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Postmodernism in the Contemporary Novel : Non-linear and Dyssynchronous Elements in the Narratives of The White Hotel, The Golden Notebook, and The French Lieutenant's Woman

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Postmodernism in the Contemporary Novel:
Non-linear and Dyssynchronous Elements in the Narratives of
The White Hotel, The Golden Notebook, and The French Lieutenant's Woman

by

Thomas F. McElroy

A Thesis

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Postmodernism in the Contemporary Novel:

Non-linear and Dyssynchronous Elements in the Narratives of

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine theoretical aspects of the narrative by exploring the elements of time and structure that constitute selected novels of D.M. Thomas, Doris Lessing, and John Fowles. Specifically, this paper will explore the spatiotemporal aspects of the narrative, including the impact of chronological arrangement and structural organization on the formation of meaning.

The novels examined in this paper—*The White Hotel*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and *The Golden Notebook*— challenge assumptions about the interpretation of narrative and the validity of the novel as commentary on the human condition. Each seeks new ways of narration and new ways to challenge form and tradition. Because these types of confrontation are consistent with a postmodern aesthetic, this paper will examine the theories of such postmodern thinkers as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard. Doing so will provide background for its exploration into such issues as the use of pastiche by postmodern authors, the presentation of fragmented narratives, the confusion of narrative voice, and the overall challenge to authority that is a defining aspect of postmodernism.

The overall purpose of this paper is to consider whether or not the disordered temporality, fragmented structure, confused narration, and oppositional stance of the postmodernism novel signals an abrogation of fictional narrative as a fundamental human activity and need.

Chapter One

Introduction

Literature has strongly felt the postmodern revolt against the ideals of progress, order, and historical continuity in the arts. Despite the strength of its impact, postmodernism is not clearly defined, either as a term or as an aesthetic movement. Fredric Jameson claims that one source of this ambiguity is the diversity of postmodernism's practitioners (55). Jameson must be on to something, for postmodernism can at once claim Thomas Pynchon and Jerry Seinfeld, Jackson Pollock and Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*. Postmodernism encompasses so many widely dissimilar qualities that perhaps the most accurate definition is found in its role as successor to modernism.

Despite this elusiveness, certain elements serve to define postmodernism, the most notable of which is a hyperawareness of self. A postmodern work of art knows itself as art. It calls attention to its artistic and cultural significance, and this self-awareness in turn becomes an essential aspect of the art itself. Additionally, postmodern artists know themselves to be artists and leverage the role in any number of ways, often situating themselves and their activities within the very art they create. Postmodernism wears itself on its sleeve, critically commenting on its art, its practitioners, its consumers, its history, its tradition, its environment, and even on its own tendency to self-awareness.

In literature, in this case the novel, postmodernism's critical self-awareness often plays out when the text confronts its own framework and its relation to human reality. The aesthetics of realism and other traditional narrative forms break down in the face of postmodernist literature's use of changing and multiple narratives. Postmodernism exposes, questions, and manipulates the text's internal and external chronologies. It confronts the idea that the novel somehow constructs its meaning along a chronologically linear plan imitating the human life. Postmodernism also rebels against authoritative and universal interpretation by exposing the various participants in authorship—author, text, reader, readership—and the various contexts that inform the creation of meaning through narrative. In fact, challenging authority might just be the principal postmodern activity.

Beyond its challenges to structure, chronology, and narrative authority, the postmodern novel also rebels against imposed boundaries of genre. It fuses epic and lyric poetry with dramatic tragedy and comedy and situates elements of them all in the fictional narrative, often with a dash of satire. Through these mergers, dislocations, and other challenges to authority, the postmodern novel disrupts critical discourse, thereby resisting interpretation. Its confutative nature obliges a challenge to the establishment of meaning, thereby raising the questions: What is truth? Who interprets it? What is reality? Who establishes it? The overarching question is: By what authority? The postmodern novel tends to be a pastiche comprising many

genres. It is a critical, sometimes wisecracking, sometimes serious, always self-aware palimpsest written between, over, on, and around the lines of its history by the dual hands of author and reader.

Of all the forms of literature, the novel most closely resembles the multiple narratives that collectively comprise the reality of the human life. The novel's world—its characters, themes, settings, times—is a human world that at the very least parallels the external reality of human life. However, like Aristotle's concept of mimesis, the novel's reality is not quite real but is instead a heightened interpretation of human life for artistic and sometimes didactic purposes. One difficulty in comparing the novel to the human life is that the novel does not necessarily exist within the same sort of birth-to-death time frame as does the human being. It does not necessarily pass away after a finite life span. Instead, a novel exists before, during, and after its individual and critical readers choose to examine it. In effect, the novel is both complete and completed before it begins, for its first and last pages exist at one and the same time in a suspended temporality. However, the reader's entry into the text initiates a linear timeline in which the start of the narrative naturally precedes its conclusion, regardless of the point of entry. Once reading begins, the reader works with the text, with the author, and with a larger critical readership to establish meaning within the influence of a variety of socio-cultural environments and within an extended spatiotemporality.

The postmodern aesthetic illuminates the difficulties posed by the spatiotemporality of the novel. It confronts authorship, questions the novel's ability to construct meaning, probes its relation to reality, and obscures its status as a distinct literary genre. Although the authors explored in this paper do not actively affiliate themselves with a postmodernist movement, their writings as reviewed here dwell within the postmodern era and certainly exhibit postmodern tendencies. D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* employs a variety of literary forms and a series of repeated characterizations, metaphors, and narratives to work in a non-linear, dysynchronous manner toward an inevitable, though unanticipated, ending. Readers completing this novel must reflect upon the entire text to discern any significant meaning. Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* offers fragmented narrative and characterization within a highly ordered structure to expose how the narrative, and the individual person, can construct meaning through a fragmented holism. John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* obscures the boundary between author and reader while challenging the delineation between internal and external narrative chronologies through his self-conscious author-as-god narration. The result is a novel, which is at once Victorian and contemporary and which forces its readers to be acutely aware of their participation in constructing meaning. These novels are all acutely self-aware. Each of them incorporates and/or challenges non-linear narrative sequencing and the spatiotemporal development of plot, theme, and character. Each employs a fusion of forms that defy accepted notions of genre. Each requires its readers to participate actively in constructing meaning, thereby challenging the traditional role of

authorship. Each consciously exposes its structural framework and illuminates the role of that structure in establishing meaning. Each challenges its own ability to create, or re-create, human reality

Postmodernism and Reality

The postmodernist framework lacks a fixed center and a single meaning in part because it allows the author to draw upon any school or model for the embellishment and ordering of the work. Ihab Hassan addresses this issue:

Postmodernism, like any other movement [. . .] is a complex of cultural actions. Such actions resist sharp differentiation from other actions they assume. Thus any particular trait of postmodernism may find precursors in other eras, other movements. (xv)

Paradoxically, postmodernism, by nature anarchistic, originates in its predecessors. It is an anti-tradition in response to tradition. However, just as anarchy depends upon an organizing framework for its very existence—with no governing entity, no order exists to generate a call to disorder—postmodernism is part of the tradition it disdains. Even if postmodernism is merely a commentary on tradition, it must recognize and rely upon that tradition for its aesthetic existence. Postmodernism shoulders its way into tradition, becoming part of that tradition while simultaneously challenging and changing it. As T. S. Eliot claims, a new work of art becomes part of the “existing order,” thereby creating a “conformity between the old and the new” (432).

Hassan cites such works as Sartre's *La Nausee* (1938), Beckett's *Murphy* (1938), or Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as being indicative of the advent of postmodernism (88). In the end, though, no single author or text marks the advent of postmodernism as an aesthetic driving force, and no single author or text stands as archetype of postmodernism or serves to perpetuate a postmodernist movement. Hassan claims that "Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future" (88). Additionally, earlier literary forms and styles, from the epic and the picaresque to fantasy to realism, remain vital in the postmodern era.

Regardless, the postmodernist aesthetic is distinct. Hassan describes the postmodernist novel as "open, discontinuous, improvisational, indeterminate, or aleatory" (72). In opposition is Grant Roemer's traditionalist's claim for the "preclusive" structure of narrative, in which "the events themselves suggest that our [readers'] will is of no avail" (5). According to Roemer, the fictional narrative allows no room for "chance." Instead, the narrative's various structural elements signify explicit authority. Surely, the reader may enter the text at any given point; however, this is simply a jump ahead or behind in a pre-established, authoritative framework. Additionally, the reader may arrive at an idiosyncratic interpretation. In the end, though, such an interpretation, however inaccurate or accurate it may be, is primarily a product of the text. In short, Roemer's traditional view regards the novel as predetermined and authoritative. In contrast, the postmodern aesthetic does not allow

for any authoritatively defined fixed point of reference common to all readers.

Instead, it razes the novel's structure, and in doing so challenges the authority of the text and the role of its author. Postmodernism situates all commentary on and critical interpretation of any particular novel within that novel as a narrative element crucial to creating meaning. The postmodernist aesthetic therefore creates not a precluded, individual text but a general text, an amorphous conceptualization resulting from the breakdown of traditional orders of discourse among authors, readers, and texts as well as among culture, philosophy, politics, literature, and criticism.

As it opens lines of discourse, the postmodern aesthetic breaks down the walls of history and tradition. The postmodern novel is truly a pastiche. It can be at once Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern (Hassan 88). It may well also be at once Classical and Neo-Classical, realistic and fantastic, fiction and non-fiction. To understand this amalgamation of styles and periods, readers must move beyond the traditional role as consumer of a predetermined, pre-authored text to become an active participant in authorship, bringing to the reading a heightened awareness and sophisticated critical competencies. The informed postmodern reader possesses both tacit and focal knowledge of history, culture, genre, tradition, and critical commentary as well as a pre-developed awareness of literature and its constituent elements. Reader response is therefore essential to understanding the postmodern novel. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes speaks of the "readerly" text, which renders the author's authority powerless as the reader becomes "no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (4). The author cannot necessarily dictate roles, cannot

command the reader to consume the story passively, cannot impose one true system of telling a story, and cannot impose a final, universal chronology. Certainly, the author is not “dead.” However, the reader must actively participate in the construction of the text while following any ordering, however illogical, of the language as defined by the author.

The postmodern novel’s challenges to authority and its tendencies to incorporate elements and styles from earlier periods call into question the relationship between narrative and reality. In *S/Z*, Barthes explores “the proairetic code,” concerned with the logic of actions, to show that the most plausible actions and the most convincing details of the narrative do not imitate reality but are in fact the products of artifice. If the logic of actions contributes to the artifice of the narrative, and the narrative itself cannot hope to present the reader with reality, then the narrative time sequence of cause and effect comes under question. As a result, the narrative time frame becomes subverted and turns away from sequential ordering. Although the text may seem to provide a directly linear narrative route, it is in essence accessible from any point; however, the journey between any two points may not be so direct. Temporality and sequence are opened to interpretation. The reader joins the author in generating meaning in separate spatiotemporalities. Together they create a fusion of narrative interpretation, depriving the author of an individual role or style. Truth and reality are not certain but are instead imbued with “the spell and distance of a glossy mirage” (Jameson 21).

This postmodern blurring of reality extends beyond the novel. Postmodernism is intrinsically imitative, if not outrightly derivative, of many cultures. This tendency to multicultural interpretation and representation, sometimes obvious and deliberate, other times implied and accidental, enhances the pastiche-like quality of postmodernism and further blurs narrative boundaries. Postmodernism is the definitive cultural tourist. According to Jean Baudrillard, the imitative aspect of postmodernism blurs not only cultural and aesthetic lines, but also the distinction between reality and simulation, thereby creating “the hyperreal” or “the simulacrum” (45). The simulacrum represents the culture-at-large in which reproductions have effectively blurred the distinction between copy and original (simulation). Jameson states, “[. . .] the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is defaced” (18). Simulation and reality fuse, each collapsing into the other to create a hyperreality. Baudrillard suggests that past and present implode as well:

Today, the history that is “given back” to us (precisely because it was taken from us) has no more of a relation to a “historical real” than neofiguration in painting does to the classical figuration of the real. Neofiguration is an invocation of resemblance, but at the same time, the flagrant proof of the disappearance of objects is in their very representation: hyperreal. (45)

Baudrillard's premise is evident in almost every aspect of contemporary life as distinctions between social and cultural structures break down. Folk art, pop art, and

high art commingle, originating not only from artistic interpretation of everyday life, but also from themselves. In turn, art and culture re-inform everyday life. Supposedly serious television journalists report on important social issues, foreign affairs, natural disasters, and national politics on an equal footing with the night's network entertainment. This news reportage in turn becomes fodder for the situation comedy or drama of the day. Television drama, film, and literature assume the purportedly objective stance of news reporting while news reporting incorporates elements of literature. Add marketing to the mix, and the reality of our art and entertainment dissolves into life's reality as life's reality dissolves into the reality of television, film, art, and literature (Baudrillard 30). Mediated by reality, journalism, entertainment, and literature become one and the same thing. Reality and the imaginary, or "illusion," are no longer possible as distinctly separate entities (Baudrillard 19). Instead, fact and fiction inform each other, eventually merging into a form similar to the editorial essay—part fact, part fiction, part interpretation—as the "real is ceaselessly manufactured as an intensified version of itself, as hyperreality" (Connor 151).

Baudrillard points to Disneyland as perhaps the ultimate hyperrealization, an interpretation of an idealized community, a fictional reality which, in effect, represents a "miniaturized [. . .] real America" (12). Of course, the reality of Disney is not so real, as a comparison of a Disney parade to the real thing quickly reveals. On the other hand, now that Disney has in many ways taken over Times Square, the real thing is no longer so clearly differentiated from the idealized facsimile. Most

important here, hyperreality is the result of narrative. It exists primarily because of the human penchant for storytelling and the need to know about ourselves and each other. As an integral agent in this hyperrealization, narrative, its authority, its structural elements, its creators, its interpreters, and its very ability to portray reality dissolve and fuse into a postmodern stew.

This theme leads to another principle of postmodernism, a principle especially important in a study of the novel and the authority of the manner in which it constructs meaning. The text is both the product of and the subject to many cultural and political influences—Marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, feminist, capitalist, etc., voices that either constitute or challenge an overarching interpretation. The overarching narrative, or metanarrative, explains the existing belief systems of those who participate in its telling or of those who challenge it. For Jean Lyotard, the metanarrative is a “discourse of legitimation” (xxiii). Steven Conner interprets it as “the principal way in which a culture of collectivity legitimates itself” (29). For example, the predominant Euro-centric history taught in American school systems in the 1950’s and 1960’s explained away and/or covered up the inequities and brutalities of white hegemony over North America’s indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and others. Postmodernism challenges the authority of this type of cultural metanarrative. At the same time, these challenges become part of a new metanarrative of political correctness, which in turn establishes a new hegemony that informs and influences the reader’s interpretation of the text.

Postmodernism critiques grand narratives as well as the individual, constituent narratives. It illuminates those contradictions masked by metanarratives, favoring localized narratives that are situational, contingent, and temporary over narratives making claims to universality and truth. All narrative, be it history or fiction, is to some degree biased by its reportage. In *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Linda Hutcheon proposes the term “historiographic metafiction” to explain this concept:

In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative—be it literature, history, or theory—that has been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains; that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made on the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past. (5)

The simulacrum emerges from these interrogations into the meaning of narrative and narrative's place in societal structure. Authoritative definitions of reality are no longer possible. Everything is in flux. The authority of all narrative, its ability to reflect reality, and its capacity for truth is called into question. These confrontations extend from the stories that constitute narrative to the spatial and temporal elements that structure these stories, for structure is essential to creating meaning, and the power to interpret this meaning is central to the challenges of postmodernism.

Narrative Spatiotemporality

“Narrative linearity is in itself a form which represses difference” (Currie 79).

It is no surprise then that, when Doris Lessing sought in *The Golden Notebook* to portray the fragmented interior lives of women not shackled by conventional society’s restraints, she bemoaned the idea of telling their stories through the limitations of a conventional narrative technique. Her medium ran counter to her message. Linearity is an essential element of storytelling. It is the predominant structuring element of the novel, and all novelists, including the novelist who chooses to resist linear structure, must contend with the chronological march of time. It is true that characters, plots, and themes can develop both within and outside time and place, at once synchronously and asynchronously. It is also true that the *in medias res* narratives of the novel presume overarching, external narratives. Additionally, the dormancy of the novel preceding the reader’s engagement signifies a time unto itself, a chronology that need not necessarily be linear. Finally, the reader may enter the novel at any given point in its narrative time, and such artistic devices as the flashback can disorder linear time sequence. Ultimately, though, the novel must begin with a word and end with a word. And these words and the act of reading these words necessarily impose a linear spatiotemporality.

In part, the novel’s linearity derives from the essential human need to frame life with narrative and the tendency to frame that narrative with a chronological sequence that imitates the birth-to-death span of the human life. Peter Brooks states, “The motivation of plotting [. . .] is intimately connected to the desire of narrating,

the desire to tell [. . .]” (216). Whether a personal, anecdotal reminiscence, the recounting of the day’s events, a newspaper item, a larger geographical/political/cultural history, or a work of fiction, the narrative is the preferred system for recording human activity. Because of its inherent humanness, narrative appears to parallel life’s chronological progression from birth to death. This mimesis of linear temporality is reinforced by the dependence of narrative on the syntagmatic association of events, one word displacing another displacing another as the text moves forward.

The presumption therefore is that the narrative, the basis of the novel, must progress within a linear spatiotemporality. The reader begins at a beginning, wherever that beginning might be, and reads on through to an ending. One intention of the postmodern novel is to challenge and subvert this apparent linearity by deviations in sequential ordering beyond the traditional literary devices. Characters might appear, disappear, and re-appear with no logical reason and in no logical order. Narrative voice shifts. Narrative time stops and starts and stops again in illogical, non-linear fashion. The narrator consciously summons the reader to become aware of all the text’s elements, including space and time. Through it all, the reader must keep a sharp eye on the overall organization in order not to lose sense of the novel’s various narrative threads. Such effort imposes a meta-awareness upon the reader, who must become hyperconscious of the various elements of the novel and the significance of those elements to comprehension. Meaning then builds not just from a series of

successive textual elements but also from readerly consideration of the text's structure. This activity, though initiated through engagement with the text and perpetuated by the text, also exists external to the text within the reader's time.

This challenge to narrative temporality is not unique to postmodernism. Play with narrative time sequence, exposure of the difficulty between the narrative's time and the reader's time, and inclusion of the reader as participant in authoring the text dates at least to Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, first published in nine volumes between 1759 and 1766. Brooks claims that such "critical fictions" may well even predate Sterne, finding their origins in *Don Quixote* or "even the earlier picaresque" (317). Through their metafictional activity, such earlier works may well have anticipated postmodernism. However, the postmodernist text differs in its degree of awareness of both itself and its history as well as in its manipulation of temporality. Brooks states, "The difference in postmodernism [. . .] is one of degree: a greater explicitness in the abandonment of mimetic claims, a more overt staging of the narrative's arbitrariness and lack of authority, a more open playfulness about fictionality" (317).

Words are the base material of the novel. Upon these concrete morphemic constructions the novel's less concrete aspects develop. The reader realizes characters, settings, tones, thoughts, philosophies, and emotions through consideration and interpretation of words and phrasal constructions. However, a word standing alone can only foster definition, not interpretation and realization. Words must be considered in context, must be combined into phrases and sentences and paragraphs

and chapters and so on in order to begin to impart meaning and allow comprehension beyond mere dictionary definition. In the novel, the plot is the managing context. It is the novel's motor, for all stories must have some degree of storyline. Plot is the essential, organizing element. Brooks claims that plot is "an embracing concept for the design and intention of the narrative, a structure for those meanings that are developed through temporal succession and time" (12). Evoking Freudian principles, he claims that the narrative arouses "desire" in the reader as a "dynamic of signification" (37). Desire exists at the beginning of the narrative. In fact, it may well even exist in the reader's anticipation prior to the novel's beginning. Once the reader opens the novel, the plot's chronology and structure begins to create "resistance to desire" (38), a force that moves the reader forward through the story in pursuit of understanding. The reader seeks meaning, but plot and other textual elements delay comprehension.

Plot, however, is not a simple, static device of structure. It is instead more organic and dynamic. Investigating the Freudian concept of "Eros as motor," Brooks finds "representations of the dynamics of the narrative text, connecting beginning and end across the middle and making of that middle—what we read through a field of force" (47). Narrative plot lays "bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire," thus signifying narrative's organic nature. Desirous of final understanding, the reader reads on until confronted by the structural end of the narrative, after which the text, and the reader's interest in it, seemingly dies. Of course, by this time the reader has become a participant not only in the novel itself, but also in the

metanarrative surrounding the novel. Moreover, although the text as a structured work in effect dies when the reader completes a reading, the reader's interest may well live on in the form of reflection or even in a re-reading. Contemplation of the text can extend over time; however, the text itself is a finite entity, as is the human life. The difference is that the novel can lie in dormancy on the bookshelf until a reader opens its pages in an act of revivification. The implication therefore is that consideration of the text, essential to deriving meaning from that text, extends beyond the parameters of space and time imposed by the text's word structure. Brooks's definition of plot as a structuring element and the implications of his comparison of plot to Freudian psychology acknowledge narrative's predisposition to linearity drawn from its imitation of the seeming linearity of the human life span. However, the novel, and the individual life, need not be solely linear. In that aspect, the novel and the human life compare quite closely.

In his discussion of narrative, Brooks refers to the Russian Formalists' notions of *fabula* and *sjuzet*. Brooks defines *fabula* as "the order of events referred to by the narrative" and *sjuzet* as the "order of events presented in the narrative" (12). In her 1985 study, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal also refers to the *fabula* the *szujet* (scholars variously translate the spelling). For Bal, the *fabula* is the "material or content that is worked" as a series of events "into a story" (7). The *fabula* is constructed according to certain rules; or "the logic of events" (7). Bal claims that structuralism often assumed that the series of events presented within a story conformed to the same rules as the ones that dictate human behavior; the

narrative would otherwise be impossible to understand (7). Bal expands on this concept by describing two other elements integral to the *fabula*: time and place. An event, no matter how insignificant, always extend over and through time. Because the *fabula* is more a presumed or implied plot, time here has a hypothetical status. “The events have not ‘actually’ occurred, or at least, their reality status is not relevant for their internal logic” (Bal 7). Despite the *fabula*’s abstract nature, time remains important. The *fabula* “deserves to be made describable” (Bal 7), and time is a necessary agent for description. Additionally, the events central to the plot occupy space. “These events always occur somewhere, be it a place that actually exists (Amsterdam) or an imaginary place (C.S. Lewis’s Narnia). Events, actors, time, and location together constitute the material of a *fabula*” (Bal 7). From the *fabula*, the narrative utilizes the *szujet* to fashion its stories. This “temporal sequence of events of the internal narrative” (Bal 78) is the narrative’s internal plot. As such, the *szujet* is more concrete and is closer to the novel’s actual word structure than the *fabula*.

Bal asserts that the interaction of structure, time, and narration create the “suspense and pleasure” that impels the reader forward in the narrative (79), an assertion consistent with Brooks’s definition of the role of plot. Inspired by a desire to know, the reader reads and reflects, engaging with the novel and the author to both establish and realize meaning. The “narrative agent” is integral to these plot-inspired activities (Bal 16). Presumably aware of the *fabula*, the novel’s narration offers the *szujet*, thus becoming a partner in the ordering scheme. In the postmodern aesthetic, the role of the narrator in this partnership is especially evident. Narrative voice, the

point of view, has been “the prime means of manipulation [. . .] in the literature of the last two centuries” (Bal 79), leading to the conclusion that “the point of view from which the elements of the *szujet* are being presented is often of decisive importance for the meaning the reader will assign to the *fabula*” (Bal 79). Bal claims that it is at this point of manipulation, or treatment, that “ideology is inscribed,” important to note when considering the impact of metanarrative.

More important here, though, is the fact that the very concept of plot as ordering agent exposes the difficulty of narrative spatiotemporality. The time and space displacements of the *fabula* and *szujet* appear to create a two-dimensional, forward moving temporality. Additionally, the novel’s syntagmatic succession of words, sentences, paragraphs—its physical structure—imposes an inescapable linear temporality paralleled by the forward-moving plots. The problem is that the author and the reader toil in separate spatiotemporalities. Although the text mediates this work, it occupies its own spatiotemporality. Finally, the *fabula* and *szujet*, though structured, are abstract forms, extending over and through the times of any particular text and its author and readers. Whereas actual engagement with the novel may well be linear, the transcendence of the *fabula* and *szujet* and the sense of time suggested by the author’s and the reader’s pursuit of meaning raise a notion of a spatiotemporality that is neither linear nor planar.

As stated earlier, the word is the fundamental structural agent of the narrative. Semiotic narratology tends to focus on these minimal narrative units and the grammar of the plot, thereby privileging analysis of structure over consideration of time, or

perhaps more accurately, relegating temporality to a secondary status, and then as a planar construct. In "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," Barthes refers to a "system of narrative [. . .] defined by the concurrence of two fundamental processes: articulation, or segmentation, which produces units (this being what Benveniste calls form) and integration, which gathers these units into a higher rank (this being meaning)" (624). This segmentation structures the *sjuzet* in a series of units as a "logical phenomenon" along a horizontal axis, or a syntagmatic plane. Barthes refers to the syntagm as a "combination of signs which has space as its support," a space which is irreversibly "linear" ("Elements of Semiology" 58). Integration "superimposes a 'vertical' reading" (Barthes, "Structural Analysis" 628). This vertical plane is associative, in Saussurean terms, or the paradigmatic or systematic in Barthes's terminology (Barthes, "Elements of Semiology" 59). Simply put, the syntagmatic plane relates to the combination of words as the discourse, or narrative, proceeds from beginning to end. The paradigmatic plane refers to an association of words related to the words in the discourse but not actually present within that discourse. This association is not the metonymic displacement of one word with another but is instead the metaphoric relationship of a word (signifier) with its meaning (signified) and with all other possible words associated with this meaning. For example, the words composing the sentence "Reggie hit the ball over the right field wall" exist on a horizontal, linear plane. However, the meanings of each of these words exists on the vertical axis with all other possible signifieds, e.g., bat, ball, player, hot dog, Yankee Stadium, or even the whole concept and history of

the game of baseball. The semiotic codes of the segmentation join the semiotic codes of integration. "The creativity of narrative is thus situated between two codes, the linguistic and translinguistic" (Barthes, "Structural Analysis" 628). Meaning therefore resides within the horizontal walls of the fictional narrative and the vertical axis of the general text. However, meaning is constructed only when these elements are "disjoined at a certain level" and the "joined again at a higher level" (Barthes, "Structural Analysis" 627).

According to Mark Currie, a primary difficulty facing such structuralist models for narrative analysis is that their synchronic orientation appears to banish time and history entirely from the narrative. Currie does not claim that structuralist analyses are inherently ahistorical. Instead, he contends that they simply favor a "tendency to view the internal, temporal sequence of narrative as a spatial or structural organisation of narrative elements" over the need to reconstruct "the system of conventions, oppositions, and codes as a kind of linguistic-historical context for any given utterance" (77). In short, this brand of structuralist narratology either ignores time as an element of structure or, at best, relegates time to a secondary status as part of an implied linear structure. Typical of this approach is Barthes's statement describing the narrative as "distending its signs over the length of the story" ("Structural Analysis" 624). Time is inferred, but only as a linear element secondary to or merely part of structure.

Currie contends that the Derridean concept of *différance* readmitted time and history into narrative analysis because “*différance* carried with it a temporal as well as a spatial meaning” (77). Structuralist analysis of narrative approached the syntagmatic and semiotic components of the narrative as having “stable structural relations” (77). Derrida’s *différance* “implied that the relationships between elements of a sentence were always in motion, or that the meaning of any sign somehow always qualified those which followed” (77). Stability destabilizes as the relationships between signified, signifier, and *interpretant* become less structured, less defined. Derrida refers to the trace structure: “any sign is embedded in a context and its meaning bears the trace of signs which surround it, which have preceded it and which follow it” (Currie 77). Meaning then builds within and across multiple times, which are at once past, dormant, and present, and which anticipate the future. These times are also at once embodied within and transcendent of the text, the author, and the reader through the pursuit of meaning or the dialectic between that which is known and that which is not yet known but could be known through association and interpretation.

In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gérard Genette refers to the “temporal duality” of the narrative, delineating the overarching story time (*fabula*) from internal narrative time (*sjuzet*). To Genette,

[. . .] the temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for

“consuming” it is the time needed for crossing or traversing it, like a road or a field. The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading. (34)

The narrative may exist as a spatial entity; however, the temporality of the narrative is borrowed, or created, from the reading. Genette acknowledges that a chronologically linear sequence in the and-then-and-then-and-then mode is more illusion than reality. At the same time, his metaphor of traversing a field suggests a chronological linearity implied by metonymic displacement.

Narrative does not necessarily exist in a horizontal and vertical linear temporality. A vertical/horizontal schema for structuring and interpreting narrative allows for spatiotemporal quadrants existing within the areas formed by the intersection of lines and the horizontal and vertical extension of those lines. Encompassing it all is an atmosphere of understanding, a three-dimensional construct in which spatiotemporal quadrants fuse into a sphere of meaning. Author and reader, with their own spheres of understanding, influences, and chronologies, join the text and its intrinsic and extrinsic elements in a sometimes linear, sometimes non-linear, sometimes synchronous, sometimes asynchronous series of activities propelled forward by suspense and the desire for meaning. Meaning develops in a three-dimensional sphere composed of multi-dimensional mosaic bits of time and narrative agents. Importantly, this meaning may not reflect universal truth or an abstract,

generalized ideal but may instead indicate a readerly understanding idiosyncratic to the individual reader but with elements initiated by the original author, shared across a community of readers, and derived from a common text. The result is a shared reality.

In *Fictional Truth*, Michael Riffaterre explores truth-creating devices of fiction. In the introduction, Stephen Nichols summarizes Riffaterre's argument: "truth is primarily a matter of linguistic perception, a triumph of semiosis over mimesis, that the truth of fiction lies in its rhetorical power" (vi). Mimesis is achieved through diegesis, which Riffaterre defines as "the concrete actualization of narrative structures, namely, the verbal representation of space and time referred to in the narrative and through which it unfolds, as well as the verbal representations of events and characters" (127). Truth through mimesis is achieved through semiosis, or "the three-way relationship between a sign, its object, and its *interpretant*" (130).

Paul Ricoeur explores a similar theme when he declares a connection between "narrative function and the human experience" (166). Ricoeur recognizes the differences and similarities between the novel's various spatiotemporalities. Like Brooks, he relies on plot as a structuring element. Plots rely on inter- and intratextual initiating actions as well as conclusions, which "do not need to be predictable, but [. . .] do need to be acceptable" (170). In other words, "looking back from the conclusion to the episodes leading up to it, we have to be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions" (170). Meaning is constructed through repetition representing an "existential deepening of time" (181). Such repetition may

be repetition of episodes, themes, characters, the story (or plot) within the fictional narrative, or it may be an individual and/or a communal repetition of the entire narrative. The particular narrative exists within its larger, general text in a “public time” which is not “the anonymous time of ordinary representation but the time of interaction” (184). Narrative time, or “narrativity,” is therefore not simply a structural element. Instead, it is “a time of being with others” (Ricoeur 184). Or, as Currie interprets the Derridean concept of the trace, “time and history” are [re]admitted to the narrative “in an unrecognizable form that destroys the linear sequence of past, present, and future with the logic of the trace which understands the components of any sequence as constitutive of the other” (78).

Ricoeur’s discussion of the conclusion is vitally important, for the end of the novel imposes meaning on the entire work. The novel’s elements must lead to an acceptable conclusion; however, the reader cannot know that the conclusion is acceptable until the novel has been read. The novel achieves meaning through its structure, whether that be the implied structure of plot or the more concrete structure of words. However, this meaning is realized only in time. Structure, time, and meaning are therefore inexorably intertwined.

A full investigation of the many questions that might arise from these matters extends well beyond the scope of this study. However, an answer to one of these questions might be that meaning derived through narrative is a conflation of general truths and idiosyncratic understandings constructed from both the particular fictional narrative as well as from its general text, at once synchronously and

dyssynchronously, linearly and mosaically, discursively and recursively. These modes of construction exist holistically along different axes and on different planes. The text, or the signifier which includes text, is not a bar to understanding but is the medium which facilitates understanding through those signifieds deriving from the collective consciousness of various multi-dimensional worlds.

Ruth Ronen refers to the fictional world as a “constellation of spatiotemporally linked elements” existing separately yet synchronously, one defined by the chronology of the *fabula*, one by the *sjuzet* (25). Narrative constructs meaning temporally and structurally, in many time frames, along many lines, between many worlds. Ultimate meaning is perhaps never fully realized. However, the most reliable meaning develops only after the reader completes the narrative text. Of course, the reader may formulate an incomplete understanding based upon a partial reading. Or the reader may revisit the text many times after having developing insights based upon prior readings, reflection between readings, and undergoing other life experiences, activities which allow the reader to bring a different consciousness to bear upon any reading subsequent to the first. Meaning is therefore a mutable construct, and ultimate meaning is elusive if not impossible to achieve. At the same time, meaning is realized only by entering and exiting the text. Therefore, despite the importance of the reader and the reader’s activities, the structural entity that is the text remains vital, as does the author who constructs the text.

Postmodernism exposes the misreading of the novel's spatiotemporality as a chronologically linear effect of mimesis. Narrative structure and chronology do not reflect reality but are instead inventions, literary devices that perhaps parallel one aspect of human life but are not identical to life. Postmodernism, however, cannot abandon time and cannot entirely discard linear spatiotemporality. Single-layered, linear chronology is vital to constructing meaning from the novel, but it is not necessarily the only or even predominant spatiotemporality. Rather, it is only one of many spatiotemporalities in the holistically constructed narrative, as the non-linear and dyssynchronous elements of the postmodern novel reveal. Instead of abandoning time, the postmodern novel de-centers time, or rather regards time as a "non-center" (Derrida 533). This de-centering of time affirms "the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation [. . .]" (Derrida 533).

Meaning is mutable. Truth is not authoritative. However, as Derrida acknowledges, these "two interpretations of interpretation," though "absolutely irreconcilable," co-exist as integral agents of the "human sciences" (534). Similarly, the postmodern aesthetic co-exists with those other aesthetics it challenges. The rebellion implied by postmodernism's penchant to confront, dispute, and parody is betrayed by its acknowledgement of its predecessors and its tendency to incorporate elements of any and all other aesthetics. The texts explored in the following chapters are situated within the tradition of the British novel. At the same time, their challenges to narrative authority, confusion of boundaries between genres, and acute self-awareness combine with their incorporation of non-linear sequencing and

fragmented structure to betray their postmodern sensibilities. On one hand, *The White Hotel*, *The Golden Notebook*, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* offer stories and characters consistent with traditional fictional narrative. On the other hand, they challenge the significance of their stories, the legitimacy of their characters, and the overall ability of the novel to portray reality and convey meaning. Paradoxically, it is this seeming contradiction that holds the key to appreciating the true value of narrative and understanding how it creates meaning.

Chapter Two

The White Hotel: Structure and Narrativity

D. M. Thomas's early career as a poet prepared him well for writing *The White Hotel*. Comprising a number of sections rather than the more typical chapters, this novel employs a variety of literary forms, which together create a work that is a pastiche of fused forms, at once novel, poem, epistolary, history, and psychoanalytic analysis. Krin Gabbard maintains that, through the novel's structure, Thomas is suggesting that "no one kind of writing [. . .] can account for all the mysteries of a single individual, even one that is entirely the creation of literature" (230). Thomas twice quotes Heraclitus: "The soul of a man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored" (*TWH* 219, 259). The soul of Thomas's novel, its meanings, and the mysteries of its individual characters are accessible, but only through in-depth, reflective consideration of its structure, its narrative voices, and the manner in which it manipulates narrative temporality. Thomas admits that he is "not a novelist in the orthodox sense of writing a coherent narrative with a steady, careful creation of characters" (qtd. in Cross 21). Instead, the structural elements of *The White Hotel*, its divisions, plots, themes, and narrative voices, exist within and across a disordered spatiotemporality best symbolized by the recurring motif of the dream. The novel introduces and re-introduces its characters and events, then explains and re-explains, analyzes and re-analyzes them over a thirty-two year narrative time frame, which itself is disordered by a final section symbolic of an

ethereal afterlife. At the same time, certain sections of the novel utilize straightforward, linear narrative in the realist mode. *The White Hotel* is then not only a fusion of forms, it is also a dream-like fusion of differing narrative voices and narrative temporalities.

The structure of *The White Hotel* is integral to understanding its meaning. It develops both linearly and non-linearly, relying on segmentations that repeat themes, characters, and narrative through a number of genres. As Robert Newman observes, it uses criss-crossed motifs, repetition, prolepsis, and a “dizzying selection of narrative voices” to “propel the reader backward and forward” (193) to establish, or decipher, meaning. However, unlike many postmodern texts, the structural elements of *The White Hotel* do not exist solely to call attention to themselves or the novel’s overall form. Instead, they also serve as integral agents in the construction of meaning. Lars Sauerberg argues that the structure, its “spatiality [. . .] becomes clear only after the second reading” (6). Each section builds upon its predecessor(s), while leading toward an ending, which, like many endings in real life, is foreshadowed but impossible to foretell. A work that begins with the epistolary musings of a quasi-historical Sigmund Freud moves to a fantastical poem composed by a supposedly hysterical young Ukrainian woman before leading toward a fictionalized recounting of the Nazi massacre of Jews at Babi Yar and culminating in an epilogue-like section depicting a dream world, which may or may not be an idealized Palestine. Dream matter, mythical allusions, recurring, chord-like motifs, a clinical case study, letters

personal and professional, and an otherworldly epiphany—all stand at angles to the conventional narrative progression through time. For example, only in its penultimate section does *The White Hotel* finally explain the cause of the protagonist's symptoms—pains in her breast and abdomen—that Freud analyzes throughout the novel in an effort to help her to address her hysteria. Meaning does not develop in a forward-moving linearity, for it is only after completing the entire novel and subsequent reflection that the reader can construct any significant meaning. *The White Hotel* almost has to be read in reverse, section-by-section and with the design of the whole in mind, in order to make the proper connections. Newman claims that “the reader reads backward, pulling together images” from elements of the novel (201).

The book's final section suggests a more global spatiotemporality. In it, a young doctor examines Lisa Erdman to determine the cause of her lingering pain in her breast and hip. He asks, “What do you think is wrong?” She answers, “Anagnorisis.” (261). Erdman's epiphany results only after the events of the preceding section and her subsequent reflection on these events in this final section, a dream-like novelistic afterlife. Sauerberg maintains that “[. . .] the concluding section can be seen to control our understanding of all events, and of the structure, of the book” (6). Only after completion of the final section, and perhaps after a second reading, does the narrative and its reader, like Lisa Erdman, come to a burgeoning realization of meaning, especially the significance of the historical theme regarding the massacre at Babi Yar. *The White Hotel* “challenges the reader to move from its level of documentation to readerly understanding” (MacInnes 255). The reader must

read, reflect, and perhaps re-read in order to come to any reliable understanding. Comprehension therefore develops outside structural linearity and within the nonlinear, spatiotemporal quadrants surrounding the horizontal and vertical axes of the text, its signifieds, and its *interpretants*.

Thomas bases the principal characters of *The White Hotel*—the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and his patient, Lisa Erdman—in reality. The Erdman character originates in actual case studies of patients Freud identified as Anna O. and Dora. Regarding Freud, Thomas states in an introductory “Author’s Note” that “my imagined Freud [. . .] abide[s] by the generally known facts of the real Freud’s life” (vii). However, Thomas also cautions the reader that Freud’s role “in this narrative is entirely fictional” (vii). Additionally, Erdman is not truly a historical figure but is instead an imaginative reconstruction, a pastiche, of real-life characters we can know only through Freud’s case studies, themselves in many ways works of the creative imagination. The worlds of fact and fiction begin to implode. This “Author’s Notes” section appears at first glance to be an explanatory aside, written by the author as the author. However, closer consideration reveals the first-person voice equated with the author is actually a narrative voice that marks the beginning of the novel’s fiction. Real-life author masquerading as a fictional narrator joins a real-life, historical character interpreted by a fictional characterization in a Baudrillardian hyperreality.

The White Hotel is also a “historical novel that leads [. . .] toward the mass killing at Babi Yar” (MacInnes 259). It is therefore a narrative comment on the politics and cultures of early- to mid-twentieth century Europe. At the same time, it is

the fictional account of a fictional Sigmund Freud and his fictional analysand, Lisa Erdman. Structurally and thematically, therefore, this novel “is a multiplicity that calls us to articulate the personal, the political, the psychological, and the historical” (MacInnes 259) in a historiographic hyperreality. The “Author’s Notes” section is therefore not simply an explanatory add-on. Instead, it is a structuring element, introducing characters while initiating thematic motifs of psychoanalysis and dream interpretation, thereby signifying the beginning of the novel’s fictional narrative.

The “Table of Contents,” like “The Author’s Note,” is integral to the meaning of *The White Hotel*. It allows those readers who take the time to review it to begin to develop comprehension, activity characteristic of the type of dynamic, aware engagement required for understanding the postmodernist text. In fact, only those readers who review these introductory sections after having completed the novel can fully understand their significance. Of course, a table of contents generally would not appear to deserve much attention; after all, with the traditional chapter segmentation of the novel, an organizing table of contents is not all that unusual. Here, however, it eventually distinguishes *The White Hotel* from the ordinary approach to novelistic structure and realistic linearity. The sectional titles—“Prologue,” “Don Giovanni,” “The Gastein Journal,” “Frau Anna G.,” “The Health Resort,” “The Sleeping Carriage,” and “The Camp”—signify more a varied collection of narratives than a work with a coherence achieved by a structure and development represented in an organizing table of contents. Each section of *The White Hotel* is “so revisionary” that it superficially wipes clean “the slate” established by the preceding section (Newman

207). In the end, “imprints registered by all the narrative details, including the prefatory sections, remain in the reader's mind,” thereby becoming integral to establishing meaning (Newman 207). Upon reflection after completing the novel, or at least after having read enough of it to develop some sort of reliable understanding, the reader can see that the “Table of Contents” and “The Author’s Note” are integral elements of this novel’s fictional narrative.

Each section is narrated differently. Questioning the authority of any one narrative voice, Linda Hutcheon writes of the “double resonance” of *The White Hotel*, which both establishes and subverts the authority of the work by acting as a “problematizing agent” (*Narcissistic Narrative* 176). Hana Wirth-Nesher addresses this same issue when she inquires into the means by which Thomas establishes narrative authority for “arriving at a meaningful understanding of Lisa Erdman” (17). Wirth-Nesher maintains that Thomas does not provide one answer to this question of narrative authority, for there is no consistency of narration in the various sections of *The White Hotel*. Instead, point of view is varied and inconsistent, beginning with the first-person narration of the first prefatory section, supposedly Thomas, but in reality some sort of first-person, expository narrative voice closely associated with the author. Voice shifts to first-person (Freud) epistolary to first-person (Lisa Erdman) poem to third-person narrative to first-person (Freud) narrative case study, returning to a third-person narration, detached omniscient narration, and so on.

Adding to this confusion of narration is the novel's variety of forms. Beyond the aforementioned prose narratives, *The White Hotel* also includes poetry and

epistles, sometimes comprising discrete sections, other times cropping up within the narrative prose sections. As Wirth-Nesher states, Thomas does not narrate Erdman's

[. . .] life in only one style. Moreover, the different styles do not all narrate the same stage of her life, so that it is not a question of six different views of presumably the same slippery reality. In this case, multiple perspectives do not hold out any promise of reconstituting some kind of omniscience. In *The White Hotel*, each style is matched with different segments of the narrative; both story and mode of discourse change as we move from chapter to chapter, without any pretense of an overview. (17)

The prefatory sections are simply structural manifestations of different “styles” of narration and form. Again, it is only upon reflection after reading *The White Hotel* that the value of these sections and their structural roles become evident. Structure is key to meaning. This level of structural significance is certainly not unique to the postmodern aesthetic. However, the structure of *The White Hotel* requires the reader’s concentrated attention and active engagement. In turn, the reader can come to understand the significance of all narrative elements as intrinsic components of the fiction and their value as agents in the construction of meaning

An epigraph by Yeats opens the first principal narrative section, continuing the incorporation of differing forms and symbolizing the dream-like temporality:

We had fed the heart on fantasy
 The heart's grown brutal from the fare
 More substance in our enmities
 Than in our love...

Thomas's choice is certainly appropriate to a novel dealing with Freudian analysis, dreams, fantasy, and the enmity reflected in (or causing) the massacre of Jews, the primary subject of the work's penultimate section. Additionally, because Thomas opts to omit two lines of the Yeats original, the epigraph signifies a manipulation of material and structural fragmentation consistent with a postmodern aesthetic. John MacInnes maintains that Thomas, in deleting two "hopeful" lines of the poem—"O honey bees,/Come build in the empty house of the stare' [. . .] doubles the motif of fragmentation and adds the tone of tragedy, announcing a dark work of fragments, outwardly disparate documents from which we must weave the story of Frau Lisa Erdman" (258-59). The epigraph therefore joins the prefatory sections as a significant structural element ultimately essential to understanding *The White Hotel*.

"The Prologue" is a collection of five letters written by Freud, Hans Sachs, and Sandor Ferenczi over a twenty-two year period beginning in 1909. These letters serve to mark this novel's composition of fused forms while expanding the introduction of characters, setting, and themes. In a 1920 letter to Ferenczi, Freud writes about one of his patients, "a young woman suffering from a severe hysteria" who has composed "some writings" indicating "an extreme of libidinous fantasy combined with extreme morbidity" (Thomas 8). The "young woman" is the first overt

reference to the character eventually identified as Lisa Erdman, and the “writings” become the gist of the next two sections. In his letter, Freud informs Ferenczi that his work with the “young patient” has inspired him to return to work on “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” his essay on the human tendency to repeat certain unpleasurable experiences and the relation of this tendency to a hypothetical death instinct. In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks refers to Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” applying his “scheme of how life proceeds from beginning to end” to the fictional narrative (96). Brooks makes the point that “narrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, [. . .] a *sjuzet* repeating the *fabula*” (97). Brooks maintains that it is possible that “the essential experience involved” in such repetition is “the movement from the passive to the active” in order to claim “mastery in a situation” or activity in which the participant is generally regarded as passive (98). Brooks cites another Freud essay, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” to support this argument and to further apply it to the narrative, specifically to the “grammar of the plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends” (98). The narrative “must ever present itself as a repetition of events that have already happened” (98).

It is in this manner that *The White Hotel* builds its meaning. The vague introduction of Lisa Erdman through the more overt introduction of a quasi-historical Freud and Freudian themes does not simply represent subtle characterization. Instead, this structuring provides a multiple-layered, spatiotemporal introduction to the

process of delay/repetition that results in the realization of meaning across the thirty-odd years represented by the novel as well as the real time devoted to reading and reflection.

Each section reveals more about the Freud and Erdman characters and their interactions. Although meaning builds in some manner from an accretion of factual information provided through expository narrative, it also develops from a process of progression and regression, iteration, and reiteration. Throughout the novel, Lisa Erdman experiences pain in her “left breast and pelvic region” (*TWH* 89), symptoms which drive her to seek Freud’s aid. In “Frau Anna G.,” a long case analysis comprising the fourth section, Freud diagnoses these symptoms as a manifestation of Erdman’s hysteria. However, only well into the story does *The White Hotel* reveal that the real cause of her pains is a Nazi soldier, who sends “his jackboot crashing into her left breast” and “cracking into her pelvis” when she shows signs of life while laying in the mass of bodies in the ravine at Babi Yar (*TWH* 248). This narrative prescience should not be equated with the usual foreshadowing. Instead, this proleptic structuring of the narrative reflects the type of narrative activity to which Brooks refers.

Finally, the correspondence in the “Prologue” prepares the reader for the dreamlike images of the next section, “Don Giovanni,” an extended, almost-pornographic poem in which the yet unnamed Lisa Erdman expresses sexual fantasies symbolizing her repression while prefiguring the repetition of themes and images that follows in succeeding sections. The poem relates in graphic language and imagery

Lisa's imagined sexual encounters with a young man, identified as Freud's son, during a short stay in a white resort hotel. As Lisa repeatedly couples with her lover, many of the other guests perish in a series of horrifying disasters, including a fire in the hotel, a flood, a landslide, and the collapse of a ski lift. These events all occur within a "timeless realm" (Newman 198), a realm surrealistically reified in this section's poetic fantasy.

Robert Newman rightly cautions the reader "to read between the lines" in order to "discern meaning" (199) in "Don Giovanni," advice appropriately applied to the entire novel. *The White Hotel* establishes meaning, both for its characters and its readers, through repetition and remembrance rather than from a linearly realized plot. Existing in a spherical temporality, the entire novel moves toward an ending that it has been trying to remember from its beginning, as if awakening from its own dream. Each section in a way becomes a gloss on its immediate predecessor, each adding a "bit more clarity to a past that is told over and over" (MacInnes 261). However, this construction of meaning "insists upon spatiality" beyond one "time or causality" (Sauerberg 6). The real meaning of the novel exists prior to its actual beginning and transcends its entirety, thereby illuminating the causal and temporal relationships between the *fabula* and *sjuzet* and, by extension, the author, the text, and the reader.

"The Gastein Journal" is a prose rendering of the fantastic dream of "Don Giovanni" narrated in a third-person voice consistent with relatively traditional fiction. The narrator begins "The Gastein Journal" by describing a dream in which the yet unnamed Lisa Erdman stumbles while running blindly away from Nazi soldiers.

She imagines herself a tree, “filled with joy” and singing “gratitude to God,” closing her eyes and then opening them to see a small boy (*TWH* 31). They crawl together through the underbrush until she feels “bullets pumping into her right shoulder” (*TWH* 32). But a conductor awakens her. She’s only been dreaming, passing away the time while on a rail journey to a “white hotel”—the Gastein spa. Importantly, this brief passage not only extends the dream motif and dream-like narrative temporality, it also establishes a motif of trains and train stations and prefigures later events.

Again, the prefiguration falls beyond the usual foreshadowing, for the scene with the boy and the Nazi soldiers is another example of the novel offering events that have not yet occurred within the temporality of the *sjuzet*. Instead of relying primarily on a structured plot, the themes, meanings, and characters of *The White Hotel* evolve slowly through repeated symbolic motifs and increasingly clarified characterization as the structure moves from one form to another. Thomas explains this many-layered structure: “[i]deally I hoped someone could open [*The White Hotel*] anywhere and read a paragraph and it would make them think of some other episode in the book, some other particular image” (qtd. by Higdon 332). With such a structure, Thomas has created a “fiction turning on its axis and offering the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time” (Higdon 332). Higdon suggests that “the end process of Thomas’s agenda often turns out to be an allegory—allegory of a very sophisticated but sometimes thematically simplistic Postmodernist sort” (332). The “incremental repetitions” that are “especially crucial” to *The White Hotel* create the expectation of finding repeated “clusters of images and symbols” (Higdon 332).

Its repetition of symbolism, setting, character, and theme builds, or rather allows to evolve, an ever-increasing sense of meaning, a structure verisimilar in that it parallels the manner in which meaning often constructs itself dyssynchronously and non-linearly through the holistic series of narratives that is real life.

“Frau Anna G.,” the fictional Freud’s first-person case analysis of Lisa Erdman, connects the fantasies of the earlier sections to “real” events in Erdman’s life. Freud narrates Erdman’s story through a series of anecdotal vignettes, between which he analyzes and explains the causes of her hysteria, in the end explaining the origination of the symbolism of death, fire, floods, and landslides offered in “Don Giovanni” and “The Gastein Journal.” In her sessions with Freud, Frau Anna recounts a number of traumatic and traumatizing experiences. Freud’s difficulty is that Frau Anna fabricates some of these events, mixing fact with fantasy as she fictionalizes certain parts of her past. Like any other human, Erdman is telling stories that are part fact, part fiction. Freud’s analysis is therefore based upon a quasi-historical narrative, as is the reader’s interpretation of the narrative of *The White Hotel*, at least to this point. The real meaning of the imagery of “Don Giovanni” and “The Gastein Journal”—water, fire, the hotel, burial, and landslides—and the symbolism of Frau Anna’s recurring sex/death fantasy, bases for Freud’s analysis, are finally realized only after the novel’s concluding sections. Frau Anna’s revisionist recounting of her past for Freud’s benefit parallels the status of *The White Hotel* as a fictional narrative based upon creative interpretations and manipulations of real-life history and characters. Additionally, just as Freud must sift through Frau Anna’s stories,

separating fact from fantasy and fiction in order to arrive at some sort of understanding, the reader must sift through a similar mix of truth, lies, and dreams to discern meaning.

The title of the fourth section, "The Health Resort," refers to the Black Sea estate where Lisa Erdman lived as a child and which the Soviet government has converted into a proletarian version of the white hotel. It repeats the train and journey motifs, and on page 147, the "young woman," Frau Anna G., is finally identified as Lisa Erdman. This section's straightforward, linear narrative clarifies the overall *sjuzet*. Erdman is traveling in the Tyrol, on her way to La Scala to stand in for an injured opera diva, Vera Serebryakova (Berenstein). Returning in another dimension to the story told in earlier sections and prefiguring events of later section, she meets a young man and begins a conversation. However, in a reversal of the narrative of "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal," she does not become sexually involved with this young man. Instead, in a parody of Freudian imagery, their conversation is "discouraged" as their train "thunders into a tunnel" after the "fertile valleys of the Tyrol" (*TWH* 150). And yet "the underground journey was long enough to convince them both that they had nothing in common" (*TWH* 150). A different narrative reality than that suggested by Erdman's fantastic sexual dreams begins to settle in.

Her symptoms eased through her work with Freud, Erdman resumes her career and eventually marries. She exchanges letters with him, in which she re-analyzes her symptoms and his earlier analyses. These letters provide another insight into her fantasies and hysteria, bringing apparent closure to this period of her life. The

narrative repeats in an altered fashion the thematic elements of the earlier sections, and the novel's overall meaning begins to gel. The white hotel of Erdman's earlier fantasies has become the health resort. Both the *sjuzet* and *fabula* introduced by "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal" have subtly yet significantly changed. No longer is the novel about a young woman's sexual fantasies and psychoanalysis. Although "The Health Resort" repeats many of the elements of the earlier narrative, it simultaneously alters them, bringing them into clearer focus, thereby marking the beginning of the narrative journey toward the historical events at Babi Yar, a primary focus of *The White Hotel*.

Closing out this section, Erdman visits the old family home on the Black Sea, the source of many of her fantasies as well as many of her problems. This particular visit is relatively pleasant and ends in an epiphany in which, inspired by the scent of a pine tree, Lisa Erdman transcends narrative time.

But suddenly, as she stood close against a pine tree and breathed in its sharp, bitter scent, a clear space opened to her childhood, as though a wind had sprung up from the sea, clearing a mist. It was not a memory from the past but the past itself, as alive, as real; and she knew that she and the child of forty years ago were the same person. (213-14)

This imagery repeats in the novel's concluding passages, where Erdman "smelt the scent of a pine tree. She couldn't place it . . . It troubled her in some mysterious way, yet also made her happy" (*TWH* 274). "The Health Resort" concludes with a relaxed

letter to Lisa Erdman's Aunt Magda, signifying Erdman's peaceful acceptance of self; however, her peace belies an approaching storm.

The fifth section shatters this serenity and seeming resolution. "The Sleeping Carriage" slides more clearly into the events of real history—early World War II and the Holocaust—with a detached narration of the horrible Nazi massacre of Jews and Ukrainians at Babi Yar. Sex and death, key elements in "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal," are once again joined. Her husband disappeared early in the Nazi occupation and is presumably dead. Lisa Erdman and Kolya, the Berensteins' son, now live in poverty in Kiev's Jewish ghetto.

This section, narrated in a realist mode and in a detached third-person voice, opens to find Kolya having difficulty sleeping because of his anticipation of a train trip to a "promised land" scheduled for the next day. Of course, there is no trip. It is all a Nazi ruse to collect the Jews in order to massacre them. Lisa and Kolya join the crowd in the streets, moving toward the train station and the expected journey. Instead, they are massacred, their bodies thrown into a ravine. The section ends with her being kicked by the Nazi soldier, who has realized that she is not dead. In an act of almost unimaginable pornographic brutality, the guard, unable to rape her himself, inserts a bayonet between her legs and imitates "the thrust of intercourse" (*TWH* 249). Returning to its revisionist history of actual events, the narration becomes even more detached, detailing the compression of the bottom layers of the mass of bodies, the color of the German bulldozers, and the eventual filling of the ravine with concrete

and the subsequent erection of structures on the site. Throughout it all, the narrative provides a detached, indifferent description of Nazi guards performing brutal sexual acts on dead and dying Jewish girls.

Thomas suffered criticism at the time of *The White Hotel*'s publication primarily because of his liberal use of historical material, which Wirth-Nesher likens to accusations of plagiarism (23). Krin Gabbard notes that most of the material in pages 276-98 of "The Sleeping Carriage" corresponds to pages 65-84 in *Babi Yar* (239), a work by Kuznetsov, a twelve-year-old boy in 1941 Kiev who claimed to be a survivor of the massacre. And Thomas himself has acknowledged his reliance on *Babi Yar*. The real issue here is not plagiarism but is instead Thomas's liberal adoption of Kuznetkov's authority as narrator of a historical event. The fictionalizing of the massacre at Babi Yar in a realistic, third-person, omniscient mode authorizes the narrator and creates a realistic historicity more pronounced, more "real," than the other sections might have indicated. Considered with the sudden shift in tone and story from the peaceful resolution of "The Health Resort," the realism of "The Sleeping Carriage" is a shock. However, it is perfectly in keeping with the postmodern sense of the hyperreal.

The brutality of the "The Sleeping Carriage" clears the way for "The Camp," an otherworldly, epilogue-like section with a title that both plays on and reverses the reality of "the historical concentration camp" (Newman 203). The camp is a mythical afterlife, perhaps an idealized version of Palestine. The section's realism and third-person narrative contrasts with its fantastic setting, thereby maintaining the themes of

fantasy and Freudian analysis and extending its dream-like spatiotemporality. Lisa Erdman finally completes the rail journey she has been undertaking throughout the entire novel. She spills out of the train with other travelers “on to a small, dusty platform in the middle of nowhere” (*TWH* 257).

The White Hotel ends with a clichéd optimism infused in a final, cinematic scene, which, perhaps unintentionally, is an over-the-top lampoon. Lisa Erdman meets a young, one-armed lieutenant, who represents an altered version of the lover in “Don Giovanni” and “The Gastein Journal.” They smoke cigarettes and ponder the meaning of it all.

Many thousands of immigrants were waiting, standing by their pathetic wooden suitcases and holding their bundles of rags tied in a string. They looked, not sad—listless; not thin, skeletal not angry—patient. Lisa sighed. “Why is it like this, Richard? We were made to be happy and to enjoy life. What’s happened?” He shook his head in bafflement, and breathed out smoke. “*Were* we made to be happy? You’re an incurable optimist, old girl!” He stubbed the cigarette, and took the baton from his belt. “We’re desperately short of nurses,” he said. “Can you help?” He pointed his baton toward the casualty unit. Camp beds had spilled out on the grounds. White figures were scurrying among them. “Yes, of course!” she said. (*TWH* 274)

At this point, just before smelling the scent of a pine tree in the novel's final passage, Lisa Erdman realizes that her own pains have disappeared. "All day her pelvis did not hurt" (*TWH* 274). The novel ends in this darkly comical moment of hope and optimism. At the very least, this passage's humor and its cinematic sentimentality mark it as postmodern parody. Of this final scene, MacInnes claims that "it is as if Lisa had been anticipating this moment for thirty years" (266).

The White Hotel, too, has been anticipating this moment for its 270-odd pages. Like a person waking from a vivid dream that is part fantasy, part nightmare, it unfolds slowly and in multiple levels of reality through its combination of forms; repetition of themes, symbols, and motifs; gradual and repeated characterizations; and reifying and authorizing historicity. "The Sleeping Carriage" sharply turns the *sjuzet* away from any anticipated or obviously foreshadowed ending, and the reader must exit the novel to complete it and reflect upon it in order to realize its meaning. The work is completed in the reader's time, after the activity of reading, as the conclusion imposes meaning on the entire narrative. This conclusion is something of a surprise, and yet it is in keeping with Ricoeur's claim that an ending must be consistent with the "sorts of events and [. . .] chain of actions" that have occurred throughout the narrative (170). *The White Hotel* does not develop along a smooth arc but instead exists as a hazy dream until the final sections violently awaken the reader. Together, these two concluding sections embody the crisis, denouement, resolution, epilogue, and, ultimately, meaning of the novel.

It is difficult to discern a totalizing and totalized plot, for *The White Hotel* does not so much present a structurally decipherable chain of events and actions as it offers a three-dimensional canvas on which recurring imagery, characters, and pieces of narrative plot blend and fuse, forming an overarching, fantastical, almost-impressionistic image from which the reader must maintain a certain distance in order to assess meaning. Moreover, this meaning derives from reflection on the text and consideration of its elements in a time transcending, or succeeding, the reader's reconstruction of the author's activity. This novel's "fragmented texture" and its dream-like finale challenge the reader's usual strategies of understanding" (MacInnes 258). Its "logic [is] that of dreams, ordered by condensation, displacement, and symbolization" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 176). Straightforward, realist narrative contrasts with dream-like sequences, Freudian symbolism, vague, repeated characterization, and recurrent but progressing temporality. All of these elements subvert authority and challenge ideas of planar narrative construction. Its quasi-historicity, Freudian transference of meaning, obvious structuring, and dreamlike spatiotemporality mark *The White Hotel* as a postmodern work. At the same time, its realist narrative and reliance on history place *The White Hotel* within the tradition of the British novel.

Chapter Three:

The Golden Notebook: Fragmented Holism

Doris Lessing has said that the meaning of *The Golden Notebook* is found in its structure. "The way it's constructed says what the book is about" (qtd. in Marder 49). However, the fragmentation of that construction might cause the reader to ponder just what type of meaning might develop, especially if meaning equates to a comprehensive resolution and totalized understanding of the novel's varied narrative strands. The protagonist, Anna Wulf, opens *The Golden Notebook*: "the point is [. . .] that as far as I can see, everything's cracking up" (9). This piece of dialogue is indicative of this novel's innovative and complex form, which disperses theme, character, and plot over cyclical, overlaying structural elements. Wulf's life is fragmented, and the structure of *The Golden Notebook* both parallels and "emphasizes" this "fragmentation" (Draine 32). It is a work composed of fragments and about fragmentation. It is a novel at once about the novelist's craft and the impossibility of the novel's form. Narrative reality derives from structure, yet the limitations imposed by that structure hinder the ability of narrative to achieve any sort of verisimilitude and to express any essential truth about the human condition. Lessing fragments her narrative to demonstrate that meaning and reality can grow from a holistic consideration of these fragments.

Paradoxically, the chaotic and fragmented self-reflexivity of *The Golden Notebook*, consistent with a postmodern sensibility, hides the fact that this novel is actually a carefully structured work. As Patrocínio Schweickart states, it is an

“elaborate, highly architectonic, fabricated structure” in keeping with Georg Lukac’s notion that the novel is not a “true-born organic [unity] but a conceptual one” (277). However, Lessing’s calculated structuring does not primarily exist to impose order. Instead, it illuminates that intersection of order and chaos where meaning is constructed from structure *and* fragment (Draine 31). Real life does not generate meaning through linear temporality. Instead, the discovery, realization, or creation of meaning, a defining need and inescapable activity of the human condition, occurs within relative and multiple contexts—emotional, situational, chronological, intellectual, etc.—as well as in relative and multiple temporalities. Reality, therefore, is not a neatly packaged truth but a process of occurrence. Correspondingly, the reality of the fictional narrative is not an act of literature; it is a process of literature, a process requiring the “subjective intervention” of the reader’s involvement (Schweickart 277). Whether a novel’s truth is universal or idiosyncratic, created communally or solipsistically, it results from the collisions between narrative worlds and the “real” world, collisions mediated by the text. *The Golden Notebook*’s self-aware juxtapositioning of ordered structure with fragmented characterization, temporality, and narrative sequence calls attention to structure’s role within that process of establishing meaning.

These multiple layers and splintered narratives serve as a statement of Lessing’s self-professed “sense of despair about writing a conventional novel” and the need for a “more complex novel form” in order to express “the changing nature of the evolving consciousness in its relation to reality” (qtd. in Rubenstein 72). To

accommodate these emerging postmodern-like sensibilities, Lessing fashioned the long novel that is *The Golden Notebook* from various slices of Anna Wulf's story. Anna Wulf the author has had some success with her novel *The Frontiers of War*; however, she is disillusioned. She realizes that some of this success resulted from the romantic qualities of her work rather than from its more serious portrayal of leftist politics and interpersonal relationships between the races in Southern Africa during WWII. Wulf has had offers for a filmed version of her novel, but the producers wish to edit out any issues of race and politics, relocate the story, and accentuate the love interest. Standing on artistic high ground, Wulf the author of literature rebuffs the film offers and the less erudite interpretations of her text. On the other hand, the proceeds from the publication of *The Frontiers of War* and her status as author allow her to live as a divorced "free woman" with her daughter in 1950's England, and she struggles to reconcile this dichotomy. Additionally, Wulf becomes increasingly disillusioned with her leftist politics in general and the Communist Party in particular. And despite her "free woman" status, her love life implies that she needs, or thinks she needs, some sort of male partner for fulfillment.

A sense of postmodern ennui permeates it all as Wulf questions her ability to express any sort of reliable reality and to convey any significance of meaning through the narrative of realist fiction and the words upon which such narrative is based. Wulf experiences a crisis of consciousness. She is a writer. Her identity is as a writer. Yet she cannot write. In an attempt to free herself from her writer's block, she keeps a series of notebooks, distinguished by color, to record different aspects of her life.

These notebooks form sections of *The Golden Notebook*. Framing these notebooks are five sections of “Free Women,” a novel about the Anna Wulf who creates the notebooks. Also included are a climactic section titled “The Golden Notebook,” representing a small piece of the novel resulting from Wulf’s notebooks; a re-writing of *The Frontiers of War*; and “The Shadow of the Third,” a section of the “Yellow Notebook” representing the novel that Anna Wulf might have written.

The first four “Free Women” sections each include a section of a formal, third-person novel by Anna Wulf about a character named Anna Wulf, followed by, in order, one section each from the Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue notebooks written by Anna in the first person. The four notebooks correspond to separate parts of Anna’s life. The Black notebook deals with her youth in Africa; the Red explores her experiences as a member of the communist party; the Yellow presents “The Shadow of the Third,” a narrative about Ella, Anna’s fictionalized alter ego; and the Blue is a more traditional, straightforward diary-like narrative of Anna’s daily life. Late in the novel, after the fourth “Free Women” section, “a heavy double black line” ends the notebooks, completing their roles as structural and narrative elements (*TGN* 519). A section titled “The Golden Notebook” follows, in which Anna confronts her writer’s block and her seemingly imminent breakdown. The novel concludes with the fifth and final “Free Women” section. In an introduction to a 1971 edition, Lessing states that “Anna keeps the four [notebooks] and not one because she has to separate things off from each other, out of a fear of chaos, of formlessness—of breakdown” (xi).¹

Through its structuring, *The Golden Notebook* confronts Wulf's fear of formlessness when it establishes, then breaks, and then re-establishes temporal and narrative patterns while Anna Wulf muses on the difficulties of interpersonal and narrative communication. In breaking these patterns, Lessing, through Wulf, writes and rewrites the novel's various narratives while questioning the ability of language to capture the complexities of human existence. Wulf reflects:

Words. Words. I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want. [. . .] The fact is, the real experience can't be described. I think, bitterly, that a row of asterisks, like an old-fashioned novel, might be better. Or a symbol of some kind, a circle perhaps, or a square. Anything at all, but not words. (*TGN* 542)

If consideration of the signified equates to the reality of human experience, it is a reality inaccessible through the signifier alone. Ironically, Anna Wulf and her stories can only exist through the recording of words. Signifiers and their structures are the tools available to the author, however much that author may decry the constraints they impose. Words are elemental to written narrative, and Wulf, despite her complaints, stands as the narrative agent that Bal claims is essential to fiction.

The Golden Notebook marked Lessing's dissatisfaction with and turning away from the realist and modernist modes of fiction. Lessing herself spoke of the breakthroughs that took place in her own consciousness while writing this novel: "When I wrote *The Golden Notebook* I deliberately evoked the different levels to

write different parts of it. And other parts of *The Golden Notebook* needed to be written by 'I's' from other levels" (qtd. in Rubenstein, 73). Lessing came to her rejection of traditional form only after her embrace of that form. Molly Hite points out that, at one point earlier in her career, "Lessing distinguished as 'the highest point of literature' the nineteenth century realist novel" because of its "coherent worldview" (17). To Lessing at this point in her career, the novel was a "totalizing structure representing the world in its entirety," a creative enterprise struggling to represent "relationships of a whole kind" (Hite 17). In this view, the novel is a holistic, humanistic enterprise expressing some sort of universal truth. It is this universal and universalizing notion of the novel that Lessing disclaims with *The Golden Notebook*. With it, she explores the collision of the individual worlds of Anna Wulf and her friends and the idiosyncratic, fragmented-yet-connected narrative worlds created by these collisions.

Despite attempts to the contrary, the linearity of language and the unavoidable mimesis of narrative limit even the most postmodern of postmodern works, as the use of relatively standard narrative patterns in *The Golden Notebook* indicates. Additionally, Lessing's turn away from a realist aesthetic does not necessarily indicate that she similarly turns away from the idea that the novel creates, or is, some manner of holistic coherence that establishes a common reality. However, this coherence is not that of the realist convention, and the holism has no pretense to universal Truth(s). To the contrary, the structuring of *The Golden Notebook* symbolizes a postmodern conciliation of chaos and coherence, a fragmented holism.

Anna, Molly, and Ella—the Free Women—cohere to form the one Anna Wulf. The fragmentation represented in Anna Wulf's "cracking up" co-exists with the structure of Anna's life and the fragmented-yet-ordered superstructure of the novel itself. In turn, the fragmentation of these structures "crack" the novel's temporality and narrativity. Chaos and order go hand in hand, and any coherent meaning ultimately derives from a commingling of both. Ella, Anna Wulf's fictionalized alter-ego in "The Shadow of the Third," imagines two people, "[. . .] both at the end of their tether. Both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits. And out of chaos, a new kind of strength" (*TGN* 399-400). The fear of chaos creates order. This novel's structure is at once its own tether and its own instrument of liberation. However, it is a freedom in disarray, for Lessing's holism acknowledges that chaos can and does exist within an organizing structure.

In the 1971 introduction, Lessing provides insight into her writing methods and the reasoning behind the novel's structure. Discussing her reaction to the critical response to *The Golden Notebook* as well as her own writing process, Lessing writes:

I was so immersed in writing this book, that I didn't think about how it might be received. I was involved not merely because it was hard to write—keeping the plan of it in my head I wrote it from start to end, consecutively, and it was difficult—but because of what I was learning as I wrote. (xvi)

By "making limitations for oneself," the writer can squeeze "out new substance," or meaning, that she might not recognize as her own (xvi). From the process of writing,

including “handing the manuscript to publisher and friends,” Lessing “discovered” her novel (xiv), tacitly admitting that her personal interpretations of the meaning within her own novel is affected by the very process of writing and reading, thereby signaling a manifestation of the simulacrum. Paradoxically, Lessing claims that “the essence of the book, the organization, everything in it, says implicitly and explicitly, that we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalize” (xvi). However, she reaches this realization through segmented narrative structure and a theme of fragmentation.

Ironically, any artist attempting to break the chains of form is inevitably influenced by both the chains and the struggle for freedom. Lessing became disillusioned with the constraints of realism and narrative and strove to stretch if not break them with *The Golden Notebook*. However, despite Lessing’s rejection of traditional form and her creativity in constructing this particular work, *The Golden Notebook* incorporates many elements of traditional realist fiction and certainly falls within the tradition of the British novel. Straightforward story telling and dialogue, money, war, sex, love, interpersonal relationships, internal and external human struggle, danger, even the rich husband, modernized into a rich ex-husband, earning so many pounds per year: *The Golden Notebook* includes them all. Additionally, it exemplifies the definition of the traditional novel as a collection and interconnection of narratives resolved within the constraints of organization. On the other hand, the ordered fragmentation of *The Golden Notebook* reveals that meaning derives from dyssynchronous, sometimes linear, sometimes non-linear patterns. Lessing’s

involvement in organizing and ordering the book while maintaining an overarching idea of its various themes and narrative threads mark her efforts as those of the omniscient author creating and controlling her fictional world. At the same time, this fragmentation of structure, character, theme, narrative, and chronology challenges the authority of this omniscience by requiring readers to actively and consciously participate in making sense of the text.

In the 1971 introduction, Lessing continues her commentary on this structure as she reflects on and questions the variety of interpretations of *The Golden Notebook* since its first printing. She wonders “why one person sees one pattern and nothing at all of another pattern, and how odd it is to have, as author, such a clear picture of a book, that is seen so differently by its readers” (xxviii). Lessing’s conclusion? It is “childish” for the writer to expect readers to see what she (the writer) wants them to see. In the end, a “book is alive and potent and fructifying and able to promote thought and discussion only when its plan and shape and intention are not understood. When a book’s pattern and the shape of its inner life is as plain to the reader as it is to the author—then perhaps it is time to throw the book aside, as having had its day, and start again on something new” (xxix).

That Lessing was still commenting on *The Golden Notebook* some ten years after its initial publication verifies the dynamic nature of the work and reveals the spatio-temporality and relativity of the reading activity. In challenging the various interpretations of her work, Lessing was, perhaps unconsciously, exposing the difficulty in authoritatively interpreting any writing, even one’s own work. All

participants in the activity of reading and interpreting a text are in many ways co-equal narrative agents connected by the mediating text. *The Golden Notebook's* theme of fragmentation mediates the construction of a totalized, though relative and idiosyncratic, meaning. As Schweickart states, "the point of the novel, Lessing insists, is in the relation of the parts to each other. The novel is more than the sum of its parts" (267). The illogical incorporation of Anna Wulf's chaos within the highly ordered structure to which Lessing refers points to the incongruity of the holism of human life, or the manner in which meaning and value develop from the mosaic confusion that is life but within the chronological linearity imposed by birth and death. According to Herbert Marder, the novel in general "imitates a process of unification, an enfolding of the many into the one which comprehends them all" (50). *The Golden Notebook* shows that this unification leading to comprehension derives from consideration of the parts that, once assembled, construct the novel. As Lessing suggests, however, a totalized, finalized comprehension of any text is difficult to achieve, and the type of involvement required to even approach this sort of understanding may well destroy the text for the reader.

The Golden Notebook is first and foremost an examination of the process and form of the novel itself. That Anna Wulf is herself a writer heightens this awareness. That Wulf the narrator recounts the stories of Wulf the character exposes the self-reflexivity of Lessing's exercise in craft. Lessing the author does not directly narrate Anna Wulf's experiences. Rather, it is Wulf's "own writing" that comments on the character Anna Wulf, for the Anna Wulf who appears in "Free Women" is the author

as well as the subject of these sections. Doris Lessing creates Anna Wulf, a fictional character who in turn creates an Anna Wulf who is an even more fictional character. The fact is that there are many Anna Wulfs in *The Golden Notebook*, and perhaps no one of them is the “real” Anna Wulf. At best, the name refers to “a composite of various roles, functions, and representations” (Michael 83). *The Golden Notebook* then is a novel about writing a novel; however, it is a many-layered novel, with multiple narratives and a protagonist with multiple guises, many of which are so closely related that it is difficult to separate one from the other. Its self-reflexive commentary on the form of the novel is also many-layered and not so readily evident. As Marder points out, *The Golden Notebook* is

[. . .] deliberately constructed in such a way as to frustrate any attempt to describe it linearly or to invoke the categories that are usually applied to conventional narrative. Lessing’s use of circularity implies that we must change our assumptions about character and chronology. (50)

The fictional narrative of the twice-fictional Wulf appears, at least at first, to represent the reality, or *sjuzet*, of the entire novel. However, this reality is twice-removed at best, and the “Free Women” sections, which frame the other narratives of *The Golden Notebook*, serve to accentuate this novel’s fragmentation and compound its challenge to narrative’s ability to mimic and/or create reality. And if the “Free

Women” sections do not provide an “authorized version of reality,” then the notebooks that these sections frame cannot themselves provide an authoritative reality (Marder 50).

The Golden Notebook therefore frustrates the notion that fact can somehow be separated from fiction. Instead, reality derives from the nexus of objectivity and subjectivity as readers interpret an author’s intentions through the means of a generalized, universal text. Art does not imitate life, and life does not imitate art. Instead, they are one and the same, a “single unit impossible to split” (Marder 51): Baudrillard’s hyperreality. Wulf is a fictional character invented by herself. The overarching narrative eventually exposes Anna Wulf as author of the notebooks. These notebooks are therefore fictional constructs within a fictional construct, one step further into fiction than “Free Women.” At the same time, they are consistent, at least at first glance, with the narratives of “Free Women.” On closer inspection, however, the narratives of the notebooks and of “Free Women” differ. For example, in “Free Women,” Tommy shoots himself; however, this event does not occur within the world of the notebooks. Other such discrepancies support the notion that the notebooks and the framing sections are not equivalent. However, these fragmented sections collectively drive the overarching narrative of *The Golden Notebook* forward. In most novels, the *sjuzet*, as a condensed form of the *fabula*, is the less complicated of the two. In this case, the opposite is true.

Anna Wulf notes that “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*” (TGN, 59). Wulf splits off her experiences into the different notebooks, which become exercises in fiction intended to address her problem with writer’s block. The notebooks cover a seven-year period, but their chronology is not linear. Instead, Lessing scrambles temporality by presenting segments of each notebook in the individual chapter segmentations, each segmentation covering the notebooks in sequence but not in simultaneous time periods. The reader must therefore reconstruct Anna Wulf’s experiences in the same way that Wulf herself does, establishing meaning from all the pieces of the whole narrative while participating in a spatiotemporal exercise in the craft of writing. Lessing’s organizational scheme forces readerly participation, pointing out the irony (and futility) of Lessing’s concerns about the various interpretations of her novel.

The cyclic layers of *The Golden Notebook*, created by the repetition of emotional and “factual” events from a variety of perspectives and in multiple segments, challenge the reader’s linear point of view in approaching narrative. The arrangements of the “Free Women” section, followed by the notebooks, constitute one such repetition. Following each “Free Women” section, the order of the notebooks is always Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue, occurring four times throughout the novel. Through this order, *The Golden Notebook* develops its overall themes of fragmentation and fear of chaos and formlessness while creating a continuum that moves from exteriorized and shaped reportage (“Free Women”), to the recollection of

past experiences (Black notebook), to the public nature of political experiences (Red notebook), to the private, fictionalizations of Anna's past emotional life (Yellow notebook), and finally to the current, unshaped introspective nature of the diary (Blue notebook).

As point of view alternates from detachment and objectivity to immediacy and subjectivity, the complete sequence of notebooks moves toward final narrative development and establishment of meaning. As in real life, meaning derives through multiple perspectives and from a series of involved activities and subsequent, detached reflections, activities and reflections which sometimes occur simultaneously, sometimes asynchronously. Perhaps it is only at, or after, the end of life that true significance is established. However, unless one believes that consciousness continues after death, only the other characters involved in any one individual's life can reflect upon and derive meaning from that life after that life has ended. A person may die, but his friends, family, acquaintances, enemies, etc., continue that life, at least for a time, through recollection, reflection, analysis, and discussion. In a like manner, completing the reading of a novel may cause a kind of death. And like the human life, the novel may live on as its readers reflect, analyze, and discuss it. The difference is that the novel, as an entity defined by its covers, exists in stasis until entered and resumes this stasis after the reader exits. Meaning, though initially created by the author and subsequently mediated by the text, is realized in the reader's time and after the act of reading. Again, the conclusion of the structural entity that is the novel—the last word on the last page of the last

chapter—imposes meaning on the entire novel, including its introduction, as the text continues on in the mind and/or experience of the readership. In the 1971 edition, Lessing states that the notebooks reflect each other and “in the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formless with the end of fragmentation—the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity” (xii). This unity becomes apparent, however, only after the novel’s conclusion.

Nearing the end of *The Golden Notebook*, Wulf is on the verge of a breakdown, primarily because of the “issues” which have stopped her from pursuing her only real emotional outlet: writing. In “The Golden Notebook” section, Wulf perceives that everything of any importance is slipping away. Words, the most basic tools of her trade, no longer have meaning. She fears that she will unravel because she can no longer write, her central and centering purpose. Her constant self-reflexivity spawns an incessant self-criticism. She awakens from a dream thinking about writing a “comic and ironic” short story or short novel (TGN 544). She summarizes the plot line, which she recognizes as “The Shadow of the Third,” the novel about Ella, her alter-ego, presented in an earlier section of *The Golden Notebook*. But through self-analysis, Wulf realizes that in Ella she is creating a “third” woman, an idealized version of herself. Wulf again questions her relationship to a meaningful reality and her ability to communicate any significant meaning (TGN 544,545). Her self-awareness has stifled her creativity. She cannot write. Saul Green, Wulf’s American lover, intercedes: “We’ve got to believe in our blueprints” (TGN

546). Words and the structure they imply/impose, though ineffective, are necessary. In an effort to help her overcome her writer's block, Green provides the first line to her unwritten novel: "The two women were alone in a London flat" (*TGN* 547). Wulf questions it, repeats it, then offers an opening line of narrative to Green, who is also a writer with writer's block and also on the verge of a breakdown. Interestingly, the narrative of "The Golden Notebook" section reveals that Green successfully used the line Wulf provided in a "short novel" that was later "published and did rather well" (*TGN* 550). The fictional narrative of "The Golden Notebook" section doesn't explicitly let on whether or not Wulf ever incorporated Green's line in a work. However, *The Golden Notebook* itself opens with Green's line, both implying that Wulf overcame her writer's block and establishing Wulf as the author of her own fiction. This activity confuses narrative voice, thereby blurring the delineation between the author and her characters and stressing Lessing's challenge to the division between fact and fiction.

These discoveries, realized through the novel's organizing structure, underscore the fact that narrative meaning is ultimately comprehensible only after the entire novel is read. Only then can the reader look back and discover that the opening line—"Two women were alone in a London flat"—is not simply the first line of a straightforward, third-person, realistic narrative. Instead, this passage serves to symbolize the multi-layered, fragmentary nature both of this particular novel and of the novel in general. Claire Sprague argues that "two women" refers more to two Anna Wulfs than it does to Anna Wulf and her friend Molly. Additionally, the "third"

in "The Shadow of the Third" refers not so much to another woman as it does to one more version of the fragmented Anna Wulf (Sprague 181), all of which point to the fact that authors and their many narrative voices (authorial, narrative, and readerly) exist in a fragmented, multi-layered world. Again, narrative meaning is not an end product; it develops through process.

The Golden Notebook fragments its narrative, chronology, characters, point of view, and themes to challenge the novel's form and to expose the difficulty art faces when attempting to gain access to truth and/or portray reality. Anna Wulf's story develops through layers of narrative and through a variety of forms, including the notebook, novel, diary, letter, book review, parody, short story, film script, headline, news item, and synopsis. Anna Wulf expresses Lessing's sense of "despair" about the shortcomings of the novel's form when she tells the analyst Mother Sugar that her secret ambition is to produce a "formless work of art." In the end, though, art is always constrained by, if not defined by, form. Although *The Golden Notebook* is highly formed, it at least challenges the constraining elements of that form by embedding formal fragments in a larger pattern which defies analysis (Marder 54). Reader joins author in deriving meaning through the holistic consideration of fragmentation, and *The Golden Notebook's* multiple forms and varied textual materials suggest an overarching theme: the multiplicity of the personality as observer and manufacturer of truth and reality. Not only is there no single

authoritative source of narrative, all such sources have several personalities. As a tenet of postmodernism, meaning develops as these many personalities participate in the novel by interpreting the various bits and pieces of its narrative plot, characterization, and theme.

Chapter Four

The French Lieutenant's Woman:

Fowles's Unique Godgame

The French Lieutenant's Woman is the archetypal postmodern novel, if such a thing exists. John Fowles's novel is acutely and explicitly aware of its "self" as well as its present, its past, its authorship, and its readership. It is a twentieth-century re-creation of a Victorian novel, a facsimile of mid-nineteenth-century realism written with the pen of a modern-day metafictionist. Fowles often intervenes in the narrative, at times with meta-aware commentary on his characters and plot, sometimes musing on the art of writing the novel, sometimes speculating on matters of reality and existence. In so doing, he conflates the roles of author and narrator, confusing any boundaries, explicit or implicit, between the two and creating a character who speaks at once as the author and as the novel's narrative voice. These narrative digressions and complexities compel the reader to actively engage in the novel in order to discern meaning.

In the typical novel, readers must follow various narrative threads and may need to be mindful of the level and impact of narrative voice. However, the multi-layered narrative threads in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* are more difficult to follow than usual, primarily as the result of the narrator's digression and manipulation but also because of the novel's shifting temporalities. Additionally, this novel incorporates two structures, one a relatively straightforward Victorian novel in a historical, realist mode, the other a contemporary, non-linear metanarrative with

shifting temporality. Narrative manipulation and binary structure meet in the novel's two endings. Readers accepting the challenge to become actively involved in constructing meaning acquire "new skills and processes," enabling them to "read in other narrative ways" ("Evolution of Narrative," Tarbox 88). The parallel stories of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; its shifting time lines; intertwined first-person, meta-aware commentary; third-person detached omniscience; and narrative fits and starts require readers to collaborate with the author, the narrator, and the various textual elements in constructing the text and creating meaning.

This forced readerly participation illuminates the fact that narrative meaning develops from both the accumulation of information and subsequent reflection on that information over multiple time frames, all within the context of any number of social, political, educational, and cultural worldviews. And this reflection is influenced by the very act of amassing data, the structural elements forming that data, and various other environmental elements, all of which affect readerly interpretation. Again, the process of reading and writing is as integral to constructing meaning as is the product that is read, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is just the sort of meta-aware fiction to reveal this point. Its combination of contemporary and Victorian allegory, pastiche-like parody, self-echoing methods, and obvious self-commentary make Fowles's "unique godgame" (*The Art of John Fowles*, Tarbox 60) the archetypal postmodern meta-fiction, a work in which readers are forced to participate with the author in constructing the narrative.

The French Lieutenant's Woman generally employs a traditional third-person, omniscient narration. However, this narrative voice is not as detached from the story as might be expected. At the onset of the exposition, the third-person narrator begins to tip his hand as an intrusive presence, commenting on Ernestina Freeman's clothing with an intelligence indicating a historical perspective. "The young lady was dressed in the height of fashion, for another wind was blowing in 1867: the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet" (*TFLW* 11). This subjective intrusion with a contemporary perspective becomes more exaggerated.

Though Charles liked to think of himself as a scientific young man and would probably not have been too surprised had news reached him out of the future of the airplane, the jet engine, television, radar; what *would* have astounded him was the changed attitude toward time itself. The supposed great misery of our century is the lack of time. (*TFLW* 19)

The third-person narrator has begun an evolution into a presence that becomes more obviously intrusive as the novel progresses. A further example of this evolution is the appearance of a first-person narrator, contemporary to the time of the novel's writing, who chimes in to comment on events and to analyze characters while contributing to the novel's overarching narrative. This first-person voice evolves into another first-person narrator, more closely associated with the author, who directly addresses the reader while reflecting on the craft of writing novels. Twice the narrator actually emerges as a character within the novel. In chapter fifty-five, he materializes on a

train, observing the sleeping Charles Smithson. In the final chapter, he materializes as a well-appointed impresario, surveying the Rossettis' Chelsea house, scene of the novel's two endings. It is generally clear that these narrators are interconnected, that the third-person narrator is an extension of the first first-person narrator, who in turn is more fully revealed as the second first-person narrator. The following passage from chapter thirteen serves as example of this latter narrative voice.

I do not know. The story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and "voice" of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story; that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend he does. But I live in the time of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word. (*TFLW* 104)

This type of intrusive, self-conscious narration might suggest that Fowles the author is speaking. However, Fowles is no more the real narrator in this passage than would be any narrative voice. Certainly, this second first-person narrative voice more closely equates to Fowles's own voice than do the others. Yet the meta-fictionness of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* suggests a more complex interpretation, an

interpretation consistent with a postmodern examination of the difficulties in establishing meaning within the constraints of a planar temporality and single narrative voice.

The fictional worlds of the novel generally incorporate many layers of fiction and reality; *The Golden Notebook* serves as example. However, the multiple-voiced narrative world of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, though perhaps no more layered than Lessing's text, is more conscious of its structure and the effect its structure has on its narrative elements, its reader, and the establishment of meaning. Lessing manipulates structure as an experiment in craft. Fowles manipulates structure in order to influence the reader and to tell his story. In one fashion, *The French Lieutenant's Woman's* multiple narrative voices simply call attention to the man-behind-the-curtain effect of the novel that helps to define the genre (Huffaker 103). However, the complexity of these narrative voices exaggerates this effect.

Linda Hutcheon maintains that the primary world of the novel is that of the characters themselves ("Real World(s)" 119). The world of narration outwardly appears to exist external to this world of characters. In truth, these two worlds, though at times separate, co-exist within the overarching world of the novel. Narration is part of the story, and the narrator is as much a character as any of the characters upon whom he comments, as Fowles's man-on-the-train and impresario characters signify. However, this characterization of the narrator is not limited to these obvious examples, nor is it limited to the first-person narrative voices and their meta-aware commentary. Instead, even the less obtrusive third-person narrator is a character

integrally involved in constructing meaning within and from the narrative. All these narrative *personae* stand removed from the author by varying degrees. The lines between narrative elements—narrators, characters, and plot—blur in an internal hyperreality. Beyond it all stands Fowles, the creator of all these worlds, who joins his various narrators to form an author-*cum*-narrator(s)-*cum*-character entity dwelling within the stories of Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff while at the same time establishing the overarching storyline of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

This issue of narrative authority and identity exposes another difficulty of the novel in general and of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in particular: the uncertainty and subjectivity inherent in the novelist's attempt to portray and/or define reality. Fowles's author/narrator/character, hereafter referred to as the commentator, comprehends that both he and his characters constantly fictionalize themselves. Sarah Woodruff, as Tragedy, is a self-creation, for her character, her world, and her story are of her own making (Hutcheon, "Real World(s)" 118). As a result, she is not so much real as she is fictional, even within her "real" world, the fictional narrative of novel: However, Woodruff does not stop at creating her own fiction and her own character, for she also creates Charles Smithson's world. By her manipulations, Woodruff is elemental to the fabrication of Smithson's character and story. From the moment he spies her at the end of the Cobb at Lyme Regis to the multiple endings in Chelsea, he is in her hands. Through it all, the commentator's collusion in this fictionalizing is obvious. In chapter thirteen, he comments on these issues.

You may think novelists always have fixed plans to which they work, so that the future predicted by Chapter One is always inexorably the actuality of Chapter Thirteen. But novelists write for many different reasons [. . .]. Only one reason is shared by all of us: *we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is* [. . .]. This is why we cannot plan. We know a world is an organism, not a machine. We also know that a genuinely created world must be independent of its creator. A planned world (a world that fully reveals its planning) is a dead world. (*TFLW* 105)

The paradox is that the novel *is* a planned world, as is evidenced by the commentaries of Lessing and Thomas on the structures of their novels.

Fowles's reference to an organic world independent of its creator is consistent with the claim of many novelists that their characters create themselves, and by extension their narrative worlds, while the author is writing. In other words, the novel writes itself. In such a view, the author claims to know as little about the work being written as might any reader; narrative and its elements develop almost spontaneously and by chance as the pen, or cursor, proceeds across the page. However, even if this were true, the act of writing follows the act of thinking, and this type of thinking follows the act of living. Characters, plots, scenes, themes do not magically create themselves on the page. Some degree of forethought, or planning, must occur, even if it occurs a millisecond before words are recorded. Narrative is a creation. It is fiction, if fiction equates to the amassing of experience, the subjective interpretation of that

experience through a creative imagination, and the subsequent activity of creating the narrative. Through the creative processes that form the act of writing, the author is organizing, and therefore planning, the novel's world. Once writing, editing, and publishing is accomplished, the novel exists as a structured, planned entity. Fowles's commentator contradicts himself, for the wish to create a world, combined with any action to fulfill that wish, e.g., writing, is a plan in itself. The point here is that the author plays godgames in creating a narrative, godgames re-created through the act of reading and interpretation. The commentator's protestations against organization are certainly ironic, for the commentator is integral to the world he creates. He is part of its structure. That he denies his omniscience while making authoritative pronouncements further illustrates the parodic, ironic nature of this novel. This parody, however, does not ultimately reduce Fowles's sincerity or the significance of his explorations into the authorship of the fictional narrative (Binns 23). It does, however, indicate a sense of postmodern irreverence and manipulation.

By its structuring, by its characterizations and plot, and by its commentator's philosophical asides, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* not only challenges the authority of external reality, it also questions the reliability of reality within the novel itself. The author, the reader, and the characters, including narrative voice, join to create reality both within and between the lines of the narrative. Nothing in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is quite as it seems, and meaning is often found in the realm between its more tangible elements. Much of this mystification is the result of the novel's self-awareness, which affects all its elements, including its readers. The

intrusive commentary and self-conscious offerings of various narrative elements expose the impossibilities of *playing* God while at the same time *being* God. In the worldview of Fowles's commentator, all participants in this novel, even its fictional characters, wish to create a "fictional" world. Just as is often the case in real life, Fowles's main characters wish to be someone else, wish to exist in another reality, wish to control their own worlds. As a result, these characters, including the narrative voices, work to create other worlds, other versions of themselves, and/or other versions of other characters. Reality within the novel is purely subjective, raising a challenge to the novel's ability to reflect any external reality while confronting the very essence of reality as an objective, universal construct. A postmodern, Cartesian interpretation of this activity may read: I fictionalize, therefore I am. The lines of distinction between reality and fiction become hazy, if not indistinguishable, as in the dream world of *The White Hotel*. Characters and their fictional worlds are never objective creations but are always drawn by a subjective hand, and that hand may well be their own, it may belong to another character, or it may belong to an external agent.

In a sense, Fowles's commentator equates reality with freedom, or the ability of characters to move freely through the narrative. There is only "one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (*TFLW* 106). The commentator, however, does not equate himself to God but instead claims a parallel, presumably lesser, role.

The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in a new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority. (*TFLW* 106)

Interestingly, in this passage and others like it, the quasi-fictional commentator defines with some authority the role of the novelist, who is presumably a non-fictional entity. However, in this definition he is in fact characterizing, and thereby fictionalizing, the novelist. According to the narrator's philosophy, the novelist is a god, not God, the capitalization of the initiating "g" implying a hierarchy of creators. In view of the commentator's own role as secondary creator, or lesser god, Fowles the novelist is accurately described as the principal creator, or God. Readers fall someplace in between.

The commentator "hastens to assure the reader that he is not being unduly artificial with his intrusion into the narrative" (Hutcheon, "Real World(s)" 119). He states: "I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all" (*TFLW* 106). The narrator finds this "new reality (or unreality) more valid" (*TFLW* 106). He challenges the concept of a single authoritative reality:

A character is “real” or “imaginary”? If you think that, hypocrite lecteur, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it . . . fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf—your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from real reality. That is the basic definition of Homo sapiens. (*TFLW* 106,107)

The essential human role is not existing. It is authoring, for the creation of fiction is a fundamental human activity. A reasonable question arising from the commentator’s musings would have to do with the nature and validity of reality, especially when taking into account that these sorts of existential philosophies are offered by the varied guises assumed by the narrator of a novel, himself a fictional character one or two times removed from “reality.” Further confusing this issue is the fact that the commentator slips in and out of his interpretive asides, at times more or less intrusive, at times more or less journalistically objective. Regardless of his degree of presence, the commentator stands as the simulacrum in the microcosmic hyperreality of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

The two novels that Fowles knits together create a postmodern pastiche, a palimpsest whose parchment is not so ancient but is only fashioned in such a way as to imitate the antique. Tarbox points out that the Victorian novel employs a conventional structure, the chapters defined many times by the character(s) they embrace—“Ernestina,” “Charles,” “Charles and Ernestina together,” “Mrs. Poultney,” etc. (*The Art of John Fowles*, 80). With this structuring, the novel interlinks narrative

strands, creating a distinctly plotted, traditional novel, just the type of obvious work that Charles, “the scientist, the despiser of novels,” would paradoxically eschew, the paradox located in the fact that he is, after all, a principal character in both novels (*TFLW* 17). The more traditional, pseudo-Victorian work of Ernestina Freeman, Aunt Tranter, Mrs. Poultney, et al., offers a relatively linear chronological progression through its traditional realist narrative and straightforward dialogue. Its themes of love, duty, marriage, and class are common to the British tradition, as Ernestina’s chapter two reference to Austen’s *Persuasion* signifies.

At closer inspection, the third-person narrator transcends the expected narrative time line of the traditional Victorian novel as he consciously moves back and forth between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The transformation of the third-person narrator into the meta-aware, intrusive first-person commentator fractures narrative progression and signifies a toying with spatiotemporality as the postmodern novel, the Sarah Woodruff novel, emerges. This contemporary work is superimposed on, and therefore part of, the pseudo-Victorian novel; however, it lacks its structure. This postmodern work is not linear, not planar. Instead, the commentator and Sarah create their aleatory narrative worlds above, between, and beyond the linearly-progressing narratives of the Victorian novel. Through internal and external manipulation of time, character, plot, and theme, the postmodern work exists multi-dimensionally. In it, Charles Smithson the Victorian gentleman is not the master of his world, as he is in the other novel. In the realist narrative, he is master of Ernestina. In the postmodern novel, he is a puppet controlled by Sarah Woodruff. In turn, Sarah

is at once a fictional creation of herself and an extension of the commentator, who disingenuously claims ignorance of the Woodruff character when he questions who she is, and then answers that he doesn't know. Sarah is enigmatic throughout the text, a "Sphinx." Her vague origins and murky characterization subvert any meaningful insight into her character, ambiguity furthered by her actions and the non-expositional nature of Fowles's postmodern style. The nineteenth-century novel is real—tangible, concrete, and residing within the lines of the text. The twentieth-century novel is abstract—implied, inferred, assumed, and residing between the lines. Together, they reflect the overall novel's questioning of authority and reality and its challenge to the constraints of narrative time and space.

The commentator does not judge the merits of the two novels, does not privilege one over the other. Instead, he uses both novels and their overarching narrative to continue his challenges to the constraints of form. He is acutely aware that his reactions and commentary do not exist extrinsically but are instead integral to the narrative, just as the author is integral to the author-text-reader troika. On the other side of the text, the reader's reaction, interpretation, and commentary become essential to both *fabula* and *sjuzet*. Mediated by the text, the author's psyche, intent, craft, and cultural and intellectual environments merge with comparable readerly factors. The ongoing shift in narrative voice and temporality in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* violates the reader's willful suspension of disbelief, challenges the establishment of narrative authority, and illuminates the difficulty of establishing reality.

The commentator encroaches upon the narrative with a flippant attitude toward the characters, the Victorian novel, the novel in general, and his own involvement in this particular novel. He continually blurs the distinctions between 1867 and 1967. The reader's engagement with a supposed Victorian reality is broken time and again. The commentator at times speak from a Victorian perspective. Sometimes his knowledge is contemporary. Other times it is a combination. He is inexorably enmeshed with the reader in a temporality established when that reader enters the text. This meta-awareness of temporality not only challenges authority and reality, but also discredits the novel as a means to establish historical accuracy. Fowles does not live in Victorian times but instead uses the Victorian era, or rather contemporary interpretations of the Victorian era, to frame his story. No time machine is available by which the contemporary author can return, *tabula rasa*, to an earlier time to record/create narrative. The contemporary author writes with a knowledge mediated by the years spanning the times written about and the times in which the author writes. Similarly, the reader enters a historical text with a pre-formed, or at least biased, knowledge, a knowledge mediated even further through the author's efforts. This overlaying of the historical novel with contemporary meta-fiction forces the reader to engage in the construction of narrative meaning while confronting both reality and history. The textual and narrative manipulations of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* reveal that all narrative is subjective history, a history established in a multi-dimensional spatiotemporality. The participants in the

narrative—writers and readers—are in some way historians, although their efforts may well produce revisionist, individualistic histories. Fiction is an exercise in historiography.

These manipulations of narrative time establish the novel as being at the center of its own multi-dimensional temporality. The novel exists in the times of the author, the reader, the historical period represented by the text, and the characters and stories within the text. Like the plot, the novel's temporality emerges both as an overarching *fabula* and an ordering *sjuzet*. However, this temporality exists only when the author and/or reader enters the text; the clock begins to tick only when someone opens the book. At the same time, the novel exists as a self-contained entity within its own, static temporality. However, even as narrative is being written or read the progression of metonymic displacement ever consigns it to the past. Although the text resides in the present, and though the author (whether writer or reader) accesses it in the present, as soon as one word displaces another, narrative is of the past. At the same time, narrative assumes the future. Brooks's ideas regarding narrative's design and intention might pose the question: why read (or write) if not to anticipate, repress, experience, and then repeat the act of discovery while toiling toward a totalized comprehension? Humans are a curious lot, especially when reading about themselves. The narrative therefore establishes a sense of past, present, and future, creating the sense of an ever-progressing narrative linearity symbolizing life's apparently linear progression. However, narrative temporality is neither always nor only linear. It certainly can progress along a planar mode; however, as established earlier, it can

also exist in a multi-dimensional realm outside vertical and horizontal lines.

Narrative's sense of temporal progression, a progression that suggests a privileging of present time and a progression from past to future, is therefore neither entirely valid nor entirely illusory. Temporality and meaning merge into a spatio-temporal, holistic totality created by the participants in the text, challenging both the identity of author and the validity of history as fact or reality.

Fowles's commentator frequently loses control of his characters. At times, Charles ignores his instructions. Sarah disappears, and not even the commentator knows her whereabouts. He openly assumes differing miens and personalities. On the train, he is "a man of forty or so [. . .] not quite a gentleman," perhaps "an ambitious butler, a successful lay preacher," or maybe "a would-be surgeon" (*TFLW* 414-15). Again, the narration is many-layered. The man described above *is* the narrator, and yet he is described by another narrator. They are, in fact, two of the many sides of one personality. The bearded man is most closely associated with the narrator of the contemporary novel, while the third-person narrator describing him represents the narrator of the Victorian novel. However, these are not discrete narrative voices. As the passage progresses, the third-person narrator shifts into the first-person. Directly commenting on the bearded man's observation of the sleeping Charles and indirectly reflecting on the responsibilities of authorship, he addresses the reader:

You may one day come under a similar gaze. And you may—in the less reserved context of our own century—be aware of it. The intent watcher will not wait until you are asleep. It will no doubt suggest

something unpleasant, some kind of devious sexual approach . . . a desire to know you in some way you do not want to be known by a stranger. In my experience, there is only one profession that gives that particular look, with its bizarre blend of the inquisitive and the magistral; of the ironic and the soliciting. (*TFLW* 416)

The profession, of course, is that of the writer, and the voyeurism is that of all creators of fiction. This particular narrator completes the character that originates in Fowles the writer and continues on with the other narrative voices. The Victorian narrator has metamorphosed into the first-person, contemporary narrator, who asks of the reader: “Now what could I do with you?” (*TFLW* 416). As the passage concludes, the commentator claims to drop the “pretense” of these narrative asides by identifying himself as both observer and creator of Charles. His manipulation of character as well as of the reader is not simply authorial arrogance but serves to expose the various roles and activities of all the narrative agents in creating meaning.

Chapter sixty offers the first of two possible endings, the ending consistent with the Victorian novel. Charles finds Sarah and learns of his daughter, Lalage. Sarah’s head on his breast, he asks of her in a final scene: “Shall I ever understand your parables?” Her head “shakes a mute vehemence” (*TFLW* 426). She is still a Sphinx. Regardless, the tone and sentimentality of this ending imply that the two have “found” each other and have come to some sort of understanding, thereby anticipating a future together. Chapter sixty-one offers an altered version of this ending. It opens with the commentator’s musings and manipulations.

It is a time-proven rule of the novelist's craft never to introduce any but very minor new characters at the end of a book. I hope Lalage may be forgiven; but the extremely important-looking person that has, during the last scene, been leaning against a parapet of the embankment across the way from 16 Cheyne Walk, the residence of Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti [. . .] may seem at first sight to represent a gross breach of the rule. (*TFLW* 474)

Of course, this is no new character. It is simply a re-emergence of the characterized commentator. He is re-incarnated from the bearded man on the train into the impresario, his beard trimmed and "Frenchified" in a weak and disingenuous attempt to disguise his identity. He observes the final scenes of the novel and offers a conclusion to the narrative of Charles and Sarah. The commentator claims to be "the kind of man who refuses to intervene in nature" (*TFLW* 474). In the guise of the impresario character, he is true to his word, mounting his landau to trot away at the last scene, detached from the story. However, he soon reappears in the role of the overarching commentator.

In these last pages of the novel, the commentator's first intrusion is as the third-person narrator describing one last scene in which Charles finally realizes Sarah's manipulations. Charles cannot have her. He must return to America. A "black avalanche" of emotion overtakes him as he realizes that his entire life has been in vain, that his pursuit of her has ruined him. As Charles leaves the house, Sarah may or may not watch him from the window (*TFLW* 478). Third-person mutates into first-

person, and the commentator addresses the two endings. He claims as his “original principle; that there is no intervening god beyond whatever can be seen” (*TFLW* 479). What can be seen, then, are Fowles’s manipulations of narrative. The commentator is, therefore, an intervening god, but he is a lesser god walking the world of his creation.

As addressed earlier, Fowles’s often playful intrusions into his novel are simply extensions of literary devices well-grounded in the British literary tradition, devices first used by Fielding and Sterne and revisited by such Victorians as Dickens and Eliot (Huffaker 103). However, in these older traditions, the author-as-narrator generally appears for purposes of clarification and soon retreats to a less visible role. This sort of intrusive narrative voice might signify the author’s arrogance and self-declaration of writing ability, Or it might signify a tongue-in-cheek attitude; even Sterne’s narrator parodied his own role in interrupting the narrative. In the end, the role of narrator is never entirely invisible. The narrator, however unobtrusive, is always a presence. However, the level of intrusiveness is a matter of degree, and that exhibited by Fowles’s commentator denotes a manipulative, postmodern literary device.

The multiple endings of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* neither signify a flippantly arrogant attitude toward the reader, nor point to the author’s indecisiveness. Instead, each ending concludes its correspondent narrative within the novel. The novel’s less intrusive passages signify the historical Victorian novel in the realist mode, concluded in chapter sixty. The more intrusive passages of chapter sixty-one signify the completion of the contemporary Woodruff novel, the novel of

manipulation and forced readerly participation. Together these two conclusions settle the overarching narrative that is *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In so doing, they make an allegorical statement about the nature of the novel and the novelist's art and, by extension, the nature and value of all narrative. Also, the final ambiguity of the multiple endings firmly underscores Fowles's ruling thesis: reality is illusory and mutable; servitude to form is abhorrent; meaning derives from freedom and innovation. For himself, for his characters, as well as for his readers, Fowles seeks self-determination and the erasure of all restrictions implied by narrative authority and adherence to a single or linear temporality. His choice of a self-conscious, witty, and resourcefully intrusive narrator, who continually tests the boundaries of form, serves as a constant reminder. Fowles acknowledges the restrictions of art and form in representing reality, but within those confines he still attempts to achieve freedom and authenticity for all involved. Finally, he challenges the relationships between the novel and its readership by exposing the spatiotemporal manner in which the novel constructs meaning. This novel's endings expose the responsibilities of the reader, who must choose between the two offered, thereby joining Fowles and his various narrative voices in creating *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Tarbox is correct in stating that "Fowles has created a unique godgame" (*The Art of John Fowles*, 60), a godgame most evident in his micromanagement of narrative voice and time.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," Roland Barthes claims that "narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society. It begins with the history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (595). Narrative is essential to the human condition. Stories frame humanity by recounting history, predicting the future, and providing entertainment; by communicating ideas; by establishing meaning within cultural contexts; and by marking and stabilizing a culture or society as well as the individual identity within a culture or society. Conversely, society, culture, and individuality frame the types of stories that are told, the ways in which they are told, and the ways in which they communicate or create meaning. Narrative is therefore both a structuring and a structured agent, imparting meaning and having significance only within cultural, societal, political, individual, literary, or other contexts.

As a form of narrative, the novel is an agent of structure. It is situated at the center of an encompassing structure, which itself exists within many overlapping spheres of intelligence and interpretation. The novel mediates the spatiotemporalities of the reader and the author with its own collection of sometimes overlapping, sometimes parallel times. Collectively, the separate-yet-connected times and situations of author, text, and reader construct a non-planar spatiotemporality encompassing them all, a sort of Tao of the novel. The problem is that all these spatiotemporalities are informed by, if not constrained by, the linear chronology and

metonymic displacement imposed by both the birth-to-death human life span and the parallel linearity imposed by the first and last words of the novel. It would seem, then, that narrative reality must be linearly finite in order to have significance. However, meaning and the comprehension of that meaning do not always develop linearly.

Whether in real life or within the novel, meaning and understanding develop through a time-transcendent, holistic process. Perhaps this difficulty of temporality is the only true verisimilitude, and the novel's structure only serves to point this out. The yin of structuralism and the yang of deconstruction exist not in binary opposition but as mirror images, each necessary for the other's existence. Human reality may at once be idiosyncratic and communal, knowable and incomprehensible, and its time fleeting and eternal. In the end, though, there is an inescapably tangible and finite aspect to reality, as there is to the novel. The novel establishes a reality and facilitates meaning both through and within structure, even if the boundaries of that structure are not always readily apparent.

Paradoxically, the investigation of spatiotemporal structure and its effect on meaning exposes the speciousness of the novel's interior reality and the difficulty the novel faces in gaining access to any external reality. The critical hyper-awareness of postmodernism calls attention to the novel's structural role and to its responsibility in mediating meaning and establishing reality. Through its structure, the novel attempts to locate expositional, exploratory, and reflective types of meaning as well as the more holistic human realities, cutting through intellect to approach or convey behavioral and emotional quotients, perhaps in some manner representing a spiritual

realm. At the same time, the novel's structure constrains these activities. Structure at once establishes and dissolves, unites and fragments, constrains and frees. Lessing's reflections on writing *The Golden Notebook* illustrate this point.

The difficulty is that the novel is a human construct, and the novel's value is realized only with human interpretation. Humans are inherently subjective, so interpretation of the novel is inherently biased. Because of this subjectivity, the novel, and narrative in general, cannot conclusively establish universal truth, cannot authoritatively communicate "what really is" across social and cultural barriers. Instead, narrative can only create approaches to truth and avenues to communication. Of course, some narratives are more fictional than others. Regardless of intent, bias, however slight, affects even the most straightforward recounting and reading of an incident.

The novel's bias is purposeful. Its reality closely parallels the everyday narratives of human life; however, the novel fashions and heightens this reality with symbolic depictions of and commentary on human reality. While the novel serves to recreate or represent life, its ultimate purpose is to comment on life, spanning the culturally enhanced void between author, signifier, signified, and reader to establish some manner of interpersonal and intercultural commentary. The individual need to establish and discuss *self*, both in relation to that self and to a larger audience, stimulates the writing and reading of fiction. The author's desire and need to create and to communicate stimulate the reader's need to re-create and to comprehend. Author and reader stand on opposite sides of a pane of glass—the novel. At times the

glass is transparent, allowing them to see through to the other side. Other times it is translucent, allowing only partial vision. And other times it is a two-sided mirror, and they can only see their own reflections and the reflections of their individual worlds. The point of narrative activity is to learn what others do—to see how “the other guy” lives, thinks, acts, and feels—in order to challenge or affirm individually-held ideas, worldviews, acts, thoughts, and feelings in an effort to establish and re-establish the existence of the individual self within the context of another individual or of a society. Again, the telling and reading of stories, and the placing of self within those stories, is an essential and defining human activity.

The postmodern aesthetic simply challenges the final authority and universality of these stories. The fragmented forms, dyssynchronous elements, ruptured and non-linear narrative, discontinuous character development, forced readerly participation, and meta-awareness of such works as *The White Hotel*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and *The Golden Notebook* expose the novel's inherent subjectivity in order to confront the difficulty of establishing meaning within hyperreality. Presumably, such subjectivity would preclude the novel from ever establishing any sort of commonly understood meaning. This presumption is reinforced by the difficulties posed by the separate-yet-connected internal and external spatiotemporalities of the novel's many agents—characters, author, reader, structure, *fabula*, *sjuzet*, etc. It would then seem impossible that the novel could establish any meaning or stand for any reliable reality when its form, its constitutive elements, and its temporality have been so deconstructed by a community of

individuals each struggling to establish “self.” Christine Brook-Rose points out that “never before have the meaning-making means at our disposal (linguistic, economic, political, scientific) appeared so inadequate” as a way to “explain the world” (qtd. in Smith, “Schrödinger’s Cat” 91). Reality is a construct of meaning. Meaning defines reality. However, as C. Jason Smith observes, the problem “is not so much how to locate reality as how to locate meaning when, as Susan Strehl adroitly summarizes, ‘reality is no longer realistic’” (91).

The acute critical awareness of postmodernism, its challenge to authority, and its annulment of form underscore this difficulty. The critical and cultural self-awareness of the postmodernist perspective has removed any remaining veils concealing the fact that reality itself is neither universal nor final. This exposure in turn has cast doubt on the very value of narrative, especially as a significant commentary on the human condition. Cultures and their narratives commingle. The individual stands as a discrete entity within society, yet society is composed of individuals. Fiction informs reality and reality informs fiction, creating a hyperreality represented today by the Disneyfication of Times Square and the creation of pseudo-realities representing New York, Rome, and other geo-cultural communities in Las Vegas. In the newest version of this hyperreality, a recent Sunday edition of *The New York Times* featured an article focusing on the fact that computer technology has advanced to the point that digitized representations of humans are so realistic as to cause some actors to fear for their livelihood. Reality is difficult to define, difficult to establish, and difficult to separate from art’s interpretative representation.

Postmodernism disputes narrative's worth. Yet despite all its challenges, postmodernism has not succeeded in entirely dismissing the value of narrative or totally repudiating the importance of narrative's constituent elements, including structure and time. Instead, the post-postmodern narrative remains fundamental to the human condition, and interpretation of the narrative remains a dynamic, necessary activity. Although the contemporary tendency to theorizing implies philosophical abstraction, narrative itself remains a finite, explorable, structured activity that has significance within a structure. And although the postmodern novel challenges its ability to depict a reliable reality, it in fact exists to create and/or re-create any number of human realities. In short, narrative remains vital, and critical interpretation remains necessary. The problem is that the manner in which narrative works and the ways in which it creates, communicates, and/or imparts meaning are neither easily nor authoritatively definable.

Thomas, Lessing, and Fowles fragment the chronology, characterization, plot, and form of their novels in order to comment on reality and to mediate meaning. In order to be "real," they challenge notions of reality as well as the ability of narrative to fix reality. *The White Hotel* re-creates the "real" Sigmund Freud as a quasi-historical character, blurring the distinctions between historical reality and fictional reality. In a fusion of literary forms, this novel conceals the identity of its protagonist and its ultimate story. It reveals Lisa Erdman through prisms of letters, psychoanalytical writing, fantastical poetry, subconscious episodes, starkly realistic prose, and a surreal epilogue. Erdman's character and her story are scattered

randomly throughout the book, avoiding any strictly linear chronological progression of plot. In the end, though, the seeming randomness of *The White Hotel* coalesces into a totalized, structured reality. It scatters its evidence before the reader, much as an analyst might reveal his or her self to an analyst. The reader must construct the story from this evidence, but can do so only after the novel is complete.

The Golden Notebook blurs the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, reality and fiction, while depicting an indecisiveness of character and characterization that, among other things, exists at once externally and internally within the order of the narrative's linear chronology. The binary oppositions that both form Anna Wulf's character and eventually fragment her world serve not so much to disorder but to create a classifying order. Anna Wulf's "crackup" distills her fragmented characterization as the novel's structure incorporates her notebooks into one, totalized work, thereby symbolizing the dichotomous relationship between fragmentation and order. As with *The White Hotel*, the reader must work in a multi-dimensional spatiotemporality, defined by but also external to the novel, in order to gain any sense from the fragmentations of *The Golden Notebook*. Paradoxically, Lessing employs a highly ordered structure to explore fragmentation. However, it is a structure composed as much by repetition as by linearity; the notebooks, although ordered within the novel, depict dyssynchronous, sometimes overlapping, temporalities.

Fowles obscures the distinction between fiction and reality throughout *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The narrator's contemporary commentary on and within a Victorian novel highlights the problem of temporality. Fowles the contemporary author can create a pastiche of the Victorian novel, but he cannot create a Victorian novel. Perhaps this is the ultimate truth of postmodernism: all authors and readers are tourists visiting someone else's reality. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* forces an awareness of the fact that narrative does not so much establish meaning as it mediates meaning through manipulations of time, plot, character, and form. Fowles the author enters the text as narrator and calls attention to his activity. In doing so, he characterizes the role of the "fictitious author," an entity parallel to Umberto Eco's fictitious reader (Eco 16). The novel's meta-awareness forces the reader to actively join the author who has joined his characters who have joined the *fabula* and the *sjuzet* to create meaning. Reality develops over multiple, many-dimensional, spatiotemporalities

The novels explored here present ways of gathering information and formulating, or realizing, meaning in an era of transition and shifting ground. This is not to suggest that the postmodern, or contemporary, novel is without a coherent spatiotemporal basis. To the contrary, postmodernism's attempts to re-form form do not preclude the fact that the fundamental purpose of literature—to fulfill the human need to tell and read stories—must occur within some manner of structured time.

Additionally, postmodernism does not entirely discredit linear temporality. Instead, it only challenges linearity as the predominant structural model as it comments on the multi-dimensionality of time.

In the end, postmodernism is not nihilistic. Its objections and provocations do not destroy the traditions upon which it is based and which it challenges. Although the postmodern aesthetic contests authority and universality, it does not do away with meaning. And though it questions certainty and organization, it does not entirely abrogate structure. Collectively, the fragmented narrative elements of *The White Hotel*, *The Golden Notebook*, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* represent the search for meaning among many realities rather than the communication of meaning within one universal reality. The art of these novels is informed by “real” life. In turn, these novels point out that art always informs the “reality” of life. The bond connecting narrative with the human condition is permanently fixed. This might just be the original and most genuine hyperreality.

Notes

¹ References to and citations from Lessing's introductions to *The Golden Notebook* are taken from the 1994 HarperCollins edition. All other references and citations are from the 1963 McGraw-Hill edition.

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