "joy, joy in light, free movement." She flies to China and finds a pregnant peasant woman, whose body she enters—but she still has her own brain, "thinking mechanical thoughts which I classified as 'progressive and liberal,'" "naming" the woman. She tries to fight her "terror of dissolution" but it overcomes her, ejects her from the woman's body, and throws her to the earth—she tries to climb the mountains to Europe but wakes afraid that she will be trapped in China.

The flying dream's liberation allows Anna to enter other people rather than the other way around. She "names" both herself and the Chinese peasant woman, which destroys her freedom in flight but also quite literally grounds her in a fixed order. This is exactly how Saul and Anna "name" and heal each other by entering one another.

It is the afternoon, and Anna is "changed by the experience of being different people." She becomes herself "with a weary sense of duty" and hears Saul upstairs. He comes downstairs and holds her hand; she realizes "he was comparing it with the hand of a woman he had just left, or a woman he wanted me to believe he had just left." He expects she will ask him questions, so she decides not to. She goes to the window and he follows and holds her, promising that he is telling the truth, that he has not been with someone else. "I did not believe him," Anna writes, "but the Anna in his arms believed him," and they make love—he promises her a child, treating her as someone else, again, and she reminds him it is her.

Anna's "sense of duty" shows that she has moved from the paralyzing search for solutions to the capacity for action; its weariness suggests that it comes not from naivety or unrealistic optimism, but rather from moral courage. She and Saul can both recognize one another's expectations and feelings, and ultimately the truth of the matter—whether Saul was actually with another woman—matters far less than his and Anna's ability to fill their roles for each other.

Anna is sick in the bathroom and goes to sleep, then **dreams** of "playing roles" against Saul, as in variations of the same play. In the morning, she writes until he wakes—he suggests that she "write another novel," and she says, for the first time, that she has a writer's block. He says that her writing is driving him crazy, challenging his "sexual superiority." They agree that, despite his theoretical support for equality, Saul enjoys dominating women; he orders Anna to make him coffee.

Anna's dream again shows how her and Saul's need for one another to play particular roles—distinct from their actual personalities, and therefore fictional—has structured their relationship. It also points to fiction's power to reconfigure their relationship and free them, so it is no coincidence that Anna admits her writer's block for the only time ever. Her newfound belief in writing's power to clarify and mask the truth sets her up to discover the golden notebook.

Anna goes grocery shopping and comes across a stationery shop, where she finds a beautiful large golden **notebook** that an American has custom-ordered and never retrieved. She buys it, but is not sure what to use it for. Saul thinks it is beautiful and wants it for himself, and so repeats, "gimme, gimme, gimme, in a child's voice." He nearly runs out with the golden notebook and Anna has to stop him; he goes upstairs and does nothing, leading her to feel ill again.

The titular golden notebook promises to let Anna finally give up on her four separate books and integrate herself into a single text. The golden notebook's mysterious origin story implies that the notebook—and consequently Anna's psychological progress—is a symbolic gift from Saul, the absent American from the stationery store.

Anna spends today inside, looking at the golden **notebook** and finding that Saul had scribbled a "schoolboy's curse" inside: "*Whoever he be who looks in this / He shall be cursed, / That is my wish. / Saul Green*, his *book. (!!!)*" She laughs and nearly gives him the golden notebook but cannot—she rids herself of the four notebooks and decides to begin recording "all of myself in one book."

Anna finally takes the decisive step to combine her notebooks, but her new notebook is not wholly hers: Saul's his writing opens the golden notebook. His curse is a direct challenge to the reader: try to distinguish him from Anna in what follows.

THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

After Saul's "schoolboy's curse," the golden **notebook** starts with Anna turning on lights on a dreary day, to have Saul join her in bed for the night. She feels that the flat's "devils" have disappeared, as though her terror is some external force in the world—but Saul starts walking upstairs and Anna "watche[s her] happiness leak away." Her body suddenly seems ugly, and she realizes she is having homosexual feelings. Saul stops walking and she expects him to come downstairs and affirm her misery, which he does—while he berates her for being naked, she asks how they manage to "influence each other's moods even when we are in different rooms" and be so many different selves (they agree they do not have to try).

The golden notebook seems to straightforwardly continue the blue notebook—it is still the story of Saul and Anna going insane. However, material from the black, red, and yellow notebooks also appears, dissolving the artificial divisions Anna has created among her four notebooks (and, by extension, in herself). In this sense, the golden notebook is similar to The Golden Notebook, *the novel as a whole—even though neither text offers a complete or consistent picture of Anna.*

Saul goes out, and suddenly everything is pleasant again, but only momentarily, and then Anna begins moving further from sanity than ever before. She crawls to bed and remembers when she could control her **dreams**, time, and motions. The ceiling becomes a tiger, the curtains the "shreds of stinking sour flesh" it left behind. She sleeps the light, lucid sleep of illness. One Anna watches another Anna sleeping, waiting to be invaded by different personalities, and tells her that she is betraying herself, sacrificing her courage, giving up; as it tells her to fight, she feels she is falling through the waters of sleep, which turn out to be shallow.

Anna ponders her sense of control just before losing it—again, she hallucinates to an extent that there is no true difference between her sleep and waking life. She is torn away from her body, then torn between fighting to be only one thing and letting her multiple selves invade her body—yet, as the integration of her disparate selves, the golden notebook itself suggests that she can have both at the same time.

The voice implores Anna to fight, to fly, and she manages to escape her cage and join the tiger on the building's roof, which soon vanishes—and now the tiger is in its own cage, beautiful and gentle. Men come running for it, and she warns it to run; afraid, it cuts her arm and jumps down among the houses. Crying, Anna realizes that Saul is the tiger, nearly wakes up, and thinks that she should write a play about them and the tiger, as a way to evade thinking.

The tiger is alternatingly free and imprisoned, representing Anna and Saul's unstable but always polarized power dynamic. As in life, Saul injures Anna in his quest for freedom. Again, she recognizes the impulse to evade rather than address her problems through fiction—but she soon overcomes it and learns to make writing part of her healing process instead.

Now in control of her sleep, Anna decides to look back at her own life, check in on it, like when she would lay awake as a child and think through everything fearful in her day. This is no longer to stave off nightmares, but rather to make sure the past is still there: George Hounslow waiting for them near the Mashopi Hotel, covered by a swarm of white butterflies, which were a hydrogen bomb exploding, "unbelievably beautiful, the shape of death."

Images from rest of text converge, crossing the divisions between Anna's notebooks to create a unity that is simultaneously violent (the hydrogen bomb and death) and beautiful (butterflies). She discovers yet another version of the "game," this time aimed at reconciling her past and present selves.

"The invisible projectionist" behind Anna's memories switches to another scene: a fight between Paul Tanner from the yellow **notebook** and Michael from reality; these two men merge into a new, heroically strong person, who says they were not failures, that "we spend our lives fighting to get people very slightly less stupid than we are to accept truths that the great men have always known," to mediate between the visionaries and the masses. A dozen people, from the yellow notebook and reality, appear before the film stops and the projectionist asks how Anna knows she put "the correct emphasis" on it—the word "correct," old-fashioned Marxist jargon, makes Anna sick.

Anna starts to feel that an alien force controls her memories. Her memory's form as a movie continues to represent both the distortion of reality (as in the television and film industries' attempts to adapt Anna's novel Frontiers of War*) and a kind of storytelling closer to the reality of individual experience. Anna's real and fictional loves merge to announce what they have just done: mediate between ideas and reality. Anna still wonders how she can feel that one perspective is "correct" while still helping people "accept truths that the great men have always known."*

The projectionist runs through various films: Mashopi, then Paul Tanner and Ella, then Michael and Anna, Ella and Julia, Anna and Molly. He laughs when it says, "*directed by Anna Wulf*," over Anna's pleas that the films are not hers. Anna is "faced with the burden of re-creating order out of the chaos that my life had become," unable to tell fact from fiction, and realizes that it is all fiction because it is all fit into her own viewpoint.

Anna's experiences and fictions meld into a continuous, chaotic narrative, much like the novel itself, that Anna at once controls—in the sense that the reader can only access these stories through her perspective—and has no control over in the sense that that no author ever controls the life of any story, either by capturing a whole truth or by determining how a story is received.

The projectionist asks if Anna knows how June Boothby would see their time together, and Anna starts composing a story, frustrated that she is writing in "the style of the most insipid coy woman's magazine" but frightened to realize this is nearly her own style. June does not help her mother with dinner and thinks Mrs Boothby must know what she feels. Then, "*he*" gets out of a lorry, and June stands up to walk mechanically towards him, toward the hotel. The projectionist laughs and said he told Anna she couldn't do it.

June Boothby is insignificant in the black notebook, which is precisely the projectionist's point: he challenges Anna to imagine another person's perspective on the same events, and she cannot—despite her efforts to tell a whole story, stretch herself personally, and incorporate other people's perspectives into herself, Anna cannot fathom June Boothby.

Anna wakes up, "exhausted by the **dreaming**," but actually, she soon realizes, exhausted because Saul has returned. She can feel that he has been just past the door, on the landing, "in a tense indecisive pose" deciding whether or not to come inside. She calls to him and realizes who the projectionist from her dream was. She tells Saul he has "become a sort of inner conscience or critic," and he responds that she is the same to him. She declares that he will have to break the relationship, because she is not strong enough.

Anna and Saul have not only caught one another's neuroses but also invaded one another's consciences; they feel that they are controlling each other's minds, perceptions, and anxieties. If Saul authors Anna's dreams, then readers must question who truly writes the golden notebook: Anna, Saul, or some combination of the two.

Saul looks at Anna with "anger, dislike, suspicion"; he wants to fight her now, but his real personality will do what she asks later on. He accuses her of trying to kick him out, and she sits up, yelling "stop it," telling him he knows it is a cycle, realizing and promising that he would leave anyway when Janet returned. Saul would see Anna and Janet as "two women, two enemies"; what "pure chance" that she had a girl and not a boy.

Now it is Anna's turn to act as Saul's conscience. She notes that he acts as replacement company for Janet in her life, especially because she mothers him as much as she has to mother her own daughter—Saul could not stand to compete with Janet for Anna's attention and affection.

Anna watches Saul fight "to refuse entrance to alien personalities," like she did during the **dream**. They put on jazz and lose track of the sick versions of themselves. She wonders aloud why the masses cannot succumb to such alien personalities, too, and they ironically mock their faith in revolution. For the first time, Saul said, he is starting to conceive his life as something besides waiting to participate in the revolution—all his American socialist friends have done the same, falling into pedestrian jobs and marriages, which he despises. He wishes he could go back to his old "gang of idealist kids," and Anna jokes that all American men are happiest reminiscing "about the group of buddies." Similarly, Anna writes, she has "buttoned up" her strongest desire: "being with one man, love, all that."

While Saul and Anna both fight their "invasions," they see how change requires the same thing, people's domination by agents that initially appear foreign to them. This hints that their "invasions" might not be threats to their sanity but actually a pathway to it—perhaps they can achieve the personal transformation they need through madness, not despite it. Saul and Anna rehash the usual evidence of ex-communists' disappointment; Saul sees his old political activities as simply a means of feeling idealistic about the future with his friends (like the masochistic gang in Anna's last story in the yellow notebook), while Anna sees real love as the deeper desire underlying the rest of her anxieties. Here, their ability to "unbutton" these repressed desires demonstrates that they are increasingly confronting the true causes of their madness.

Anna calls Molly, but recites their coming conversation to Saul while she waits for Molly to pick up: Anna will reveal the affair and explain how she has "buttoned up" her past insistence on finding men who would love or hurt her, plus her communism. Molly does not pick up. Saul asks what he will become; Anna says he will turn into "a very gentle, wise, kind man" who could dissuade people from pursuing their good causes. All the "*real* people" she knows, she promises Saul, have "a history of emotional crime." She offers that he looks poised to become "one of those tough, square, solid middle-aged men" that others credit with wisdom, although "one of the corpses" would occasionally call out, "*remember me*?"

*Anna clearly does not need Molly to pick up, since she already knows how their conversation would go—Molly, too, proves a sort of inner critic for Anna. She recognizes that turmoil and guilt can engender a unique kind of moral growth, but she also suggests that Saul's potential wisdom—which she describes through an image of Willi Rodde—might be a farce, based on others' reverence for men who seem to know what they are talking about. Perhaps there is something more noble in the "corpses" than the "*real people*" (like Anna's "*real men*" who are only real because they make her suffer).*

These "corpses" are people who have given up their own path along "the golden road to maturity," like Anna herself, who is busy pushing a boulder up the "great black mountain" toward the "few great men" at the top. Saul is a boulder-pusher too, she insists, and not one of the "few great men." He snaps back into his "I, I, I." Anna drinks while he lectures, shooting words like bullets that ricochet off the walls. For a moment, Anna blacks out and returns to her nightmare of a crumbling city; when she awakens, Saul is momentarily lucid before returning to the "I I I I, but I against women."

Anna sees the choice between wisdom and ignorance as the choice between fighting despite impossible odds, which requires a realistic cynicism about the possibility of change combined with the moral courage to act anyway, and the cycle of blind naivety and moral discouragement that has led Anna to give up her parallel struggles for justice and love. Saul's assertion of his ego—his fight against the truth that he is merely pushing a boulder up someone else's mountain—appears as an act of war, a moral crime in itself, which momentarily destroys Anna's consciousness.

Anna cries "weak, sodden whisky-diluted tears on behalf of womankind" and watches them both get aroused. Saul drags her to bed and kisses her asleep; she laughs herself to sleep and awakens, next to him, "full of happiness." But Saul is exhausted, distorted from his "I I I I."

By trying to impose his ego, Saul tires himself out, too—perhaps this will lead others to see him as a "real person," but this will require delusion on his part as well as his observers'.

They have coffee in silence, and Saul says he will go to work; they go to bed and he says he has to leave, goes for a walk, and asks Anna to stop him—she will not, for it does not matter if he is visiting a woman. He comes back inside her room, and she thinks of De Silva saying, "I wanted to see what would happen." She and Saul both do. Saul compares her to a spy, saying he will never "be corralled by any dame." She says he is now and laughs, before they agree they hope "we'll never have to say that again." Saul leaves the flat.

Anna acutely recognizes that Saul's infidelity is a symptom of his failing struggle for moral courage with himself: it is an easy way to assert power over Anna, eroding her power over him. By refusing to let infidelity injure her, however, she breaks its power over her and forces Saul to confront and accept his own vulnerability to her.

Anna thinks about reading Saul's diary but knows she will never look again. Feeling ill, she pours some scotch and feels vertigo, the kitchen's colors and faults attacking her. She comes to the big room, which seems just as bad, "an insistent attack on my attention from a hundred different points." She has to crawl to bed and falls asleep, ready for the projectionist, knowing what he will tell her. This knowledge, like her other recent moments of insight, is powerful but inexpressible through words. The **dream** simply feels like "words spoken after the event, or a summing-up, for emphasis' sake, of something learned."

Of course, in reality Anna is still hurt by Saul's affairs, which feels like the universe attacking her, threatening to invade her mind: the very essence of madness. In turn, she takes recourse to the version of Saul she has internalized. Again, this knowledge that exceeds the potential of literature—not only does the notebook's fail to describe the dream, but the dream fails to describe Anna's foreknowledge, just as the novel cannot possibly capture Anna's identity.

The projectionist runs Anna through the films, the same films, which now seem "realistic," crude, with a new attention to details, like Mrs Boothby's curves and sweat, Willi's humming, Mr Boothby's "envious, but un-bitter" gaze at the man with his daughter June. There is Mr Lattimer ogling Mrs Boothby, then Paul Tanner getting his clean shirt—"Get it?" asks the projectionist.

Anna manages to see the same images from a new perspective, finding details from her memory she never noticed before. Her vision is expanding, surely, but so is her knowledge of its limits. She realizes that she can see more, but she can never see everything; her writing can never capture the whole "truth," which of course explains the novel's fragmented structure.

The films all begin fusing together, then slowing down to show a peasant planting a seed, water trickling down a rock, a man standing with a rifle, a woman telling herself, "No, I won't kill myself." The projectionist will not answer, so Anna turns off the machine, and then (still in her **dream**) reads her own words from a page: these scenes are about the "small painful sort of courage which is at the root of every life, because injustice and cruelty is at the root of life." By emphasizing "the heroic or the beautiful or the intelligent," Anna refuses to accept this. She takes these words to Mother Sugar, asking whether this courage is the same as the grass growing thousands of years after the world is destroyed by the hydrogen bomb. Anna will still not give it "all that much reverence." Mother Sugar looks impatient and disappointed.

The films, like Anna's notebooks, merge into singular images that represent a moral stand, action out of knowledge rather than naivety. This includes the stand against suicide, which Anna has clearly had on her mind throughout the novel, even if she has been unable to express it directly. She finally develops a better theory of action and creativity than Ella's "power to create through naivety": creation through courage, which means boulder-pushing: mundane resilience, not fantastic heroism. This is the essence of writing and politics alike.

Anna wakes up, needing Saul. "A short story: or a short novel: comic and ironic:" a woman begins alternating between two men, one night after the other, hoping to free herself from men and find them equally enjoyable. They both realize there is another man; one becomes jealous, the other "cool and guarded." The woman falls for the jealous man who loves her, but he leaves her when she announces that she has emancipated herself by taking two men.

Anna returns to the form of the yellow notebook, which affirms that she does successfully combine the different aspects of her thought into the golden notebook—even though her madness is only deeper, not yet resolved. This story seems to be about Anna's relationship with the two versions of Saul, and how his divided personality tears them apart. In freeing herself from any particular man by taking two (like Saul does with women), the woman in Anna's story manages to lose one of them, and is thus no longer free.

Anna wonders what it would take to fit Ella into this story; Ella would be more defensive now, and with Saul, she would be more intelligent and cool than Anna. Anna realizes she is "creating 'the third'—the woman altogether better than I was." She hopes her imagination will come to life, then laughs at herself.

Anna recognizes that her novel, The Shadow of the Third, *was a "third" to her own life the whole time; it represented her capacity to imagine an ideal version of herself rather than her capacity to confront the truths about herself.*

Saul comes upstairs, tired and not combative, and announces that it is curious Anna is laughing, and that he has been thinking about her while walking through London. She said she is laughing because he was walking about, "making sets of moral axioms to save us both with." She says she is laughing about "free women" and tells him her story's plot. He says to put laughing on her agenda, as this would save her.

Even as Saul wanders the streets in an attempt to separate himself from Anna, the version of her that lives inside his mind persists; her laughing alone represents a kind of independence from his control and her agony, which she has apparently achieved through her "third." The notebook explicitly connects to Free Women *for the first time.*

Saul says that Anna needs to start writing again—she will "really crack up" unless she comes to terms with her creative block. She declares that whenever she tries to write, "someone comes into the room, looks over my shoulders, and stops me": figures from her past, from masses and revolutions. Saul tells Anna to get paper and a pencil, to "just begin." He gives her a first sentence for a story about "the two woman you are": "the two women were alone in the London flat." Anna gives Saul the first sentence for his novel: "On a dry hillside in Algeria, the soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle." He declares he will only write it down if she will give him her **notebook**—she does. He tells her to cook for him, something he "never though I'd say to a woman." She does, and they sleep.

Now, the solution to Anna's romantic block forces her to address her creative block; just as their merged identity has helped them confront their madness by leading them deeper into it, Anna and Saul's merger allows them both to write again, as they trade the first lines of what become their next works. "The two women were alone in the London flat" is the first sentence of Free Women. Astonishingly, the golden notebook reveals that Free Women is not an objective frame story about the "real" Anna Wulf, who reveals her subjective feelings and history in the notebooks; rather, Free Women is the real Anna Wulf's fictionalization of her life, an heir to the yellow notebook. The "true" Anna, Tommy, Molly, Richard, and Marion can never be grasped directly, only inferred by interpreting the notebooks. It is also unclear whether the notebooks in The Golden Notebook are Anna's real notebooks or merely the ones that Tommy peruses in Free Women, a fictional version of any real notebooks Anna may keep.

In the morning, Saul looks too ill to go out; Anna wants to tell him this, to insist that "I must look after you. I'll do anything if only you'll say you'll stay with me." She fights her impulse to hold him, but then blacks out and does. He whispers, "Ise a good boy," words from literature in half-parody, then "jerked himself out of sleep." Anna and Saul agree to never "go lower than that." He packs his things, and she sees him as the same Saul Green who first came to her flat a few weeks before, wearing his well-fitting clothes as though in an imitation of someone strong and broad-shouldered. She can see the sick Saul behind him, but feels that this Saul is like her brother.

Since Anna has given Saul her notebook and they have exchanged their first lines, Anna seems to recognize that it is time for them to separate, to rediscover a sense of order in themselves and move on with their separate lives. They have achieved unity not by resolving the contradictions among the divided versions of themselves or becoming just "one thing," but rather by allowing their contradictions to coexist and their identities to remain multiple. They have found order through and in their disorder, rather than trying to find order by banishing their disorder.

Saul tells Anna to write the first sentence down. He says they are part of the same team, "the ones who haven't given in, who'll go on fighting." He notes that he is sometimes delighted to see books that have already been written, which means that he will not have to write them instead. He promises that he will come back for the book soon, then "say goodbye and I'll be on my way," but to where he did not know.

Anna and Saul affirm their new identities as boulder-pushers and see their writing as part and parcel of their struggle. This is the last the reader hears from the Anna who writes the notebooks—even though it is still unclear whether Anna or Saul is writing. There is no word on what happens to Anna, or her relationship with Saul, after he leaves.

After the opening sentence—"On a dry hillside in Algeria, the soldier watched the moonlight glinting on his rifle"—the golden **notebook** continues in Saul Green's writing. It is a short novel about the Algerian soldier, a farmer who joins the F.L.N. and wonders why he feels nothing about torturing French prisoners. The Algerian soldier talks to one of these prisoners, a young philosophy student, who says all his thoughts can be pigeon-holed into two categories: "Marx" and "Freud." They envy one another, for the soldier's trouble is that he thinks and feels nothing he is expected to think or feel. Talking too loudly, they attract the attention of the Commanding Officer, who decides the protagonist is a spy and has them both shot on the same hillside where the book began. Saul Green's novel turns out to be rather successful.

This story, which the rest of the book has repeatedly alluded to with various references to the Algerian war and a farmer holding a rifle, represents Saul's equivalent of Free Women. *The soldier's relationship with the prisoner symbolizes Saul and Anna's relationship (and relationships between men and women more broadly), and also recalls Anna's dream about a prisoner and the member of a firing squad switching places: the roles of aggressor and victim are first reversed (in the revolution) and then ultimately revealed to be arbitrary (as the prisoner and prison guard end up fulfilling the same role and getting shot). The reference to Marx and Freud points to the two main influences on this book (in the red and blue notebooks, the Communist Party and the ironically named Mrs Marks, respectively) but also shows how thinkers struggle to incorporate the ideas of those who came before them without becoming completely dominated by them. Finally, like* Free Women *(which now continues for one more section) Saul's novel comes full circle, ending just as it began.*

FREE WOMEN: 5

Anna is initially reluctant to let Janet go to boarding school, but the girl is adamant and refuses a "progressive" school; she decides that "the world of disorder, experiment" is not for her. She has no qualms about coming out like a "processed pea," and Anna is worried to lose the discipline Janet's presence creates in her life.

Since it is now clear that Free Women *is not a factual narrative that happens after all of Anna's notebook entries, but rather a work of fiction, the novel-within-a-novel's plot begins to closely parallel the blue notebook's, but with important differences that illustrate Anna's creative decisions and priorities.*

Alone in her flat, not wanting to let rooms or work, Anna shrinks from the world of people, and "everything seemed to have changed." Marion and Tommy are in Sicily, Molly is alone in her house, too, and has started taking care of Richard's sons, while Richard does business in Canada with his secretary.

Anna's final descent into madness happens all at once in Free Women*—whereas Anna withdrew from Molly and Janet did not leave for boarding school until after Anna met Saul Green in the blue notebook, everyone leaves Anna here. Her reluctance to write anything also suggests that this period of her life may have been perfectly consistent with the blue notebook, but merely not recorded there.*

Anna is busy doing nothing and resolves "that the remedy for her condition was a man." She has little interest in Nelson, although she is still devastated to leave him and cannot bring herself to seek another man.

Although Anna's affair with Nelson played a significant part in the blue notebook, he has not appeared in Free Women *at all until Anna mentions him in this aside.*

Instead, Anna spends her days carefully reading the news, trying to balance the facts of the world, to make sense of snippets of language, waiting for meaning to defeat the words that try to express it. She starts pinning clippings to the walls and realizes she is "cracking up."

This passage gives the reader a context for interpreting what is left out of the notebooks—Anna's endless newspaper clippings, which seemed like unremarkable record-keeping in the notebooks, are now the core proof of her madness.

Anna knows, but does not feel, that she is mad; she knows that she will return to normal when Janet returns, but since this is only a month away, she turns back to her **notebooks**. Reading them for the first time since Tommy's suicide attempt, for which she worries they might be responsible, she sees the notebooks as alien. One night, she **dreams** that both the healthy Janet and the starved Tommy are her children; Tommy disappears and Anna awakens, wondering why she feels responsible for him. She returns to her newspaper work.

Anna continues to feel that her sanity depends on the people around her and the sense of order they create in her life. Here, she suddenly positions herself as reader, perusing her own notebooks as the work of an unfamiliar writer; this inversion of writer and reader points to the sense in which The Golden Notebook*'s readers are in fact writing their own versions of the novel, struggling with the impossible task of determining who Anna Wulf "really" is. (Of course, a version of this episode already happened long ago in the blue notebook).*

Listening to jazz, working through the newspapers, Anna "[feels] a new sensation, like a hallucination, a new and hitherto not understood picture of the world." It is a terrible picture, from some foreign place, in which words lose their meaning. She then begins having experiences that words cannot describe. She looks over the **notebooks**, unable to write. Music cannot make sense of her experiences, either; she wonders why she keeps notebooks if she so lacks faith in words. She realizes that she is undertaking "a descent into banality," that she has lost all faith in her actions, which have become mere provisional guesses, but no less consequential. She awakens, begins to pin clippings in the kitchen, and wonders if she should let them overtake another room of her house. Compulsively, she continues to put them up.

Anna also begins listening to jazz and losing her sanity long before she meets Saul Green (who gets a different name in Free Women*, too); the newspapers offer her a seemingly total, unified view of the world in all its horrors, and again she cites her inability to write and the failure of language, which could never appear in her notebooks. Her compulsive search for meaning and wholeness through the news is based on a blind faith that she cannot articulate or understand—with the world coming into clearer focus, her individuality slips out of view, and she can no longer connect her identity to the picture of the world she cobbles together on her walls.*

A friend of Molly's, Milt, calls to see Anna's spare room but reschedules for the next day, giving an elaborate excuse that a quick conversation with Molly easily dispels. When he arrives, he is "shrewd, competent, intelligent," but his false excuse troubles Anna, who wonders (as any single woman might) whether he could be "*the* man." He wants to stay there tonight, and she takes him into the room.

It is unclear why Saul Green gets a different name in Free Women, *but Milt approaches Anna in the same way as Saul in the blue notebook; strangely, too, all the affairs and failed romances that fill the notebooks are completely absent throughout* Free Women *(besides Anna's passing reference to Nelson), perhaps because Saul/Milt encompasses all of these experiences.*

They talk about politics; Milt looks at Anna's walls and tells her about a "red" friend in New York who has spent the last three years leafing through huge stacks of newspapers. She says she will return to normal when Janet comes home, and she starts changing the sheets for him—he starts talking about sex and joking about divorcing his wife. He said he "can't sleep alone," and Anna is thrown off and angry. Milt tells her about sleeping with a friend of her friend's and tries to coax her into bed; she cries on the bed and he follows her, complaining about women and reassuring her that she will not fall for him.

Milt sees Anna's "cracking up" as emblematic of ex-communists' search for meaning and order after they lose faith in the Soviet Union; Anna and Milt's friend are not only trying to make sense of politics, but also to figure out what versions of the stories they read are the "true" ones, what events truly lie behind the words they read. Milt's divided personality is evident from the start—he can relate to Anna but also insists on using her for his own sexual satisfaction.

Anna goes to put on a dressing-gown and Milt starts pulling the newspaper off her walls, making her feel "protected and cared for." He talks about her "meretricious" novel and she asks him not to read her **notebooks**—the only person who did so tried to kill himself. He promises he is "more of a feeder on women, a sucker of other people's vitality," than a suicide risk. He closes her notebooks, asking if she is trying to "cage the *truth*" and singing about her "vulture guilt."

Milt tears down the symbols of Anna's madness and negation of self even as he declares that he will likely "feed" on her energy. The full irony of the title Free Women *becomes apparent: Anna only achieves freedom from her madness when a man enables her to be, and he does this by first latching onto her and depriving her of her freedom. While he recognizes that Anna's notebooks are a symbol of her madness, they are never integrated in* Free Women *(although they* are *integrated* as Free Women*).*

Milt puts on jazz and admits that he "can't sleep with women I like." Anna finds it sad; he proposes they sleep together; she refuses. He talks about loving his wife, but never sleeping with her, and Anna has heard it all before. Milt promises he will overcome it and complains that he gets "nuts sleeping alone," but Anna is lucky to have a child (his own wife does not want one). Anna remarks that "there's something extraordinary about" a man telling a woman, "I've got to share your bed because I fall into space if I sleep alone, but I can't make love to you because if I do I'll hate you." They go to sleep and, in the morning, Saul is cold, deathlike, and she is tense.

While Saul Green never mentions a wife in the blue and golden notebooks, Milt is married and clearly views Anna as a substitute for his wife. He creates order in Anna's life not through mutual neurosis but rather in the same way as Janet does: by calling her into a particular role, even if it is a contradictory and unsatisfactory one. It also remains unclear whether Anna and Milt even have sex, and it seems doubtful that Milt manages to overcome his commitment issues (as Saul does, to a limited extent, in the notebooks).

Anna and Milt quickly grow fond of one another and, after five days, Anna tells him to stay; he says he knows it is "time to move on" but also that he does not have to—he knows he will eventually overcome his impulses but cannot yet. On his way out, he wonders if Anna might give in, and she says she would not, that she will get a job, that she is angry, that she is thankful to him "for pulling me out—of what I was in." They kiss and he leaves, claiming she should have promised to write him—they wouldn't write, she declares—but he says that "let's preserve the forms, the *forms* at least of…" and departs.

Anna and Milt's affair progresses far more rapidly and linearly than her relationship with Saul—there is no golden notebook, breakdown of interpersonal barriers, or exchange of opening lines. Indeed, whereas Anna takes charge of her and Saul's relationship at the end of the blue and golden notebooks, Milt maintains control here, saving and then promptly leaving Anna—he never comes around to loving her or treating her well, and her ultimate achievement is her return to everyday life rather than a newfound artistic drive—indeed, this Anna decides to work (as Molly had feared) rather than return to writing. In this sense, her achievement in Free Women *is far less radical than in the notebooks. Milt's closing sentence breaks down structurally while he ironically declares his intention to maintain order. It also refers to the order he has created in Anna's life and the order she creates out of her life (the novel* Free Women*), even though both are inevitably provisional, parts of the cycle of ordering and dissolution.*

Janet returns to find Anna looking for a smaller flat and a job. Molly is getting married to "what we used to refer to as a progressive businessman," a wealthy philanthropist with a house in the country. Tommy is "all set to follow in Richard's footsteps," although he seems to believe business can change the world, and Richard seems happy with his new wife, Jean, but has already moved on to another mistress. Marion is running a dress shop and spends her days "surrounded by a gaggle of little queers who exploit her."

Free Women*'s characters—but not necessarily the notebooks'—have found various provisional solutions to their sense of failure and paralysis, but also appear poised to repeat those failures: Molly marries what Richard used to be and Tommy again pursues a sort of change that may or may not be successful; Molly seems to recognize the irony of her husband and son as "progressive businessmen." Richard's cycle of infidelity and Marion's cycle of naïve reliance on worldlier people continue, and all appear to be simply pushing boulders up mountains, as it were, rather than finding true remedies to their problems.*

Anna admits her affair with Milt, the American, to Molly and explains that she is planning to start counseling at a "marriage welfare center—half-official, half-private." Anna is also joining the Labour Party to teach delinquent kids on the evenings. She is "very good at other people's marriages," she insists, and Molly starts to wonder how her own marriage will turn out—she "was perfectly resigned to it all until [Anna] came in." She finds it "all very odd." Anna has to go home for Janet, so she and Molly "kissed and separated."

The end of The Golden Notebook *is not a true resolution; it returns to where it began, with Anna and Molly alone in the flat, unsure about their "very odd" relationships. While the* Free Women *version of Anna ends up switching to Labour and taking on new "welfare work," this says nothing about the fate of the Anna who wrote the notebooks—the reader's last trace of her is her merger with Saul in the golden notebook, and of course the trace of herself that she has left in writing* Free Women.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Jennings, Rohan. "*The Golden Notebook*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 30 Nov 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Jennings, Rohan. "*The Golden Notebook*." LitCharts LLC, November 30, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-golden-notebook.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Golden Notebook* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Lessing, Doris. The Golden Notebook. Simon and Schuster. 1962.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Lessing, Doris. The Golden Notebook. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1962.