

Introduction

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor singles out the intensification of the internalization as one of the fronts out of which modernity emerges. People were more inclined to search within themselves than to look up to the omniscient God for the moral source of their existence. Since the sixteenth century, the Aristotelian conception of the universe, a chain of being within which man is supposed to take a designated place, has been an ongoing discussion. The individual was urged to turn inward in the search for certainty of the reality. In the centuries that followed, the belief in the autonomous nature of the self and the independent, free-thinking subject became entrenched and also found eloquent articulation in the expressions of Romanticism. The romanticists enjoined us to heed our inner voice which will lead to the presence of the transcendental true self. Although self-exploration does not dissipate the nebulosity of the transcendental true self, the romantic discourse of the self “created a sense of reality beyond immediate, sensory awareness; the unseen, inner depths were most substantial” (Gergen 24). Finally, the transcendental true self replaced God as the source of unity and wholeness after people turned away from the Church. From the romanticists, we also inherit a set of values that prioritize personal depth, passion, and integrity. This vocabulary is essential to the formation of deeply committed relations, dedicated friendship, and life purposes.

In the twentieth century, the romanticist ideas are challenged. The observation that the world is fragmentary and so is the self undercuts the validity of the romanticist expressions. People pine under the world-view of fragmentation, lamenting the loss of the old dream of unity and wholeness. With the ascendancy of postmodernism, which in Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition is characterized by the “incredulity toward metanarratives”, the nostalgic mood is dismissed (xxiv). Lyotard

asserts that metanarrative, the claim to truth, smothers difference, opposition, and plurality in the name of unity and wholeness. Similarly, Jacques Derrida's discourse on *différance* points out the falsity of logocentrism, the desire for the presence of truth, and asserts, "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse" (110). The dismantlement of "the center" would entail the swelling of the heterogeneous voices and the free play of values and meanings. All the truths are but a form of interpretation from a specific angle, and Truth the absolute remains inaccessible. For the postmodernists, the illusion of unity and transcendence is totalitarian and suffocating. "In contrast to the narrow range of options and oppressive restraints favored by totalizing systems of understanding, postmodernists resolve to open the way to the full expression of all discourses, to a free play of discourses" (Gergen 247). Nevertheless, the postmodern free play of values and meanings arouses the suspicion of anarchic relativism. Indeed, following the breakdown of the gravitating center, the heterogeneous voices swell and vie for supremacy. Now that any attempt to claim the final authority falls a prey to the totalitarian logocentrism, it is determined that the process of the competition would be endless without results. As long as the authoritative position of Truth remains unoccupied, it seems that all the voices—even the diametrically conflicting ones—are equally valid. It then stands to reason to suggest that the postmodern free-play is meaningless. The postmodern celebration of the free play can flatten all the discourses on the scale of veracity to the degree that the very existence of the scale becomes pointless. The fact that Truth does not exist reduces all the discourses to the status of stories or interpretations. Even though the postmodernists hold out the promise of emancipation in tearing down the totalitarian center at the first place, the energy to challenge the status quo is cancelled at the menace of meaninglessness. The extant hierarchy is thus secure and solidified with the playful liberation. Because of the lurking despondency behind its assertions,

postmodernism often invites the charges of being a-political in thrust.

In the domain of selfhood, the postmodernist viewpoint is particularly debilitating. A corollary to the notion of centerlessness is that the true self does not exist; that is, there is no continuous and indestructible kernel within that holds the key to the sense of unity and wholeness and has the answer to the meanings of our existence. For the postmodernists, the true self is an illusion. Magali Cornier Michael states, “postmodernism posits a centerless, dispersed subject who is literally a composite of various socially and culturally constructed roles or positions—*not* perspectives—that cannot be reconciled” (40). Under the postmodern condition, the subject exists in a continuous construction and reconstruction. The view of disrupted and discontinuous subjectivity raises severe moral questions. With respect to the hazards of the view of the postmodern subject Kim L. Worthington’s questions are eloquent:

To open up the notion of subjectivity to the endless free play of supplementary possibility, stressing the inherent failure of any attempt to retrieve undisputed meaning or certain personhood, raise severe moral questions. If my identity is not fixed and continuous, if I am not ready-made but only constantly re-made, how can my actions and relations have any guarantee of consistency? How can I be held responsible for my actions if the self who performs them is never me, an intentional agent of casual determination, but always only a misrecognized other? How is friendship or relationship of any kind possible if the self I believe myself to be today, now, is different from the self I thought I was yesterday, then? (166-7)

To obviate Worthington’s questions, it is not acceptable for many by falling back into the tyranny of logocentrism and transcendence. For Lyotard, the price to pay for the illusion of unity and wholeness which promise solace and certainty is “terror” (81). If

we accept the postmodern world in which we no longer experience a secure sense of self, and in which doubt is increasingly placed on the very assumption of a bounded identity with palpable attributes, how are we supposed to respond to the situations? To strike a balance that embraces neither the nostalgia for wholeness nor the postmodernist playfulness becomes an issue that has to be dealt with.

In *The Golden Notebook* Doris Lessing traversed the nostalgia for wholeness and anarchic playfulness through Anna Wulf's identity crisis. The characters the heroine encounters more or less suffer from the feeling of being fragmentary. Some might habitually put on the mask of the stereotyped figures for the exigency of the occasions or their positions. They share the attitude to split themselves up, "One personality for the committee room; another for the café afterwards" (Lessing 88). When the propensity for masquerading is carried to the extreme, they even develop a chameleonic personality, shifting the role-identities they can adopt without reflexive consciousness. The pictures of the split individuals collected in this novel offer a panorama of the discontinuous and constructed self associated with the postmodern subject. Anna's repulsion against the chameleon-like characters implicitly reveals the severe moral hazards in the notion of the postmodern subject.

From the criticism of her contemporary existential writers, it is apt to assert that the idea of anarchic relativism latent in postmodernism is repulsive to Lessing. The absurd world espoused by the existentialists is perhaps the best manifestation of a world haunted by the specter of moral anarchy. The existentialists look at the system of values and morality with suspicion and distrust. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus's preference for "quantity" over "quality" divulges that he favors moral vacuum to avoid self-righteous oppression. Lessing finds that the chord of the existentialists strike seems to be permeated with nothing but a horrified pity for humanity. "If writers like Camus, Sartre, Genet, Beckett, feel anything but a tired pity

for human beings, then it is not evident from their work” (Voice 11). As a writer, she will not settle for such a pity for humankind, which in her opinion is a cowardly acceptance of despair. “I was looking for the warmth, the compassion, the humanity, the love of people which illuminates the literature of the nineteenth century,” she remarks, “and which makes all these old novels a statement of faith in man himself” (Voice 6). Lessing’s words are reminiscent of Anna’s explanation about her writing block. Out of an artist’s scrupulousness, Anna resolves not to write another novel when she lacks the comprehensive imagination that can power the book “with an intellectual moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life” (76). Covert in Lessing’s criticism against these existentialists is that they give up the faith in man. For her, the small personal voice of the writers is the instrument for the good, to strengthen “a vision of a good which may defeat the evil” (Voice 7). Nothing is further from Lessing’s beliefs than the existentialist moral vacuum. The description about violence and tyranny does not submerge the rhetoric of “development” and “flexibility” in her books. “To my mind the whole push and thrust and development of the world is towards the more complex, flexible, the open-minded, the ability to entertain many ideas, sometimes contradictory ones, in one’s mind at the same time” (Prisons 72-3). As Mark Freeman suggests, “it is extremely difficult to talk about development without positing an endpoint, a telos, in which the process culminates. To the extent that the concept retains its traditional forward-moving connotations, it is, and must be, toward something: a goal, a place on high.” (13). In Lessing’s works, this place on high is usually embodied by the delineation of an ideal city.¹ Even though the road is thorny, in Lessing’s mind the world is doubtlessly heading for the vision of an ideal city or an understated better

¹ Jean Pickering notices that the vision of an ideal city “is general to the whole body of Lessing’s works” and supplies with textual evidence from *The Golden Notebook* to support her argument (20).

future when the contours of the ideal city are not offered. Her tenacious hold on the notion of “a better world” is incommensurate with Camus’ s world of moral vacuum, let alone the postmodern invocation of the meaningless universe.

On the other hand, even if Lessing dismisses the existentialist covert anarchy of values and emotions as an act of cowardice, she also rejects the confinement of certainties. She penetrates the attraction of certainty.

People like certainties. More, they crave certainty, they seek certainty, and great resounding truths. They like to be part of some movement equipped with these truths and certainties, and if there are rebels and heretics, that is even more satisfying, because this structure is so deep in all of us. (Prisons 21)

The deep structure in us has blocked the infiltration of the new information and ideas, and in turn frustrates new achievements and development, leaving us in the circularity of patterns. It is clear that she will not endorse the notion of wholeness that permits a limited range of possibilities at the sacrifice of the heterogeneous voices that might promise a better view of the world. Among the features that she ranks highly in a person is flexibility but flexibility does not amount to the free play. As strong as her antipathy toward suffocating certainties is her hold on the cosmos of values and meanings. She manages to remain as flexible as possible to elude the trap of limitation and repression; meanwhile, unlike the existentialists, she does not try to propose a nonchalant worldview to claim the intellectual superiority.

In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing delineates Anna’ s identity crisis which turns out to be a struggle against complacent self-limitation and meaningless playfulness. Anna is situated in the intersection of disparate pulling powers each of which offers the deliverance from the crisis with a price. Torn between the various pressures, Anna tires to act as an integrate agent. The fight with her colleague Jack gives resonant

voice to the heroine's inner struggle. The antagonism that separates them is engendered by the defense of humanism on Anna's part. She chides Jack for his shying away from the obvious contradictions and ridicules of the communist activities by expecting the justification of the future generations for his small contribution. With a good conscience, Jack takes up the role of a split activist who refuses to stare at the twisted ideals in practice despite the voice of his intellectuality. Repelled at his attitude, Anna protests,

But humanism stands for the whole person, the whole individual, striving to become as conscious and responsible as possible about everything in the universe. But now you sit there, quite calmly, and as a humanist you say that due to the complexity of scientific achievement the human being must never expect to be whole, he must always be fragmented. (320)

Anna's faith in humanistic notion of wholeness and unity intensifies her conflicts in the fragmentary society. She revolts at the group of conformists who, like Jack, entertain the myth of justification to condone his act of betrayal to humanism and himself. To her distress, however, there seems to be no feasible alternatives that can accommodate both the fragmentary world and her ideals. She finds herself being pushed toward the direction of masquerading—switching on and off her role-identities without the slightest qualm about their incompatibility and conflicts, a pleasure of a split individual—or the club of the madmen who retreat from the public world into the consolation that their integrity remains intact consequently. Anna has no heart for both of them, but despair intensifies and saps her determination to find a feasible alternative.

Across the multifarious writings in Lessing's career, the concern with the individual's conscience in its relation to the collective is familiar (Pickering 18). Anna's groping for the deliverance from the hazards of the fragmentary subjectivity

represents Lessing's attempt to hint at the new way of looking at life for the individual in the chaotic world.

The approach of this thesis is a mixture. The concept of self as narrative is based on the post-structuralist's suggestions. This concept will shed light on the significance of Anna's writing with respect to her identity crisis. However, for a full discussion of the maintenance of self-identity, I feel compelled to tread through the three dimension of the self—the temporal, the moral and the social. The explication of the disturbance of the three dimensions in Anna's identity crisis relies on the approach of the psychoanalysis and sociology. In the first chapter, I take a survey at the notion of the self as narrative and the three dimensions in the concept of the self. The theoretical analysis aims to elucidate the conceptualization of self-identity in narrative and the confirmation of self-identity in the daily performance. This chapter will prepare for the examination of Anna's writing later. Besides, the theoretical discussion also provides the angle from which I try to trace the sources and the syndromes of Anna's identity crisis in the second chapter. The third chapter focuses on Anna's obsession with and quest for the transcendental true self, which takes the form of the consulting sessions and the scribbling in the notebooks. My point is that the true self is inaccessible and when the quest is carried to the extreme, it leads to the breakdown of the subject. The fourth chapter deals with Anna's solution that reconciles her with the fragmentary world after the abortive quest for the true self. Through the examination of Anna's breakthrough, I argue that Anna's solution is actually Lessing's prescription for the fear of fragmentation and meaninglessness.

Chapter One: Self and Narrative

Since the nineteenth century, more and more philosophers took a new interest in the part that language plays in our understanding of reality (Kerby 2). Language is no longer deemed simply as a tool of communication, a medium through which we express our feelings and comprehension of the found reality. It is now widely accepted that language actually constitutes and constrains our perception of the world, rather than passively conveying our observation. If language plays an active part in our perception of reality, the conceptualization of the self is also under its sway. The self, which used to be held as a given and autonomous essence within, is dethroned from the status of the originator of actions and intentions; instead it becomes a product of language, generated in the narration of our life stories. In *Self as Narrative* Worthington quotes Emile Benveniste, “It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality which is that of being” (emphasis in original, 25). Anthony Paul Kerby also endorses this position and claims, “Language is not simply a tool of device used by persons but is part of their very definition” (67). If the self is constituted and produced in language as they assert, it follows that we arrive at a concept of who we are only after the fact of expression. The notion that the self is a latent but fixed entity recedes. In its place emerges the metaphor of self as a text whose content requires the selective emplotment of the myriad episodes from experience and whose lineaments permit constant revisions.

Acknowledging his indebtedness to Paul Ricoeur, Kerby emphasizes that narrative structures are indigenous to human experience. Our lives are not experienced as random unconnected events but processed and grasped much the same as how we understand a story. “Life is inherently of a narrative structure,” Kerby asserts. “To understand a life is to trace its development upon a narrative thread, a

thread that unites otherwise disparate or unheeded happenings into the significance of a development, a directionality, a destiny” (40). With Kerby, Worthington also states:

In the process of narration, discrete moments and acts are contextualized: they are enmeshed in a history. Historical narrative contextualization is crucial to human understanding. It is because we can understand or conceptualize the connection and interrelation between remembered, experienced, and anticipated actions and events, and because we can situate them in space and time, that the plethora of stimuli and experiences that constitute our lived world (and our selves) come to have a meaning. (14)

If narration is one of the crucial modes of human conceptualization as they have suggested, the conceptualization of the self still has to rely on the agency of narration. Consequently, the self usually emerges from narrative.

To penetrate how narrative accommodates the concept of the self and how the self-narrative is maintained in life necessitates a survey of the three dimensions of the self. In *Narrative and the Self*, Kerby touches upon these three dimensions but focuses attention only on the facet of temporality. I thus draw on Taylor’s arguments which dwell on the moral dimension of the self and Anthony Giddens’ s theory in *Modernity and Self-Identity* to examine the social dimension and the maintenance of self-identity. Despite of the difference of their perspectives and focuses, all three critics endorse the concept of self as narrative and at a closer look, their points frequently echo each other’ s. Based on their arguments, I construct the three dimensions of the self to facilitate the exploration of Anna’ s identity crisis.

Temporal Dimension

In his book, Kerby highlights the temporal dimension of human existence. From birth to death, human existence is eventually measured on the horizon of time. The

notion of the self, which is contingent on this temporal existence, should not bypass the realm of temporality in its construction. The importance of temporality in the self is divulged by our instinctive response to the request of introducing ourselves. When asked to introduce ourselves, we are inclined to offer a brief story of our past with the expectation that it can speak for us who we are and perhaps implies how we will maintain ourselves in the future.¹ Such a response betrays our intuitive understanding that the self has a personal history, a narrated life. We have to tell a story to present it, very similar to the creation of a character in fiction. Stories unfold before the self comes to life. Other than that, the nexus of the past and the present is palpable in the inclination to recount the personal history. To explain who I am now unavoidably involves the recollection of the past “I.” The contours of the past, however, are largely determined by the purview of my present understanding. It might go the other way around—i.e., the present is under the sway of the past experience.² At any rate, the self-identity relies heavily on the retrieval of the past. Kerby states, “To narrate the figure of the past is . . . to attempt a retrieval of ourselves on the plane of self-understanding. It is to create a portrait of ourselves, no matter how badly delineated. Without this recuperative act there would be little or no content to the ‘I that I am for myself’ (53).

With respect to the conceptualization of the self, the temporal nexus not only moves backward into the past as our instinctive response discloses, but also stretches forward into the future. Kerby remarks, “the present moment rides, as it were, on the immediate past and is also caught up in a future project” (19-20). The interaction among the past, present, and future is subtle and intense. Roy Schafer expounds this

¹ For a detailed discussion of how the lived episodes are selected and organized in response to the demands of the circumstances see Roger C. Schank, *Tell Me a Story: Narrative and Intelligence*.

² Freeman maintains that the flux of the impact on the temporal nexus does not always go unilaterally from the present to the past, and could be the other way around.

relation from the perspective of psychoanalysis,

It soon becomes evident that, interpretively, one is working in a temporal circle. One works backward from what is told about the autobiographical present in order to define, refine, correct, organized, and complete an analytically coherent and useful account of the past, and one work forward from various tellings of the past to constitute that present and that anticipated future which are most important to explain. (48-9)

As Schafer suggests, the inquiry about the individual's self-identity is always tied up with the concern about the future, which is perhaps understated but crucial. According to Kerby, the self-portrait plays a more active role than predicting the possible trajectories of the individual but in effect serves as a center to organize the new experience. The "new experiences will tend to flow into this story of our lives, augmenting it and adapting themselves to it" (Kerby 45). Giddens follows this line of the argument and further avers, "A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*" (emphasis in original, 54). It turns out that self-identity will not stand to its feet unless the individual can carry the picture of his self-portrait with him when marching into the future. It does not come as a surprise then if one claims that the attempt at self-conceptualization is powered less by desire for the presence of the self-portrait than the need to justify and direct our actions. The integration of the ongoing experience into the delineated picture of the self-understanding eventually claims the center of the self-interpreting process, the construction of the self.

As the above discussion has shown, the matrix of temporality, which does not frequently intrude our awareness and focus our attention, operates quite actively in the formation of our selves. If the temporal hinges are securely in place for an ordered

sequentialization of the lived experience, the sense of continuity emerges. The continuity emerges from the connection of the discursive episodes is the main prop to support a sense of coherent self-identity. Things change with time but “our notion of identity seeks to find some continuity in this change” (Kerby 37). “In the act of conceptualizing one’s selfhood,” Worthington remarks, “one writes a narrative of personal continuity through time” despite the radical transformation we might go through in appearance and mentality (13). Narration—with its innate narrative structure of the beginning, middle, and end—helps synthesize the disjointed points of life into a smooth and interrelated framework. In reference to such a framework, the discrete moment can be situated and thus granted meanings. Without it, the individual would appear to ride on the tide of the fragmentary moments, disoriented and dissociated. Drawing on Hayden White’s arguments, Freeman avers, “To live without narrative, it would appear, is to live in an essentially meaningless perpetual present, devoid of form and coherence; it is to experience the world as disconnected and fragmented, as an endless series of things that happen” (110). Similarly, Kerby emphasizes that meaning is produced only when the larger frame of reference is available, the part-whole relation palpable. A context is needed for the present action to attain its significance. “Actions are, generally speaking, already understood in the context of a before and after” (Kerby 40). Devoid of a continual and referential context, the actions would be rendered meaningless. The self, built on the narrated record of the actions, would also face the threat of meaninglessness and emptiness. In this regard, serious disturbance on the temporal dimension may slide into the dissolution of this referential framework, a breakdown that in turn would detriment the self savagely. Kerby asserts:

It is this continuity of our life story that constitutes the greater part of our experienced self-identity. . . . At the broadest and most abstract level this

identity is constituted out of the part-whole relation between the “now” and the at least implicit horizon of my life as a whole. . . . A breakdown of this type of self-identity will occur if the part-whole relation breaks down. (45-6)

To illustrate this, he adds:

In a dream our identity will still rely on a part-whole relation, but if the whole is to a very great expanse and if it often changes dimensions, then one’s identity can become disturbingly volatile and episodic. Amnesia will produce a similar result in a waking life. Similarly, a catastrophic event, such as war, may simply destroy the credibility of one’s prior life horizon, resulting in a temporary or even a more permanent disruption of identity. (Kerby 46)

In a word, the stability and continuity of the temporal relations is a prerequisite to a viable self-identity, and narrative affords a structure that conduces to the feeling of continuity through time. In this respect, self-narrative enhances the stability of temporal dimension of the self.

Moral Dimension

Apart from the temporal dimension, the self also moves in a moral space. According to Taylor, in the articulation of what is moral, we announce what is of higher values. Morality eventually defines what is worth our respect. A moral space is the horizon in which the qualitative discriminations—what is valuable, good, important and what is not—are maintained. The individual emerges from such a space. “To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary” (Taylor 28). Selfhood is bound up with what the individual believes to be of higher values. Our

orientation to the good sets the parameters to our self-identity. If the self operates in the moral horizon, the attempt at self-definition must tread its way through the thickets of morality. Taylor remarks:

doing without [moral] frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover . . . living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood. (27)

With Taylor, Kerby states, “our identity is tied to what is morally good. To define my self is to become conversant with the values I operate by . . .” (Kerby 59). The portrait of self-identity consequently involves more than a recount of the personal acts with a clear and stable temporal relations; it would also drives one to explicate the basis upon which he/she passes evaluative judgments and makes decisions. Therefore, the quest for self-identity ineluctably would take the route of clarifying what is important to us and what is not. Taylor roughly terms this cluster of qualitative discriminations as framework “in virtue of which,” he adds, “we make sense of our lives spiritually” (18). The moral framework not only defines who I am but also helps define the criterion by which we judge the worth of our lives, their fullness or emptiness. On the other hand, the framework hierarchies the value of things by virtue of its discriminative nature. The dissolution of such a framework would flatten everything in our life on the scale of its worth and dignity; in turn it would lead to the emergence of the nonchalant, meaningless world. Consequently, our life would be also hurled into the abyss of meaninglessness after this moral space or horizon disappears from view. The feelings of meaninglessness extinguish the desire to commit oneself and

easily thrust one into the paralysis of will. Human agency can not dispense with such a loss.

More importantly, Taylor stresses that it is not enough to recognize the framework that secures the individual the feeling of the meaningful existence. People also need to know how they are related to this framework to navigate the world with confidence. Taylor remarks, “our orientation in relation to the good requires not only some framework(s) which defines the shape of the qualitatively higher but also a sense of where we stand in relation to this” (42). When faced with the threat of a potentially meaningless life, people frequently express the radical doubt about their existence in the question “Who am I?” which is nevertheless not answered by giving names and genealogy. Identity crisis, Taylor states, “is an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand [in relation to the moral framework]” (27). By bringing out what is morally important to us, we can determine whether we have been true to the moral principles. If the investigation reveals that we have deviated from the standard, we can adjust ourselves in the direction of our pursuit to reclaim their worth. Here the concern about the future emerges. We look back our lives to examine our orientation to the good, the consequence of which would determine whether we should continue or change the present direction. As we confirm or replace it, we project a future trajectory as a bent for our whole lives to come. All the diverse forms of aspirations therefore carry the hint to the moral outlook. Counterfactually, the inability to spell out the aspirations or to chart out the course for the future represents a form of uncertainty about the moral framework as well as irresolution to identity crisis.

As the above paragraph implies, to making sense of our actions requires a narrative understanding of our life. Self-identity if conceptualized through narration

allows for the clarification on the values that we adhere to. In the act of self-narration, a selective process of inclusion and exclusion is unavoidable. If life is viewed as a string of countless episodes, narrative with its limited length and inherent conventions cannot contain such an infinitude. Out of the innumerable episodes a moderate junk is to be chopped out to meet the requirements of the narrative. Evaluation thus creeps into this selective process. Behind the façade of evaluation a complex system of values and ethics is at work. Kerby remarks,

stories (fictional or otherwise) do not recount a mere string of details that have no human interest; nor do they describe events in an objective or neutral fashion (no matter what the author's avowed intention may be). Narratives grow out of a social milieu and cannot but reflect and augment (positively or negatively) its values and concerns. (52)

In self-narration, the dose of the values and concerns issues more directly from the individual, who in a way serves a mirror to his/her contemporary society. In consideration of the limited length of narrative, narrators must have an idea of the points that they want to make; these concerns would become the standards according to which the significant and relevant events are picked out. The act of sequentializing the events is termed as "emplotment." "Emplotment, in histories and fictions, takes a prefigured world of events and actions and draws out or proposes a configuration that serves to organize worldly events into meaningful sequences and purposes" (Kerby 43). If the emplotment is always undertaken with an eye to a certain purpose, the story or narrative would unfold symmetrically for a meaningful end. To put it more simply, the purpose in effect animates the narration, and the narrative structure is ineluctably teleological. Moreover, since the individual connects and interprets the events in reference to the purpose, some of the actions are thus valorized while the others are downplayed and denigrated. The values that underpin his/her moral outlook naturally

come to the fore through the process. In this respect, the nature of the narrative is apt to moral articulation. Therefore, self-narrative not only accommodates the moral dimension of the self but also legitimizes and valorizes the moral practice of the narrator.

The accommodation of the moral dimension of the self in narrative is mediated through the agency of the imposed closure. Narrative conventionally demands a closure which is not available in life until the individual reaches his/her biographical end. Just as one might have observed, the meaning of a story can be easily changed by a slight twist of the ending, the meaning of our lives remains in obscurity before the ending is attained. Nevertheless, in order to fulfill the anticipated ending of the narrative, we have to insert a tentative ending point to our experience in the recount of our stories. This ending harbors our understanding and interpretation about life, the purpose for which we live at that moment. To make it an acceptable and comprehensible stories, the narration of the deliberately strung events would culminate in the demonstration of our points and purpose. This demand for followability makes imperative the sense of unity and coherence which perhaps is not felt in the discursive experience, and the individual would feel possessive of a unified and integrate self if this version of self-narrative is embraced wholeheartedly. However, the sense of unity and coherence is not necessarily granted in life as previously discussed, and the confidence in the notion of the unified self might be misplaced since it is produced by a tentative endpoint to the real experience for the exigency of narrative conventions. This is the fragility of the self-narrative because in fact its tentative period is not verified from the transcendental standpoint which alone holds the key to the final meanings of our lives. With its artificial closure, the fragile self-narrative is thus vulnerable to the charges of self-delusion on account of its volatility, complacency, and inauthenticity to the real experience.

To avoid inauthenticity, some are tempted to undertake the project for the true self-narrative, which usually takes the form of the determination to document meticulously and truthfully. The element of imagination is deemed as the source of duplicity and must be occluded completely. The fictive with its evident inclusion of imagination must be carefully picked out from the factual account. The boundary between fiction and truth is reinstated with a sharp definition and maintained with strong resolution. The aim is to dissipate the suspicion of self-delusion and to confront the reality as it is. When this project is particularly concerned with the personal history, it is no less an attempt at demystifying and rewriting the past so as to arrive at the hard core of self-knowledge, the truth about the self. At a closer look, the quest for true self-knowledge eventually conceives the desire for the true self. As Freeman observes it:

This is of course a classic formula for the progress of self-knowledge: in order to become healthy . . . there is the need to strip away the various fictions and myths through which one has been living, the supposition being that when this stripping-away goes deep enough the true self will happily emerge. (115)

Presumably, the fictions and myths that we have unwittingly fed into our self-narratives must be expelled for the true self to attain presence. However, this attempt is doomed to failure. Firstly, memory implies a present act of recollection that is temporally distinct from the time which is recollected. The distance between the recollected moment and the recollecting time is a space that allows for the settlement of difference. The passage of time frequently transforms our perspective as well as our physical appearance. The retrieval of the past conducted under the present standpoint can not get rid of the impact of the present concern and interest. The historicity of our gaze and our interest is not erasable. “We are finite historical beings

whose understanding is mediated by and made possible through our history. We have no transcendental standpoint from which the past may be seen without the interference of ‘subjectivity’ (the present)” (Kerby 31). If the recollection of the past comes under the domination of the present standpoint, the picture of the past probably would appear different from the last time it is investigated. Even though the determination to be faithful to the past experience remains the same, self-narration will produce as many versions of self-narrative as the act of self-narrating repeats in response to a newly acquired insight to life. On the other hand, from the linear and objective view of the temporality, the past is a history that is irredeemably behind us, finished and gone. Memory retains rags of the past images. Through the agency of our memory, we can attempt at the retrieval of the lived history. The fragmentary nature of the memorial past is particularly susceptible to the infiltration of imagination which functions to connect the fragments in order to meet the expectations of coherence and closure, both of which are indispensable to the acquisition of meaning and understanding. When the memorial past finds its expressions in the narrative, its strong predilection for coherence and closure converges with that of the narrative structure.³ The result makes the seducement of imagination almost irresistible. The attempt at the true self-narrative is frustrated.

In fact, the goal of establishing the facts of life untainted by imagination is misguided: once the individual has singled out what is factual, imagination is already at work. After all, as Kerby remarks with David A. Hume, “Imagination serves as the underlying synthetic activity that is indispensable for constituting the world as we know it, for it is imagination that grounds causality and the other relations” (27).

³ Despite the difference of the perspectives, both Schank and Kerby maintain that people understand the world through stories and live out the stories. Before the memorial past is concretized in words, it is actually processed through a quasi-narrative approach. Narrative does not necessarily come after the need for the recollection of the past arises but could have entered our grasp of reality long before the intention to narrate it.

Self-knowledge requires that we see some forms of causality operating in our lives: how I have progressed and become so. For human actions this causality usually takes the form of motivations or purposes, which are closely related to the ethical and evaluative principles and by no means can be abstracted from subjective intuition. To remove the scope of motivations and purposes from view with the hope to expunge imagination amounts to hive off the indispensable moral dimension of the self. The offshoot would be detrimental to the subject as Taylor has suggested. Even if it is possible to report things as it is without the intervention from the subjective perceptions, the outcome is even more devastating to the subject. When the author of the work functions like a camera which faithfully records without its own judgment, his/her existence is suspended from the text. So far as the self-narration is concerned, it is the author that is supposed to be presented or incarnated in the main character of the narrative. If the author succeeds in effacing himself/herself from the process of self-narration, the text would unveil nothing but a pale skeleton. Freeman remarks, “the very project of living itself is no less imaginative and no less bound to narrative than the alleged fictions we create when we reflect upon or write about our lives” (110). To strive after a true self-narrative is indeed a task launched under bad faith. It either savagely detracts the subject or completely does away it. The quest for the true self invites the specter of death, reminiscent of Jonathan Dollimore’s assertion that “in western thought death was always at the heart of identity” (251).

But where does the desire for the transcendental, true self spring from in the first place? If the transcendental self is available, the individual must obey its dictations without protests. The possibility of change and creativity, usually held to be the demonstration of human agency, is foreclosed. For some, the transcendental self exacts too high a price on the human agency. It undermines the status of human as the free, active agent. So Worthington remarks, “The discovery of a transcendental self is

hardly desirable, even if it were possible, for this must limit me to the given contours of the unchanging, permanent form I discover” (161). Nevertheless, it is exactly the certainty and fixity that afford attraction to the quest for the transcendental self. No matter what circumstances provokes the desire for the true self-narrative, it is still a form of “identity crisis.” Just as Taylor marks out “identity crisis” as the moment when the individual feels uncertain and unconfident of the worth of their commitments and life, the attempt at the true self-narrative reflects nothing other than the desire for the true and verified answer to the questions of his/her existence under the acute awareness that he/she has lived with incorrect presumptions. The individual expects that the emergence of the true self would unravel the knotted threads of his/her doubts, solve the conflicts, and dissipates the enveloping mist that has hid the direction. In this respective, the abortive quest for the true self-narrative is disconcerting. The inaccessibility of the transcendental standpoint throws people on their own to work out the solution. What is at stake, however, is more than the disappearance of the ultimate authority to rectify and verify the trajectory of life. The frustrated attempt at the true self-narrative implies that the final objective truth, whether it is about our selves or the reality, is out of our reach since the perception is hopelessly parochial because of our provisional standpoint. If all the versions of accounts or interpretations are impure and thus imperfect, one may suspect that these versions are as much valid as they are invalid. Such radical doubts can drive one to presume that it is pointless to talk about truth and knowledge at all. The contamination from the incompleteness of our perception gives rise to the anxiety about the validity of truth and knowledge; if carried to the extreme, it may pose a threat to the very foundation of the knowledge and intellectual activity. The danger concomitant with such radical doubts lies in its easy slide into approaching the world as a playground of meaninglessness, an orchestra of nonsensical babbles. Selfhood is

constituted of a moral dimension as discussed previously. In Taylor's discussion of the moral dimension, he underlies that the moral dimension is bound up with human agency (27). The perception of a meaningless world negates the hierarchy of the discriminative evaluation upon which the moral framework is built. As Truth eludes our grip, the swelling of the multiple truths or stories if linked with the dread of meaninglessness drains out the energy of human agency. Then the individual is stranded in the paralysis of will. The vacuum of moral judgments with its resemblance to a world without gravitation is distressing rather than fascinating. Camus's Sisyphus remains a paragon that is not proper for the object of human ambitions.⁴

Although the groundwork of knowledge is not as solid as we might have presumed, according to Freeman, "to deny the possibility of knowledge, whether of world or self, is . . . to engage in a profound act of bad faith, the consequence of which can only be a deafening silence" (147). For Freeman, it is between the two extremes—the framed certainty of the transcendence that denies human agency and the total mess of meaninglessness that cancels human agency—that exists the scope of possibility for both our status of being a free agent and the validity of knowledge. It is not perfect knowledge, of course. Its imperfectness thus allows for revision. Generally speaking, the revised version has to be proved "better" in the sense that it is more profound and acceptable both to the individual and others. Here the factor of community—loosely defined as a group of people from similar societal and cultural background—comes into play. It is becoming prevalent that if there is no transcendental perspective to claim universally verified Truth, such a loss can be compensated by an acknowledgement of the context from which the multiple truths or stories emerges. The individual has to live with the stories to salvage agency. The

⁴ Kerby also criticizes the extreme existentialists that their position would make no sense because of its utter elusion of values (57).

truths or stories are not to be disparaged to the level of lies or self-delusion even though they do not claim the status of universality.

On the level of selfhood, the true self-narrative is forever deferred. But if the imperfect self-narrative is acceptable and comparably desirable, it might well be authentic. The significance of this proposition is twofold. Firstly, the authenticity of a self-narrative is not to be measured by its verisimilitude to reality but by whether it can help us move beyond our previous purview. If the act of self-narration is commenced under the desire to rewrite the self as Freeman upholds,

implicit in the very idea of rewriting the self—and in the correlative idea of development as well—is the notion that one has progressed from what can now be seen as a less desirable mode of knowing and being to a more desirable mode; one has come to understand one's self and one's world in a way that is arguably or demonstrably preferable to what had existed earlier.
(171)

Nevertheless, to make a more desirable self-narrative does not explode the frame of the lived experience and thrust the narration of the personal history into the direction of creative fiction. Apart from some factual data, such as the date and the place, the acceptance of others would set limits to the contours of the self-narration and abate the impulse for fantastic deviation. Taylor points out, “One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it,” (35). People need the support of their surroundings for the maintenance and development of their self-narration. Similarly, Giddens asserts, “The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive” (54). At a larger scale, the confirmation and acceptance of the community serves as the foundation where the validity of knowledge is authorized. In light of selfhood, the individual must situate his/her self-narrative in the network of the

community, seek its confirmation, and keep an active and receptive dialogue with it. “Selfhood cannot simply be founded on the psychological (dis)continuity of the individual self, but is intrinsically correlative, part of the stories of other selves who are also and always part of ours” (Worthington 185). The social dimension of the self becomes one of the anchors that prevent the narration of the personal history from flying into the field of fictive fabrication. From this perspective, too radical estrangement from community poses a threat to the conceptualization of the self-identity. Inferring from Alasdair MacIntyre’s arguments in *After Virtue*, Worthington maintains, “Severance of self from community has pathological consequences: intersubjective engagement is a condition of healthy personhood”(18). Self-identity needs a social backdrop. The support and confirmation from the social interaction eventually functions as the sturdy buttress of all to the maintenance of self-identity.

Social Dimension

The emergence of the self from narration is perhaps subtle and complex from the angle of theoretical analysis, but the maintenance of the self-identity is concrete and tangible through the participation in the social activities, i.e., the practical intercourse and engagements. In general, people do not labor to keep their self-narrative in mind so as to be an active agent. The individual’s self-identity is accepted and confirmed repeatedly in the daily flux of activity. Kerby states, “Much of the time our identity is not a concern for us because it is unthematically supported by the regularities in our day-to-day experience: our body, work, friends, home, and general style of living” (47-8). “Practical consciousness,” Giddens’s term for the intuition based on the routinely activity and interactions, lays the most solid groundwork that buttresses the construct of our self-identity. Most of the time, practical consciousness remains as

much unconscious or non-conscious as the self-identity is unproblematic. “For much of our lives a concern with self-identity may be marginal at best. Questions of identity and self-understanding arise primarily in crisis situations and at certain turning points in our routine behavior. Such events often call for “self-appraisal” (Kerby 6-7). Except the fateful moments that call for self-appraisal, practical consciousness affords the individual the impression of living in an orderly and predictable world. But, the nature of life is not as orderly and reasonable as it appears. The predictability and familiarity of the trivial daily interaction belies the disconcerting chaos of life. Giddens states:

To answer even the simplest everyday query, or respond to the most cursory remark, demands the bracketing of a potentially almost infinite range of possibilities open to the individual. What makes a given response ‘appropriate’ or ‘acceptable’ necessitates a shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality. (36)

Overall, people move in a horizon based on the mutual connivance about the grasped reality in which the latitude of possibilities has been arbitrarily narrowed to facilitate communication. Within the boundary of the shared reality, the individual basks in the warmth of ontological security—the feelings of order and continuity in the perceptual environment. Yet, the sense of shared reality is fragile. Contingent on the sense of shared reality, the vulnerability of the ontological security is also palpable. But practical consciousness, which is also operative on the shared reality, masks the vulnerability of the ontological security by virtue of its nature of concreteness and tangibility in the daily performance. The routine activities structured on the practical consciousness turn out to be the most solid basis upon which the individual builds and enhances his/her self-identity.

If self-identity has a moral backdrop, as Taylor suggests, our daily performance

with its relevance to our self-identity also hints at the underlying ethics and ideals that have kindled our commitments and identification. When the practical consciousness is at force, daily activities reinforce our sense of ontological security and successfully brackets out questions about ourselves and the world out there:

Practical consciousness, together with the day-to-day routines reproduced by it, help bracket such anxieties not only, or even primarily, because of the social stability that they imply, but because of their constitutive role in organizing an ‘as if’ environment in relation to existential issues. They provide modes of orientation which, on the level of practice, ‘answer’ the questions which could be raised about the frameworks of existence.
(Giddens 37)

If the daily activity has retained our answers to the questions of existence as Giddens suggests, the interruption or the breakup of the routinely engagements would probably lead to the upsurge of existential anxiety. Meanwhile, the collapse of the routinely intercourse might also compel the individual to reinvestigate the clusters of beliefs that have been long held unquestioned. Hence, the disruption of commitments and routines could be aligned with the individual’s transformed outlook of life. The fateful moment, or the turning point of life, has always been such an occasion in which the individual is perhaps about to meet the altered scenery of life on account of a critical decision. Fateful moments call for self-appraisal, as Kerby has stated. In other words, in these moments when the strength of practical consciousness in sustaining our self-identity recedes, the bracketed existential questions must be reconsidered and answered. Kerby’s statement concurs with Taylor’s remark that the issues of existence revolve the question of identity. The concern with self-identity moves beyond the pettiness of self-images—how I view myself and want others to expect the same—and stretches into the estimation of our value systems, lives and world.

Overall, we can find that the picture of self-identity is basically sustained by the practice of daily activity and the acts of self-narration. The former is unconscious and staunch, and the latter is reflexive and organizing. Kerby states:

the possibility of unity for the subject can only arise through two primary channels; routine activity at the level of praxis and acts of self-narration. In the first case, identity is a matter of repetition, of having a schedule that one repeats daily, weekly, etc. Because this type of identity is largely unconscious, it will take something like sickness to bring our implicit dependence on it to the foreground. . . . The second option, self-narration, is the properly conscious form of human identity. Only here is the implicit order (or disorder) and structure of our lives taken up into conscious understanding. It is also in narration that we seek to tie together the more disparate strands of our lives, of our history. (105)

Perhaps, from the angle of theoretical analysis the task of weaving together the discursive strands of life is complicated and abstruse. After all, the notion of self as narrative can trace its sources to a variety of theories and disciplines like linguistics and (post-)structuralism.⁵ These theories converge to facilitate the emergence of self as a linguistic construct but their profundity frustrates their application to the analysis of literary works. However, the notion of self as narrative lives out of the shadow of its origins. It finds echoes in the discussion of fictions because of its tangibility in the real experience. In this chapter, I have surveyed Kerby's theory, and weave some other critics' arguments which I find relevant and helpful to explicate the full dimension of the self as narrative. With the lens of the theoretical analysis, I expect to

⁵ Most of the critics surveyed here devote at least a section to the sources of the notion of the textual identity. I sidestep this source discussion because I am afraid that it is beyond the scope of my capability and, on the other hand, I find it does not have a direct relevance to my analysis of *The Golden Notebook*.

bring out more subtlety in the exploration of Anna Wulf's predicament in *The Golden Notebook* and this is the focus that I will turn to in the next chapter.



Chapter Two: Downward Spiral

As discussed in the first chapter, to maintain a viable self-identity necessitates a sense of ontological security which is in effect fragile. Although the volatile and capricious environment militates against the implantation of any deep-seated firmness and certainty, the solidity of the practical consciousness proves to be a fortress that defends for the feelings of continuity and security. In the praxis of the daily activities, people invest prodigious trust in their beloved and confidence in the engagements that in turn help screen off the anxiety resulted from the insecurity and uncertainty in life. It follows that commitments operative on the level of the practical consciousness hold up a stable and predictable environment beneficial for the maintenance of self-identity. Once the trust is betrayed, commitment withdrawn, the individual's self-identity would be under strain. Existential anxiety soon sets in. Hence, identity crisis tends to weld with the existential questions. In this chapter I would like to explore Anna Wulf's identity crisis from the angle of the collapse of her routinely practices. The disruption of the daily performance intensifies Anna's identity crisis and sinks her further in uncertainty and disorientation.

According to Taylor, identity crisis is a form of uncertainty about how the individual is related to his/her moral framework. The moral framework serves as the criterion to judge the worth of life. As a result, the feeling of disorientation probably will give rise to the fear of meaninglessness about one's life. In *The Golden Notebook*, Anna's identity crisis results from her perception that her life seems to have gone wry. As a communist activist, she finds herself unable to justify the strategies of the Communist Party, and her participation in the political activities becomes a struggle against the dictation of her ideals and conscience. As a creative writer, she calls into question the efficacy of writing and negates the value of her own work. While the two threads of the social dimension are getting loose, her intimate relation with the

man—a facet that used to occupy the core of the woman’s existence—plunges into a vicious circle that produces an ever more devastating effect on her life. At this fateful moment, Anna is brought to examine the picture of self-identity and the territory of her life.

Identity Crisis

The Golden Notebook is a compilation of various texts, consisted of five notebooks and a novella “Free Women”. The envelope novella is written in imitation of the conventional narrative and divided into five parts. Except the fifth chapter, every segment of “Free Women” is tagged with the fragments of four notebooks; the colors of the notebooks distinguish a facet of Anna’s life and their appearance always follows the order of black, red, yellow, and blue. The black notebook focuses on Anna the writer and the memory of her early experiences in Africa; the red notebook deals with her political activities; the yellow notebook is a fictionalized recount of her sexual relations; the blue notebook is her diary. At the end of the last notebook sequence Anna uses a new golden notebook, which records her descent into madness. The fifth segment of “Free Women” puts a period to the mass of the five notebooks. In fact, “Free Women” is “a summary and condensation” of Anna’s experience that is discursively documented in the five notebooks (13). The installment of “Free Women” initiates the presentation of Anna’s experience in *The Golden Notebook*, from her identity crisis that culminates in mental collapse to the breakthrough. It may not be the most reliable of all her accounts, as H. Porter Abbot has argued,¹ but it can serve as a good index to Anna’s understanding of the fateful moment in her life.

One thing that is noteworthy in “Free Women” is that it begins with Molly’s

¹ Abbot remarks, “in terms of fictional credibility, compared with any of the five notebooks, Free Women becomes the most inauthentic, the least credible prose in the book” (114).

discussion with Anna over Tommy's problem. Tommy, Molly's son, feels dubious about his future. He has two choices: either he follows his father's step and enters the circle that worships material success, or he can lead a restless life like his mother and take up the posture of the activist. At the end of the first part of the novella, Tommy decides to hang around until he can really make up his mind. To put the situation more simply, Tommy has the identity problem. He is uncertain who he would like to become and what he would like to do. If Anna can be trusted as a good creative writer, her arrangement of the dramatic episodes in "Free Women" should have its significance. To begin a novel based on her experience with the identity problem designates that the author is aware that the weight of identity hangs heavy in her life. Besides, Tommy is the only character who has read Anna's secret four notebooks. It seems to suggest that Tommy shares some sympathies with Anna: Tommy's situation has much in common with Anna's. Hence, for the same reason Tommy would turn to Anna, instead of Molly, for help in his meditation over his future. After Anna fails him in his interrogation, he tries to commit suicide but survives with the price of his eyesight. The physical handicap lifts the burden of free choice from his shoulder; suddenly he is willing to settle for life. Patrocínio P. Schweichart notices that Tommy's blinding himself is both "literally and metaphorically" (266). Schweichart's words direct our attention to the dramatic smack of Tommy's suicide. Tommy opts for self-blindness to decrease the range of possibilities that life offers for him. At this juncture, his identity problem is more than a prelude to Anna's predicament, intensifying the shadow of identity crisis in *The Golden Notebook*. With its pathetic result, it also reveals the danger of self-truncation or self-limitation if the individual bows down under the strain of living to his opportunities and potential.

Yet Anna's dilemma is more complicated. Like Tommy, she stands at the cross-road; unlike him, she is not to opt for a clear-cut frame of identity but to

re-examine the picture of her self-identity because the maneuver prompted and sustained by her identity appears futile and meaningless. She feels compelled to find out who she really is and the meaning of her existence.

Withdrawal from Political Activity

Anna is a political activist. She is dedicated to the welfare of the humankind and believes that in the end a better world will be brought into existence through her efforts. Nonetheless, the enthusiasm and optimism wear out and disillusion sets in. From her experience in Africa Anna learns that plans go awry even if the goal is correct and noble, and the participants sincere and enthusiastic. Trivial disputes can brew so much bitterness and hatred that the communist group finally splits up, leaving its members with a sense of being deflated. Anna summarizes this gleaned lesson in the first segment of the black notebook:

It is now obvious that inherent in the structure of a Communist Party or group is a self-dividing principle. Any Communist Party anywhere exists and perhaps even flourishes by this process of discarding individuals or groups; not because of personal merits or demerits, but according to how they accord with the inner dynamism of the Party at any give moment. . . . Because we did not understand the process, it sapped our emotional energy. (80-1)

In practice, a myriad of movements and activities that aim to promote the Communist ideals flounder. Many activists drop out because of frustration. For those who remain, frustration drives them to look beyond the reality upon the mystified figure Stalin, secretly entertaining the great-father fantasy. They dream about the recognition of their talent and capability from this Great Father who seeks their advice and through whom the barriers to the enforcement of their ideas are removed. In the second segment of the red notebook, Anna clips a sarcastic story on such a fantasy which, she

admits, has taken hold of her firmly for a long while (276). The red notebook somberly ends with a recount of Harry Mathews' s experience which in parallel to the sarcastic story relentlessly sharpens its biting and sardonic edge. After all, the dream of recognition from a providential figure, together with the advent of a golden age, is just a fantasy. In reality people do not have an ultimate authority whom they can appeal to and who would come down to remove the barricade to the prevalence of the ideals. The activities in the Communist Party do not bring the activist closer to their dream of the golden age; instead they witness the recession of their naïve idealistic enthusiasm, together with their dream.

Anna is not blind to the accumulation of bitterness and frustration inside the Communist Party when the red notebook commences. The red notebook records Anna' s political activities, but it is not cast in a linear way from a communist member' s illusion to disillusion. At the beginning, Anna relates her mentality when she decides to join the Party. She admits she is “an old hand” and “with a full understanding of the nature of the inner circles [of the Communist Party]” (152). Henceforth, episodes accumulate. But the point of culmination, which presumably is the moment when she decides to leave the party, does not appear in it.² The journal of her political activity unfolds circuitously around certain points. Finally, the red notebook is terminated unexpectedly, as if extra details would not add anything meaningful to it or prevent its content from falling into patterns. The identification of patterns and repetition in one' s experience marks the time when the individual realizes that something has gone wrong but is still unable or hesitant to take the decisive step to break away. In the case of Anna, the period of hesitation is prolonged because she finds the alternative is equally repulsive—to join the club of the disillusioned who

² It is in the second part of the blue notebook that Anna records the occasion that prompts her decision to leave the party.

devote themselves to the accumulation of wealth and turn deaf to any higher appeals to squeeze out the memory of their previous naïve enthusiasm. The documentation of her political activity divulges her reluctance to pour out her idealist frenzy. Just as we have discussed, the daily routines sometimes harbors our answers to the existential questions. If the dream of the golden age fuels Anna's participation in politics, the political commitment simultaneously suggests how she puts up with the chaos of the world—it can be rectified once the communist ideals are realized and practiced. Therefore, on the day she decides to leave the party, she confesses to her colleague Jack that her mind has become “a mass of totally contradictory attitudes about everything,” (319) and on the bus home she eventually “collapse[s] into emptiness” (321). Political enthusiasm has indeed sustained the impression of leading a meaningful life in a reasonable world. But when she finally takes the decisive step away from the political circle after the quarrel with her colleague Jack, the belief in the golden age dissipates and the strain and danger of living in the transient world can no longer be held back. Since the participation in the political activities has occupied a large section of her life, this withdrawal represents the negation of her past efforts; other than that, because Anna welds the meaning of her life with the communist utopia, to break away from the Communist Party demands Anna re-define the purpose of her life.

Writing Block

Similar to her political commitment, Anna's writing also plays a part in fending off existential angst. Anna is a writer, she does not write for a living. Although she lives on the profits her first novel brought in, she turns down a couple of prodigious offers to adapt it into a screenplay which, she feels, would twist it for the convenience and taste of the commercial market. Apart from a decent writer's conscience, Anna's

nonchalance to these offers even when oppressed by the financial needs has a bearing on the tacit expectation she holds for her writing. To bring this to light, it is better to look the other way around—the reason why she can not write for the public. She tells Saul Green she can not write because she is interrupted every time when she starts writing:

‘I can’ t write that short story or any other, because at that moment I sit down to write, someone comes into the room, looks over my shoulder, and stops me.’

‘Who? Do you know?’

‘Of course I know. It could be a Chinese peasant. Or one of Castro’s guerrilla fighters. Or an Algerian fighting in the FLN. Or Mr. Mathlong. They stand here in the room and they say, why aren’ t you doing something about us, instead of wasting your time scribbling?’ (553-4)

Anna’s words suggest that her writing block is partly caused by her doubt of the efficacy of writing. Since she does not have the intention to reduce writing to a tool of earning bread and neither does she have the confidence that her writing can effect remarkable change to the world, the momentum to write for the public drains off. Here, it is clear that creative writing and political activity are both consigned with the vision of a better world, a dream that shores up the appearance of a meaningful life. If writing helps to suspend the infiltration of existential anxiety, Anna’s writing block confiscates from her a set of tools that creates the impression of living in an ordered and reasonable world. Indirectly, the suspicion about the efficacy of writing accelerates the erosion of the ontological security. The questions of existence loom up. Now that she has decided to renounce the political engagements, and the resolution to lock up her writing remains as strong as ever, it is imperative to re-construct the ground of ontological security to go through the crisis.

Lack of “imaginative comprehension” is another cause to which Anna attributes her writing block. By this, Anna means the ability to stretch beyond the limits of one’s life and experience and relate oneself to the world as a whole. Devoid of imaginative comprehension, the individual concentrates on his/her tiny little circle, cut off from the rest of the world beyond physical reach, and consequently consolidating fragmentation. The assaults of fragmentation upon the mentality of the modern people are reputedly devastating. Anna believes that the artist should try to alleviate rather than exacerbate the pains of living in a fragmentary world. In reproducing the world through imagination, the artist takes up the challenge of synthesizing the fragmentary and discordant and create out of them order and unity. “Yet,” she states, “I am incapable of writing the only kind of novel which interests me: a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life. It is because I am too diffused. I have decided never to write another novel” (76). As if to testify this statement, the short story “The Shadow of the Third” in the yellow notebook ends with the heroine Ella brooding over her dilemma. With full understanding of her problems, Ella is not delivered from her predicament because Anna, her creator, does not have the “intellectual and moral passion” to create light for her heroine after leading Ella to the end of the tunnel. Anna leaves Ella there, waiting: “Ella looks inwards, as into a pool, to find this story imaged; but it remains a series of dry sentences in her mind. She waits, she waits patiently, for the images to form, to take on life” (411).

Projecting her experience into Ella’s story, Anna investigates her affair with Michael. Through Ella she discerns her own problems but she is unable to solve them. If Anna could provide a satisfactory upshot for her surrogate Ella, Anna would probably bring herself out of her plight. Yet narrative affords her the nexus of causality; it does not grant her solutions. Anna’s lack of imaginative comprehension

not only leaves Ella stranded but also attests to Anna's powerlessness at the onslaught of existential anxiety that follows the dissolution of her commitments. More than undermining the sense of ontological security, Anna's writing block also deprives her of the recourse to recover from it.

Failure of Sexual Relationship

It may be the privilege of modern women that they are permitted a range of ground outside domesticity to explore their selves and create an identity independent of men's expectation. For the traditional and conservative women whose world gravitates around the existence of their men, the demands of their spouses define the very essence of their self-identity. Most of the time when living under the wings of their men, they are safe from the confrontation with crudity of life and free from the shadow of existential anxiety. Apparently, their security comes at the price of self-assertion. The counterpoint to this traditional female type is "free women" who economically and emotionally withhold men's domination and take pride in their independence. Anna regards herself as one of them. Outside the domestic sphere, she is engaged in the writing career and the political activities; above all, she does not submit to the marital bonds when maintaining a sexual relation with men. Yet through Ella, the falsity of her pride and complacency dawns on her. She confesses, "my being 'free' has nothing to do with writing a novel; it has to do with my attitude towards a man, and that has been proved dishonest" (283). The appearance of being emancipated is fraudulent. After all, the culturally sanctioned dependence on men is too inveterate to eradicate, as Anna herself remarks, "women's emotions are all still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists. My deep emotions, my real ones, are to do with my relationship with a man." (283). When the foundation of the self-identity deteriorates with the eclipse of the faith in the social commitments, the

impulse to rely on their men for self-definition and protection from the pressure of the chaotic world becomes ever more irresistible. For the independent women, this situation is particularly perilous. The hazard is twofold. Firstly, the deflation of being free would probably drive her to the extreme—the total negation of her present self. Anna's surrogate Ella exhibits such a tendency. "Because by now she knows and is frightened of, her utter dependence on Paul," she envies Paul's wife, to whom Paul always returns (193). Significantly, she develops a picture of this woman corresponding to her own imagination than to the reality. This imagined woman embodying what Ella dispossesses becomes the object of her desire. "Slowly Ella understand that this is what she would like to be herself, this imagined woman is her own shadow, everything she is not" (193). The price to pay for the fraudulent self-image is self-abnegation.

The other price to claim on free women is to the reduction to an object of physical desire. Men take advantage of women's emancipation, relishing the sexual intimacy while exempted from the marital responsibility.³ Without the intention of committing themselves, these men foreclose the possibility of supporting a viable identity for their partner. The only identity these men propose, in consideration of expedience, is the heartless free woman, who rejects the bond of intimacy to preserve independence and career. Casting their woman in the role of the callous lover, they posture as the "ditched" in response, hiding behind the mask of the victim to save themselves from qualms. On the verge of the dissolution of her affair with Michael, Anna finds herself pressed up to such a role. When Michael insinuates the breakup, Anna recalls, "Last night Michael said (I had not seen him for a week): 'Well, Anna, and so our great love affair is coming to an end?' Characteristic of him that it is a

³ Molly Hite points out that the men Anna encounters simply read "free" as sexually "available" (Hite 61).

question mark: he is bringing it to an end, but talks as if I am” (296). In parallel to Anna in the blue notebook, Ella hears from Paul that she does not need a man to have children because ice can now be applied to woman’s ovaries and is assured that “it’s a sign of our times” (198). At this juncture, both Michael and Paul intend to circumvent their affairs within the domain of physical desire. They dread at the mention of love, wincing at its strong connotation of emotional bindings. If Anna has based her self-identity on Michael’s perception, she is now distressed at its revelation—a “flighty piece,” Ella’s stamp from the standpoint of Dr. West (208). It turns out that dependence on men’s definition for her self-identity hurls her into the abyss of debasement and even deprives her of the position of the subject. Compared with the conservative women, the free women’s retreat into the arms of the men is tainted with more disparagement from the male and the intellectual bitterness on the part of the women themselves. Lorelei Cederstrom comments that Ella’s “most serious problem is that her self-definition depends entirely on a man’s perception of her” (126). Transposing her problem onto the character of Ella, Anna examines her plight and tries to construct a viable self-identity on her own to be delivered from the identity crisis and the existential angst.

Motherhood

If all the above commitments play a part in withholding invasion of the existential anxiety, the beefiest stanchion that postpones the collapse of Anna’s defense is motherhood. Janet’s dependence on her occupies a vital part of the daily routines and it exhibits the least flexibility for the change of practical flux. Anna remarks, “Having a child means being conscious of the clock, never being free of something that has to be done at a certain moment ahead” (480). The strict rhythm of caring the child forces Anna to brush aside the questions of existence that loom up

when the backdrop of her world is dissolving. If the daily performance is the most substantial form of our self-identity, as Giddens suggests, Janet's presence grounds Anna in the terrain of normality, deterring her from the full process of her identity crisis and its subsequent breakdown. Anna recognizes this fact when Janet decides to go to a boarding school. She finds that when she is with Janet, she "banish[es] the Anna who is listless and frightened" and she admits that the reason why she hates Janet's departure is that her daughter is her normality; "she anchors me in what is normal in myself" (476). The deterrent from the exploration of her identity problem must come to its natural end as Janet grows up and no longer needs a nurser. Anna's flux of the daily activities is utterly ruffled with Janet's departure. Set free from the chain of routines, Anna is floating away from the social intercourse and adrift with the paralysis of will when Saul Green appears.

Syndromes of Identity Crisis

The dissolution of commitments and relations cripples the maintenance of a viable self-identity. As the maintenance of a viable self-identity falters, the individual's sense of self is fractured. With the fractured sense of self, the feeling of biographical discontinuity floods. Allied with Kerby on the importance of the temporal dimension in the concept of the self, Giddens notes that when people are deprived of ontological security, they may fail to achieve an enduring conception of their aliveness, the syndrome of which is the feeling of discontinuity. "Discontinuity in temporal experience is often a basic feature of such a sentiment. Time may be comprehended as a series of discrete moments, each of which severs prior experiences from subsequent ones in such a way that no continuous 'narrative' can be sustained" (Giddens 53). Conversely, narrative can valorize the temporal relation of the lived experience on account of its linear movement. Significantly, it also connects the

discrete moments with the implement of causality. This feature of the narrative structure is well grasped by Anna as she reflects over her unfinished novella “The Shadow of the Third”:

Supposing I were to write it like this: two full days, in every detail, one at the beginning of the affair, and one towards the end? No, because I would still be instinctively isolating and emphasizing the factors that destroyed the affair. It is that which would give the thing its shape. Otherwise it would be chaos, because these two days, separated by many months in time, would have no shadow over them (210)

Narrative not only unfolds under the guidance of a *telo* that entails a selective process but also imposes the causal connection between the episodes. Anna marks out this implicit structure in narrative and expresses her disconcert with the easy slide into causality to mask the contingency of life in creative writing. Apparently, she is aware that life consists of disjoint moments, without the teleological structure in narrative. Such a perception can prompt one under the quest for a true story of life, denude of the contamination from the creative artificiality. The quest is doomed as discussed. However, the perception of the contingency of life is not necessarily pernicious as long as the individual does not immerse himself in its pessimistic implications or set out for a wrong destination. Nevertheless, Anna exhibits the sign of indulgence in the negative side of the artificial order and causality. She feels “the form,” the teleological orientation of the narrative, “is a kind of pain” (210). The innate causal nexus and the teleological framework of narrative are annoying because in its insertion it recalls the absence of such a structure in life. The picture of self-identity depends heavily on the practice of daily activities and the act of self-narration. When Anna’s self-identity is under strain after the failure of her political commitments and sexual relationship, the configuration of her self-identity falls heavily on the latter. The discomfort with the

teleological and causal structure of narrative portends that the road to self-narration is tough going. Anna is extremely vulnerable when she casts a suspicious glimpse on the artificiality of narrative. The repudiation of the narrative structure seems to nudge her further toward the breakdown.

When the self is under strain, the sense of discontinuity upsurges. Consequent to the dissolution of the temporal continuity, the feeling of unreality emerges. A remote event in memory recalled at the reminiscence of the situation obtrudes itself. The obtrusion itself is not so alarming, given that one experiences the unexpected evocation of the past episodes at one time or another. The difference is that under the normal circumstances people recognize the obtrusion from the memory—the awareness of the present time within the recollected event—and they proceed with their engagements at that moment without much disconcertion. However, when the self is under strain, the distance between the recollected moment and the recollecting time is closed. Kerby states,

memory implies a present act of recollection that is temporally distinct from the time which is recollected. If one has, in such an experience, lost the awareness of the present in which the recollection occurs, then one can no longer talk of memory but rather of hallucination, delusion, or some such state. (24)

As the awareness of the present is gone, the individual loses his/her grip on reality. Anna sometimes expresses her bewilderment at the consequent confusion of the temporal horizon. When Michael complains that Anna's motherhood goes before the need of the lover, it seems that a facet of her self-identity is criticized. Then Anna feels the sense of unreality upsurges:

And this morning I felt enclosed by the repetitive quality—the baby crying

next door, and my hostility to Michael. (Remembering my hostility towards Max.) Then a feeling of unreality - couldn't remember where I was – here, in London, or there, in Africa, in that other building, where the baby cried through the wall. (214-5)

The disturbance of the biographical continuity closes the temporal distances. It takes away with it the sense of progression, leaving the individual taken over by the feeling of repetition in the temporal stagnation. If carried to its end, reality destroys the sense of aliveness.

“Unreality” is reminiscent of Giddens' s term “reality inversion.” At first, Giddens uses this term to describe the intrusion of the mediated representation, from the media mainly, into the real experience of the individual so that in the day-to-day routines, he explains, “the real object and event, when encountered, seem to have a less concrete existence than their media representation” (27). Significantly, he does not confine the term within the discussion of the mediated experience but connects it to the phenomenon of “disembodiment.” Disembodiment is the estrangement of the self from the body. The individual feels out of his body, acting out most or all routines rather than following them for valid reasons. Although most people at one time or another detect a gap between their selves and the ‘performance’ they put on in some specific social occasions, the distance between the self and the performance does not necessarily nurse tension and conflicts. The gap remains unproblematic until it is constantly brought to consciousness and put under surveillance. Giddens states:

Too radical a discrepancy between accepted routines and the individual' s biographical narrative creates what Laing (following Winnicott) calls a false self – in which the body appears as an object or instrument manipulated by the self from behind the scenes. . . when this dissociation happens as an unwanted feature of personality, it expresses existential anxieties impinging

directly upon self-identity. (59)

In other words, when most people in their daily activities do not alert themselves to their reservation from the flow of the routinely activities, those afflicted with the identity crisis persistently direct their attention to the dissociation. They may witness the activities of their bodies with neutral detachment, cynicism, hatred or irony. At its extreme, they play on the discrepancy, viewing their intercourse with others as a sort of staged performance and relishing the pleasure of fooling others who do not grasp the subtlety and wholeheartedly participated in it. For them, the reality experienced is inverted with an unreal and inauthentic resonance.

As a radical split between the self and the body arouses the feeling of playing inauthentic or inadequate roles in life, the individual becomes more attentive to the adoption of roles. While we generally switch to different roles smoothly—a mother, a friend, a manager—in response to the situation, the split individuals undergoes the process of this swift transposition with monitoring consciousness. The meditation on the choice of their identity, or the roles, frequently occupies them. One of the subjects that usually concern them is their appearance. Against the ineffable codes of dressing and demeanor in society, the body is not just a physical entity we possess, but becomes a field in which the self substantiates itself. Our appearance insinuates how we define ourselves and how we desire to be defined. Giddens remarks, “In all culture, dress is vastly more than simply a means of bodily protection: it is manifestly a means of symbolic display, a way of giving external form to narrative of self-identity” (62). It is because the self speaks through the body that we catch Anna, under the strain of identity crisis, sometimes reflecting over her appearance:

Dressing for lunch I was thinking of how Molly would enjoy this – playing some role or other. Decided I’d look like a “lady writer”. I had a skirt, rather too long, and a badly fitting blouse. I put them on and some arty beads. And

some long coral earrings. Looked the part. But felt enormously uncomfortable – as if I were inside the wrong skin. Irritated. . . . At the last moment changed into myself. . . . Mr Tarbrucke (call me Reggie) was surprised: he had expected the lady writer. . . . ‘I am living off the royalties from *Frontiers of War*.’ Look of slight shock – my tone was one of being only interested in money. . . . I switch my tone to one of dedicated artist and say: ‘Of course, I don’t want to rush the second. The second novel is so important, don’t you think?’ He is delighted and set at ease. (258)

Anna is aware of the plurality of the roles she assumes and the set of expectations usually tagged to it. Like an actor she scrupulously picks out her costume that would go with the favorable image of the female writer, only to cancel out her maneuver at the last minute. She decides to be herself but saves herself the effort to depict the self-image that she holds to be true. The significance of Lessing’s obsession with the “true” or “real” self is a point I will return later. Here it is only proper to emphasize that to her bitterness Anna finds herself not cut for this kind of acting, and repelled by the adoption of the false self-image. Her abandonment of the false self-image implies that she has no intention to appreciate the fun of masquerading and deluding. Even if none of the role-image speaks for her, she still strives to be true to herself and be sincere to others instead of putting on the false mask to fool around. However, she can not help notice that people are more comfortable with the familiar type of the role image. They are pleased when her behavior matches that of the stereotyped figure and restless when she steps out of it. This observation adds another dose of bitterness to her struggle out of her identity crisis. It seems that an inauthentic role-identity is shoved slyly again in her way to alleviate the discomfort of the appointment, very similar to the offering of “the heartless free woman” from Michael to sooth his uneasiness and guilt over the breakup. No one seems to be concerned with her

authentic self. On the point of the departure, the feeling of reality inversion upsurges again. The nearby newsman's shouting 'War in Quemoy' keeps intruding the realm of Anna's consciousness, punctuating their conversation, and she feels as if she is "standing in the middle of a scene from a play that is the parody of something" (263). The outer environment is by no means conducive to Anna's attempt to re-define her self.

While Anna has been nudged into one of the stereotyped and framed identities, she has a clear idea of the comfort they offer. Her colleague Rose Latimer is totally saturated in the cozy atmosphere of the framed-up world. A hard-cored communist, she embraces her role-identity without conflicting consciousness. Anna describes her:

the world 'worker' literally fills her eyes with tears. When she makes speeches, and uses the phrases: the British Worker, or the Working Class, her voice goes soft with reverence. When she goes off into the provinces to organize meeting or makes speeches, she returns exalted: 'Wonderful people,' she says 'wonderful marvellous people. They are real.' (317)

Rose's eulogy of the real, marvelous working class is continual. Never disquieted, she does not take any word that contradicts her neat system of beliefs or look beyond the world created by communist propaganda. Anna hands her the letters that contain the down-to-earth aspects of these workers but the letters only provoke Rose to angry defensiveness. Anna dislikes her. Yet Rose seems to be the only person who is "whole," untouched by the sense of fragmentation or incongruity. She does not envy Rose for the security and certainty which stealthily accompany self-limitation. In her rejection of Rose, she spells out her dismissal of the set-up categories, expressive of the resolution to spill over the frames, to find out a feasible alternative in the terrain of formlessness and uncertainty. On the plane of self-quest, it implies that she will not come to terms with the truncated but easy solution to her identity crisis. Anna's plight

is partly related to her rebuff of the framed-up identity and certainty. Her crisis prolongs as the alternative is nowhere in sight.

Rose Latimer is an extreme representative of the self-truncated individual. Many others are not so headstrong and assertive that their identification with their role-identity does not prevent them from catching a glimpse at the landscape secluded from their position. There are moments when people do not speak out of their roles, dutifully reading their lines, but really take a fresh and serious look at the issue under discussion. They are moments of real communication that allow one to cleave through the clouding of inauthenticity to reach each other. Nevertheless, such a moment is rare and transient. When it does happen, people hasten to forget it, dragging themselves back to normality, resuming the prescribed skit. Anna's appointment with Mrs. Edwina Wright serves as a good example to this. In their discussion of the possible adaptations of *Frontiers of Wars*, formality and suspicion between them suddenly evaporates when Mrs. Wright grasps the caricaturing intention of Anna's suggestions. She drops off the courtesy to woo a writer into agreement. "She frowns," Anna notes, "Then she grins. Then our eyes meet and she lets out a snort of laughter. She laughs again. Then she checks herself and sits frowning. And just as if this subversive laughter had not occurred she takes a deep breath and begins . . . ' (266). Mrs. Wright is upset with her remiss in maintaining her part and quickly draws herself back on the previous track. The perception that this appointment would yield no satisfactory results for her company does not revoke the reason to play out her assigned part. She would rather stick to the stale interaction pattern of business transaction than venture for a new possibility in the mingling with others. The reluctance to cross the lines is one of the impulses that Anna finds repulsive in people. It militates against her tendency to assert an authentic and unbound self-identity and increases the difficulty of finding support and models in her struggle.

The feeling of playing inadequate roles, in the case of Anna, results from the resistance to squeeze herself into the framed picture. For others, role-playing is frequently conducted for the exigency of their position or occupation. Inevitable in both situations is the sentiment of being split. A gap between intention and performance is highlighted. Anna desperately tries to close the gap and to be “whole” again. For her, the submission to the lure of the role-playing is no less than an act of evasion and irresponsibility. One hides behind the image of a certain figure to shield from the impact of unpleasant encounters. Since the reality is imaginatively transformed into the backdrop of some dramatic performance, the individual is thus safe from real and serious assault of depression and guilt. Anna’s meditation on her dressing not only mirrors her concern with her identity but also betrays the impulse to protect herself. By presenting the false image of the lady writer, she can hide her authentic self beyond the range of the frustration and bitterness that she foresees in that appointment. The feeling of disembodiment in the performance of role-playing is “an attempt to transcend dangers and be safe” (Giddens 59).

Role-playing offers a hard shell against the painful experience. If carried further, it can precipitate the easy slide into irresponsibility. As the split individuals have a myriad of roles to choose from, certainly none of them represents a complete picture of their real self-identity. It follows that the harsh and cold remarks can smoothly flow from the tongue since they are mouthed by the inauthentic persona, not by their authentic selves. Hence, they can disclose their nonchalance and acidity without implicating themselves in the sense of guilt or incurring reproach from others. Maryrose tentatively inquires Willi how to extinguish her love for her brother whose death has gnawed her heart. To dismiss this thorny problem, Willi chooses to speak “out of his role as sophisticated Berliner” and bluntly suggests to Maryrose that the best way to cure her infatuation with her dead brother is to bed with one of the group

members (110). Nelson is another example. Trapped in a miserable marriage, Nelson can not divorce his wife or break out from the morbid pattern of torturing each other. His affair with Anna does not drive him to confide in Anna his problem and his pains. His elusiveness and reservation portend that this affair will not extend beyond the physical desire. The label of “flighty piece” seems to hover over Anna’s head again. The fragility and superficiality of their relationship are well realized by both parties but none of them voice it. But in parody of the sexy rake, Nelson can bring this unpleasant downside of their affair to light with cruel bluntness. He urges Anna, “ ‘Com’ n, let’ s fuck, baby. I like your style’ ” (432). Both Nelson and Willi try to downplay the seriousness and severity of the problem at hand. The complexity of their identities engenders the multiple selves. As the multiple selves successfully create the centerless subject, people feel free to choose from an even wider range of roles that they can imitate in response to a specific situation. More than often, they take up the one that helps get around the trouble, excuse their coldness, and communicate their bitterness. They throw up their hands at the plans to rectify the wrongness and face the responsibility. Role-playing, invoking the association with the false persona, turns out to be an exit away from strain imposed on the responsible and conscientious person. The plentitude of the selves, if maintained in this mannered, leads to moral paralysis and probably cancels human agency.

Conversely, role-playing can create illusions and surreptitiously find its way into self-delusion. Sometimes people evoke a familiar scrip. They take the desired role in this play and invite others to step into the supporting cast. As the others meekly cooperate, they are granted an illusion in which they embrace the favored but false self-image. For Comrade John Butte, the self-image of the avid and fresh dissent has faded into the past. Nevertheless, he can revitalize the erstwhile image through his repetitious arguments with Anna, masking the fact that he has been converted to the

fossilized, hardened bureaucracy and immersed in the intellectual rottenness of the Party. Unwittingly, Anna has long participated in the game of self-delusion. Not until the day when she loses interest in continuing the repeating and futile wrangling and quits her part does this fact dawn on her:

Comrade Butte lowers his eyes. He is annoyed. I realize that my role or function is to argue, to play the part of [captive] critic, so that Comrade Butte may have the illusion that he has fought his way through informed opposition. I am, in fact, his youthful self, sitting opposite him, which he has to defeat. I am ashamed I have never understood this very obvious fact before. . . . (310)

Soon after the scene, Anna decides to leave the Party. On the same day, she also relinquishes the role as the heartless free woman proposed by Michael (326). The two events of breakup conclude the second segment of the blue notebook. It is remarkable that they are both preceded by her rejection of the role-playing. The refusal to take part in this form of masquerading designates that Anna still tries to be honest both to herself and to others. The old picture of her self-identity may appear invalid but she is not going to replace it with a false one for convenience or certainty. She determines to take a more intense inward gaze to fine out who she is.

The severance of the long-term connections thrusts Anna in isolation and prepares the way for the downward spiral into the mental breakdown. The repudiation of the false identities ignites the desire to discover the true self. But unexpectedly it leads to mental collapse. The next chapter will deal with Anna's obsession with and doomed quest for the true self.

Chapter Three: Search for the True Self

Anna's identity crisis results from the collapse of the familiar landscape of her world. As a mother, she is no longer needed because Janet has decided to go to the boarding school, growing independent of Anna's caring and protection. Proud of being a free woman, she used to take pride in her independence, but the breakup with her lover Michael dawns on her that the pride is misplaced and the posture of being emancipated is ironic. To make it worse, even if she is willing to return to the domestic field of the traditional female, her men still have no intention to commit to her emotionally. As a creative writer, she is unable to write, suffering from the writing block and questioning the efficacy of writing. Above all, the political maneuver at the vision of a better world proves futile. She then decides to leave the party. At this moment, the flux of her daily activities is utterly disrupted and all the main facets of her self-identity verge on dissolution. In the meantime, she is also beset by the conflicts of her multiple identities and the feeling of being fragmentary. People who remain unruffled by the sense of fragmentation seem to hedge their lives with limitation. Others who feel the strain are driven to the role-playing to appease their disturbed minds. None of them sets up a model that Anna desires. Nevertheless, between the self-limitation and the nonchalant playfulness there seem to be no feasible happy medium.

In response to the crisis, Anna feels compelled to reinvestigate the picture of her life so as to figure out what has gone wry. The survey of her personal history produces a form of narrative from which the self emerges and against which the individual tries to make sense of the present situation. Because this form of self-narrative is a response to the identity crisis, it aims at the discovery of the true self-knowledge. The attempt at the true self-knowledge is frequently consigned with hope to bring out the true self, the presence of which supposedly can unravel the tangled shards of life and grants her the sense of wholeness. Anna's impulse to bring out the true self-identity

speaks through her sessions with Mrs. Marks and her scribbling in the notebooks.

The Sessions with Mrs. Marks

Compared with the scribbling in the notebooks, Anna's sessions with Mrs. Marks, nicknamed Mother Sugar by Anna and Molly, is the more overt and obvious response to her identity crisis. Paul Schlueter observes, "It is, in fact, her search for her identity that leads Anna to go to and depend upon a lay psychoanalyst named Mrs. Marks" (66). The function of therapy, Gergen explains, is "to build or restore essence. . . . The therapist's task is to restore a full sense of self-acceptance to the individual. Most existential therapists attempted to restore the individual's capacity for conscious choice—to establish the center of active being" (41). Doubtlessly, Anna's sessions with Mrs. Marks is her attempt to restore the essence of her self, to establish the center of active being when she feels lost in the debris of her little shattered world.

In *Modernity and Self-Identity* Giddens links the emergence of psychoanalysis with modernity. He states, "Therapy is an expert system deeply implicated in the reflexive project of the self" (180). Stephen Frosh further explains the advantage of therapy from the angle of the self-quest. Because the self possesses an ambiguous status—it is both an object of contemplation and an experiencing subject, therapy has its credits in offering an interpretation of the self. He asserts that in the psychoanalytic dialogue the analysand can see himself "from the vantage point of the other" (Frosh 2-3). Therapy, in other words, points to a route that leads one to see themselves and the landscape of their life differently. The analysis offers a version of self-narrative that is perhaps more plausible because it sheds light on the previously dark territory to the mind. In this respect the process of therapy turns out to be a struggle for self-narration with the help of an expert. "Analysis can take diverse routes, but the end result is a narrative account of the analysand's life wherein the analysand finds

him or herself adequately reflected” (Kerby 86).

Although therapy has its advantages to offer for self-understanding, the version it proposes is just one among many. Frosh in his explanation is careful not to grant therapy the feature of objectivity albeit he admits the weakness of self-observation. Regardless of the diversity of its branches, therapy has its limits and prejudices, which is partly the reason why Anna does not bother to specify the sect of Mrs. Marks’ s practice. It is not a specific branch that is under attack but the insufficiency of the whole spectrum of the psychoanalysis. The prejudice of the psychoanalysis is not always palpable because the therapists are less inclined to impose their explanation but invites the patients’ cooperation to interpret their stories. The therapist’s insinuation usually comes across through the passive posture of listening. As the therapists listen to their patients’ recounted experience, they deftly channel the stories to the field where their theory and approach can contain. Roger C. Schank comments on the shaping forces of listening.

Listeners reveal, usually implicitly, which stories they want to hear. . . .

Therapists are also listeners, of course, and in many ways, they are rather typical listeners. They do not usually tell their own stories in response, but they, too, reward some stories and criticize others. They also do this implicitly, at times. Tellers have a sense of whether their stories are meeting with approval while they are telling them, and they can alter them during the telling to regain the attention or approval of the hearer. (136)

Anna is not blind to the shaping forces of the therapist’s attitude and insinuation. She feels the solace that Mrs. Marks can offer. With her help, Anna can “put the pain away where it can’t hurt” (414). Nevertheless, consistent with the determination to spill over the frames, Anna bluntly exposes the weakness of Mrs. Marks’ s instruction at last. As the series of sessions is drawing to an end, Anna protests:

Look, if I'd said to you when I came in this afternoon; yesterday I met a man at a party and I recognized in him the wolf, or the knight, or the monk, you'd nod and you'd smile. And we'd both feel the joy of recognition. But if I'd said; Yesterday I met a man at a party and suddenly he said something, and I thought; yes, there's a kind of something – there's a crack in that man's personality like a gap in a dam, and through that gap the future might pour in a different shape – terrible perhaps, or marvelous, but something new – if I said that, you'd frown. (416)

Not intimidated by the authority of the expertise which cloaks Mrs. Marks, Anna accuses Mrs. Marks of fraudulence through inviting collusion from the patient to present a “containable” story, the consequence of which encourages diversion from spontaneous responses and distraction from pernicious brooding. The labels offered by Mrs. Marks such as “real woman” and “true artist” aim to contain Anna's problems within a predetermined and familiar story so that the chaos and conflicts can be controlled as the therapist insinuates (218). The “joy of recognition” relieves the analysand since being containable has the connotation of being controllable. If her situation is described in the medical casebooks, the prescription is also there. She needs not to work out her own salvation but just has to meekly follow the therapist's suggestion. The burden to solve the conflicts is thus lifted from the analysand's shoulder when she conspires to “contain” her stories. In this respect, therapy and psychoanalysis are not cleansed of the suspicion of duplicity and self-delusion. Anna's insistence on her uniqueness¹ designates that her repulsion at self-delusion remains strong as ever, an echo to her resentment at Rose, who contents with the framed

¹ Mrs. Marks' s assertion that the “detail [of the women' s problems] change, but the form is the same” provokes Anna to an indignant retort, “I don' t want to be told when I wake up, terrified by a dream of total annihilation, because of the H-bomb exploding, that people felt that way about the cross-bow. It isn' t true. There is something new in the world” (415).

territory of her self-identity and life. As a result, tension intermittently envelops the counseling room where Anna seeks Mrs. Marks assistance, feels the solace of her approach, but simultaneously resists the lure of defection to self-delusion. Mrs. Marks' s complacency in dishing out labels, expressive of her blindness to Anna' s aversion to categorization, further illustrates that the highland of antagonism between them is not easy to overcome. Mrs. Marks can not defuse Anna' s identity crisis in Anna' s terms. It does not come as a surprise that Anna must leave the counseling room to work out her salvation on her own, if she still insists on the quest for the authentic self. Paul Schlueter remarks, "Anna, though, cannot receive this ordered existence vicariously from Mother Sugar; she must work it out for and by herself, and this is done, through her obsessive concern with language and with putting on paper the ordered language constituting human discourse" (69). The notebooks turn out to be Anna' s self-reliant quest for true self-identity.

Scribbling in the Notebooks

As psychoanalysis proves a biased and insufficient guidance for the individual to uphold a proper self-image, the scribbling in the notebooks, running in parallel to the psychological consultation, is Anna' s private attempt at the configuration of her self-identity. It is felt throughout the novel that "Anna Wulf' s sense of self-identity had always been intimately related the power of words" (Kaplan 124). Her notebooks can be regarded as a form of self-narrative and the words burst on the notebooks finally take the center of Anna' s search for a true self-identity after she puts an end to her therapeutic sessions.

Unlike the sessions with Mrs. Marks, the content of the notebooks has less to do with the labels of identities which aim to explain away her conflicts and problems. The content of the notebooks is discursive and makes up a comparatively ordered and

substantial record of her experience. The substantial documentation offers the context of her present predicament. In effect, the attempt to map the territory of her personal history is an instinctive reaction to the feeling of loss and disorientation in her identity crisis. Kerby remarks, “Actions do not occur in a void and are not meaningful in and of themselves; their meaning is dependent on the broader perspective of a framing story, as events in a history. We must ourselves know such a personal history if we are to make intelligent choices in the present” (40). Because of the futility of her maneuver and the dissolution of her relationships, Anna feels the need to sketch out the larger background of her plight against which her past actions can acquire meanings to defeat the sense of emptiness.

However, the transcription of her experience is more than an attempt at grasping at the meaning of her life. In structure the notebooks are organized with an eye to create order and in content they concern with the presence of Truth. Both of the gestures disclose Anna’s longing for the true self. However, the transcription of her experience does not grant her wish readily. Instead, she is forced to deal with the multiple roles she assumes in life and their clashes.

In Structure

Anna’s documentation of her life can be grasped as an act of self-narration. In the act of self-narration, she tries to clarify what has gone wry about her life. The attempt to transcribe her experience first underlies the multiplicity of roles that she adopts in life. Anna partly attributes her plight to the clashes of these role-identities. To alleviate the strain of these clashes, she divides her experience into four notebooks to deal with the various aspects of her life, feeling that otherwise “it would be such a—scramble. Such a mess” (240). The compartment of her life is inspired by her preference for order and control. “Part of the function of Anna’s division of

experience in the Notebooks,” Marguerite Alexander observes, “is to separate aspects of her personality which are in conflicts with each other” (89). To take a closer look, the impulse to compartmentalize her life in face of chaos and confusion bears upon her tenacious hold on the notion of wholeness. By neatly categorizing the details of her life into the four notebooks, she creates the impression of an integrate self. There seems to exist a self that, looming over the disparate and jostling roles, transcends them, separates them, and presumably can accommodate their conflicts when order and wholeness are attained. Beneath the structural facade of the notebooks eventually lies Anna’s conviction in the humanistic wholeness and the romantic transcendental self, the true and solid kernel that the individual strives after even though it remains mystical and elusive from our grasp. Magali Cornier Michael remarks, “Anna has convinced herself that the division of her life into four notebooks will stave off the chaos of contemporary existence and enable her to retain a concept of wholeness” (50). The maneuver at dividing her life is no less than an attempt to bring forth the transcendental true self, the presence of which is consigned with the hope to release the strain and pains of identity crisis.

If the compartmentalization of her life reveals Anna’s longing for the true self to solve the incompatibility of her role-identities, the awkwardness of this division foreshadows the invalidity of such a belief and the inaccessibility of the true self. Anna elucidates the division of her notebooks. “I keep four notebooks, a black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics, a yellow notebook, in which I make stories out of my experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary” (418). The keeping of the four notebooks is undertaken with the identification of her political, artistic, and sexual self in mind, to say the least. But just as Kerby and other critics have emphasized, if the self is produced and created in writing, the acts of narration would inevitably multiply the

self-narrative as well as the self. Then, after Anna recognizes her conflicting roles and compartments them into the notebooks, she not only gives a substantial form to her disjoint selves but also is bound to come across some others in the process of writing. In the red, and the black notebooks emerge the disillusioned Anna and the idealistic Anna, wrestling with each other for the dominance of her political activity. In the yellow notebook she encounters the naïve Anna who would mesmerize herself for the mirage of happiness. The blue notebook presents the parenting Anna who expresses ambivalent emotions toward her daughter Janet.² As Anna proliferates in the process of writing, it appears that there exists “no essential Anna in *The Golden Notebook*; instead the novels offer many versions of Anna on several narrative levels, so that the name ‘Anna’ can at best refer to a composite of various roles, functions and representation” (Michael 47). If Anna has intended to bring forth the transcendental true self through the apartheid of her clashing selves in her notebooks, she now is faced the ever growing immensity of the task since every attempt to nail her selves down on paper brings her to some others that have so far hidden in the dark. The difficulty of accomplishing the project turns out unsurpassable. The invocation of the transcendental self fails as the attempt at the clear-cut separation falters.

More detrimental to the project of bringing forth the transcendental true self is the futility of maintaining the boundary among the discursive selves. The line between the notebooks is frequently transgressed. Anna is unable to prevent the flooding mood of desperation and bitterness in the black notebook from flowing into the others. Observations congruent more with the tenor of a specific notebook repeatedly crop up in the wrong notebooks. She parenthesizes the note of transgression in the yellow notebook, “(This sort of comment belongs to the blue

² More or less, Janet’s presence constrains Anna’s development of her potential. Anna is aware of it but she chooses to understate it. She feels herself “spring up like a tree that has been bent over by a weight” when her daughter lets her go (300).

notebook, not this one)" (471). Moreover, the concern with the inadequacy of language in representing the world and her private perceptions is not limited to a specific notebook. Alexander notices, "there is a remarkable unity of preoccupation running across the notebooks. As a writer, Anna is concerned with the inevitable falsifications which attend any attempt to give fictional form of experience" (91). "Hard as she tries, it proves to be impossible to partition her thoughts and to attempt the implied division of her self" (Kauffman 150). The struggle to contain the disparate selves within the assigned terrain is frustrated. Anna the author of the four notebooks fails to separate her conflicting selves properly. Consequently the true self remains absent. There is no transcendental self that can deliver her from the identity crisis. On the surface level, her notebooks are inaugurated with an eye to curb the chaos but paradoxically, they increase the complexity and multiplicity of her roles, an upshot that inevitably accrues more chaos and confusion. On a deeper level, the failure of the division directly flaunts her hold on the transcendental true self.

In Content

Another gesture that carries the full weight of Anna's search for the true self is manifest in her experiments with writing, motivated by the felt need to stare at truth squarely. At the beginning of the blue notebook, Anna avows that she has to resist the impulse to frame up her experience in stories. She feels that her "turning everything into fiction—must be an evasion" (211). In the diary entry of 17 September, 1954, her determination is pushed to the extreme. Prodded by Michael's mockery of her as a story-teller, Anna painstakingly withholds herself from selective filtering when documenting the flux of her life and scrupulously denudes these entries of imaginative embroilment. Through this project, she hopes that she can dissipate the enveloping mist of lies. However, the most desperate attempt to nail down the truth fails. With a

creative writer's sensitivity to language, Anna recognizes the impact of the literal convention weighs heavy on the written discourse. Now that the author's intention is conveyed through a medium resonant with the echoes of its former users, it is hardly possible that he/she can get his/her messages across without interruption or intervention from the past specter. Jotting down her feeling about her menstrual period, Anna confess, "I know that as soon as I write the word 'blood,' it will be giving a wrong emphasis, and even to me when I come to read what I've written. And so I begin to doubt the value of a day's recording before I've started to record it" (304). Even though she has set herself the task of being truthful about everything and singles out the factor that might slant her intention, she cannot close the gap between the authorial intention and the reader's understanding that arises from the heritage of writing practices. The awareness of the gap acknowledges that "we enter a preexisting language system that is aswarm with names and connotations beyond the control of author, reader, and even author-as-reader" (Kauffman 167). It also foreshadows the failure of the record as Anna has suspected at the outset.

That record turns out unsatisfactory is partly a result of the inherent conventions in narrative/language. Yet there is another source that contaminates the discourse long before the impact of the literal practices intrudes—Anna's deliberate consciousness of the flowing of the daily activities. The details of her period will not enter the entry if she is not determined to write down everything regardless of its triviality. More importantly, the intention to record it later amplifies the sense of discomfort with having a period. The savor of the daily experience is changed. Anna remarks,

I realize that all these thoughts would not have been in my head at all had I not set myself to be conscious. A period is something I deal with, without thinking about it particularly, or rather I think of it with a part of my mind that deals with routine problems. It is the same part of my mind that deals

with the problem of routine cleanliness. But the idea that I will have to write it down is changing the balance, destroying the truth (304-5).

Ironically, it is the resolution to stare at the truth that tips the balance of the pre-narrative experience to the side of falsity. Truth, as Anna has demonstrated, is elusive.

Following the exhaustive record of 17 September, 1954 is a string of orderly and small entries consisted of short factual statements. At this juncture, it seems that the narrative structure is held responsible for the failure of this exhaustive record and is consequently fractured to close the space permissible to the contamination from the subjective and emotional judgments. With the suspension of the subjective and emotional judgments, what is presented in the text seems to be nothing other than the factual truth itself. Nevertheless, the ensemble of the flat and factual statements still falls short of her expectation. Like the previous record, the long series of entries which span over eighteen months is scored through with a thick black cross. The conscious endeavor to capture the factual, objective truth is terminated with the statement: "The blue notebook, which I had expected to be the most truthful of the notebooks, is worse than any of them" (412). A meticulous record of life does not cleanse her writing of the taint of falsifying experience which is aligned with self-delusion in her mind. Falling back on the non-narrative structure does not pry open the door to the full presence of the truth, either. At this juncture, Anna has reached the limits of writing and the end of tether. She is only a step away from mental collapse when the old picture of self-identity dissolves and the much desired true self remains intangible.

In the entry of 17 September, 1954, an important remark crops up, "my problems of being truthful in writing (which is being truthful about oneself) . . ." (304). Although to give an authentic recount of her experience is ignited by the desire

to obviate “evasion,” the significance of the pursuit of Truth resides not so much in an external encounter with the crude reality as in an internal confrontation with one’s self (211). In this sense, the desire to capture the authentic experience in writing is no less than the desire to configure the true self. From the angle of Kerby’s viewpoint, if writing is one of the means to create and confront one’s self, needless to say that the project of being truthful in writing represents the quest for the true self. Therefore, the failure of capturing the truth in writing accentuates more than the opacity and inadequacy of language. It highlights the true self is beyond language and it is inaccessible. Anna’s writing, mirroring her search for the true self, is doomed both on the plane of structure and content.

As a writer, Anna instinctively resorts to writing in face of her identity crisis. Due to the constraints inherent in narration, the notebooks fail to bring forth the true self for her, leaving her to its elusiveness and her continual predicament. Non-fictional writing disappoints her in its deficiency to correspond to the reality. On the other hand, creative writing with its acknowledged dissociation from slavish documentation of the lived experience, holds up a mirror that exposes the innate structure which narrative possesses but life lacks: fiction has a teleological structure that constructs and sustains the unfolding of the stories while life is not granted such a scaffold.

At the end of the first segment of the yellow notebook, the artificiality of creative writing has been pointed out. The remark “Literature is analysis after the event” makes it clear that fiction does not mesh with the experience of living but presents it in light of causality (210). More significantly, the causal nexus also underlies a crucial element in the fictive writing. For the writers, the end of an event frequently turns out to be the onset of their creative endeavor. Hence, the ending has probably been set down long before the fictive story actually unfolds. Just as Anna

has come to realize about her “The Shadow of the Third,” the embryonic fiction is inaugurated under the shadow of the dissolution of her relationship with Michael, and consequently all the episodes that find their way into the story would ineluctably culminate in the breakup of Ella/Paul duet. There is a *telo* in fiction. The *telo* of the Ella/Paul story is the collapse of their relationship. It serves as the point of reference to cut out from the myriad episodes of the affair a manageable junk that can be contained within the length of fictive creation. The teleological structure, after setting the tone of the stories, implies the direction that they should pursue and warrants their smooth unfolding. It informs the emplotting of the episodes and the significance of the story.

In contrast, life does not inhabit such a structure. Since the time people begin to cast a suspicious glance at the Providence, the idea that life is not under the guidance of a certain providential design becomes ever more prevalent. If the individual’s living story is not guided by a definitive blueprint, one is liberated to have his/her way, a freedom which usually leads to poignant feeling of loss; after all, “[t]he certainty of a God giving a meaning to life far surpasses in attractiveness the ability to behave badly with impunity” (Camus 65). Even though at the level of a specific event, people can assume a transcendental position, reflecting upon it and connecting the relevant episodes at the end of it in a way similar to the process of reading or writing novels, when they turn the gaze into the future, the feeling of uncertainty and distraction surges up because the ultimate end of their life is suspended. More than once, after sketching out the silhouette of her past experience, Anna ponders, “It’s a stage of my life finished. And what next?” (315).³ The disconcerting query, echoing the overwhelming existential anxiety and pressure of living, accentuates the distinction

³ Another statement that attests to Anna’s predicament after periodizing her life can be found in page 421, “I was an Anna who invited defeat from men without even being conscious of it. (But I am conscious of it. And being conscious of it means I shall leave it all behind me and become – but what?)

between life and writing: even if she can recollect her past like reading or writing fictions, giving the trajectory of her life a transitory period, she can not ascertain the next step to move since such a period is inserted after the experience is lived. When it comes to the present moment, the feeling of uncertainty and confusion rears its head as long as the individual remain dubious about the purpose of life. In other words, unless Anna can foresee her last day or visualize a *telo* for it, she finds herself unable to fare ahead with confidence and certainty. Yet to imagine something as if it really existed, such as a *telo*, evokes the very specter of self-delusion that she desperately strives to exorcise. Given that Anna first disparages the certainty and comfort of the aesthetic world because of its inadequacy to mirror the real world, and then she embarks upon the road to Truth, it is clear that at this moment she would not come to terms with such an imaginative and delusive purpose for the sake of relief and security. Thus, faced with a potentially purposeless and meaningless life, Anna is confused and lost. She becomes ever more vulnerable when she arrives at the limits of writing and language. “Her attempt at self-definition slowly collapse,” Sydney Janet Kaplan observes, “finally, because it hinges on the power of words and she discovers that words cannot contain a reality too immense for them” (124). Both writing and psychoanalysis fail her in the configuration of the true self, together with the direction for the future. Conversely, for Anna to recover from her identity crisis, the first step is brush aside the hope in the presence of the true self. She must not aspire at a life or a self beyond narrative.

Implicitly, the psychotherapy and Anna’s notebooks aim to bring out the true self. Nevertheless, both fail to produce the desired results. In the notebooks, it is remarkable that despite the jostling of her selves that clamor against the notion of integration and wholeness, she does not repudiate this humanistic tenet but sticks to it regardless of the prevailing anti-humanist trend. She retorts in the first part of the

black notebook when she sets out to recapture her experience in Africa:

Heaven knows we are never allowed to forget that the ‘personality’ doesn’t exist any more. It’s the theme of half the novels written, the theme of the sociologists, and all the other –ologists. We’re told so often that human personality has disintegrated into nothing under pressure of all our knowledge that I’ve even been believing it. Yet when I look back to that group under the tree, and recreate them in my memory, suddenly I know it’s nonsense. Suppose I were to meet Maryrose now, all these years later, she’d make some gesture, or turn her eyes in such a way and there she’d be, Maryrose, and indestructible. . . . And so all this tall, this anti-humanist bullying, about the evaporation of the personality becomes meaningless for me at that point when I manufacture enough emotional energy inside myself to create in memory some human being I’ve known. (114-5)

Anna’s perception of the “indestructible” core within every person is reminiscent of the transcendental, true self. In her mind, the true self is continuous and resists the contamination and transformation through the passage of time. Whatever appearance the individual grows into or puts on, the true self remains there. The mask of the role-players is thus superficial and penetrable, and the fragmentation of the self can be overcome. Nonetheless, when the elusiveness of the true self becomes clear, she loses the anchor that helps her battle the vertigo of fragmentation. She no longer has the “emotional energy” to put herself together and to represent her experience in Africa. In the last section of the black notebook, she confesses, “I have been unable to remember how Maryrose moved her eyes, or how Paul laughed. It’s all gone” (462). This message signals the onset of her breakdown.

For Anna, the true self is not only continuous but also unbound. Her dialogue with Mrs. Marks illustrates this point best. Although Anna resists the temptation of

self delusion/self-limitation in Mrs. Marks's consultation, she acknowledges Mrs. Marks's credits in revitalizing her sense of being alive. She declares to Mrs. Marks, "now I can feel. I'm open to everything. . . . I want to walk off, by myself, Anna Freeman" (415). The refusal to seek refuge in the therapist's interpretations echoes her attempt at breaking through the limits of language/narrative to arrive at Truth. Both bespeak Anna's desire to explode the frames. If both the sessions and the scribbling represent the search for the true self, they reveal Anna's expectation of the true self is free and unbound. However, to follow the post-structuralist's suggestions, the world we perceived is subjected in language. It is out of the question to remain beyond the boundaries of language, the forms. Wrothington avers, "Only in the absence of consciousness and coherent language—in death, in madness—can [the] absolute freedom be achieved" (178-9). In this respect, Anna's expectation of the true self has predicted her heading for madness.

Temporal Features of the Notebooks

Temporal dimension assumes a very important place in the individual's picture of his self. Anna's notebooks, if approached from the light of temporality, also take on the temporal feature and develop concurrently with the progress of her search. Anna once elucidates the division of the first four notebooks (418). As to the inner golden notebook, she states that she intends to write "all of myself in one book" (518). We are assured that the inner golden notebook appears last, as a gesture signaling the end of Anna's overwhelming feeling of fragmentation. Other than that, no ample evidence is offered to ascertain that the notebooks follow the sequential order as they appear physically to the reader.⁴ Anna's clarification on the distinction of her notebooks is

⁴ One of the reasons Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen give to bolster their argument that Saul is not a real character is that the episodes Saul initiates in the blue notebook are derived from the story

very helpful for the reader to catch the tonality and gist of these notebooks. Nevertheless, it also drives us to the prescribed direction to understand their relation. There are alternatives to appreciate the interrelatedness of the notebooks, such as temporality.

Overall, from the light of immediacy the black and the yellow notebooks are undertaken in retrospection: the black notebook is the recount of Anna's experience in Africa, which is also the raw material of *Frontiers of War*, and the yellow notebook is the dramatic projection of her affair with Michael when their relation verges on dissolution. They both concern the understanding of her personal history and the criticism of her fragility in face of the overwhelming forces around. On the whole, these two notebooks signal Anna's instinct to take a survey over her past in order to have a better picture of her self, a reflexive reaction to the uncertainty of the meaning of her life. In contrast, the red notebook and the blue notebook share the feature of being dated: the former is the journal-like record of the heroine's political activity and the latter is her acknowledged diary. Dating affords these two notebooks the feeling of spontaneity and immediacy. Andrew Hassam brings out the impact of dating in diary when he analyzes its culturally embedded elements. He states:

The diary is composed of regular dated sections corresponding to the time of composition; it has thus a fragmented narrative structure and is nonretrospective. . . . So far as the narration [of the diary] is concerned, it is the moment rather than the self that is privileged. A sense of the unselfconscious truth is derived from the necessity of composing from day to day without benefit of retrospection—the diarist is caught up in the imperative

outlines sketched on the yellow notebook. It is quite risky, however, to presume that a certain notebook predates one of the other three. The physical appearance of the notebooks does not certainly coincide with their actual sequence of transcription. For example, the third segment of the red notebook does not predate that of the blue notebook (see p. 395 and p. 411). Molly Hite seemingly makes a similar mistake on this point (see *The Other Side of the Story*. P. 71).

of events. (21-2)

Of course, writing does not simultaneously proceed along with the unfolding of the events. Therefore, “nonretrospective” remains a feature more descriptive than prescriptive.⁵ In the red and the blue notebook, retrospective passages proliferate as much as in the non-dated notebooks. Yet it is clear that both the red and the blue notebooks concern less the retrieval of the fading past than the sporadic meditation over the immediate episodes. Despite their similarity, the red notebook trails into blankness as a consequence of Anna’s drifting away from the political activist circle, but the blue notebook lengthens and heralds the presence of the inner golden notebook. The golden notebook exists like a supplement to the blue notebook. It records the critical moment of Anna’s breakdown roughly sketched in the blue notebook and details the process of her salvation. The color golden invokes the atmosphere of brightness and beauty, reinforcing the impression of Anna’s ultimate recovery from her neurotic paralysis. Anna herself confirms and encourages such an association in the text. She urges Saul to embark on the “golden road to maturity” and they depart with renewed strength (543). The inner golden notebook tracing the process of madness down to the signpost for a better tomorrow becomes the notebook for the future. The blue notebook can be regarded as the notebook of the present by virtue of its comparatively immediacy and spontaneity, and stands in contrast to the black and the yellow notebooks over-loaded with the weight of reminiscence.⁶

The temporal features of the notebooks explain the vicissitude of them. It is no accident that the black and the yellow notebooks thin as the blue notebook thickens. The transmutation of the three notebooks in length implies that the re-mapping of the

⁵ Hassam also concedes that retrospection usually abounds in the writing of the diary fiction and the non-fiction diary.

⁶ I exclude the red notebook in my discussion. I tend to view the red notebook as a supplement of the blue notebook, deliberately isolated from it for the emphasis of Anna’s sense of fragmentation.

biographical history is the groundwork for the deliverance from the identity crisis. The search for a viable self-identity, just as Kerby has emphasized, inevitably involves the interplay of the past collected from the memory and the present. Yet the past seeped from the memory can not avoid the historicity of the present standpoint and concerns. The picture of the past reflects more the overview from our comprehension at that moment rather than the actual happenings. The story of our past is therefore subjected to constant revision and interpretation. In other words, even if the picture of the present self is hinged on the past, the parameters of the past are eventually set down by the foothold at that moment.⁷ The picture of our personal history at best serves the basis to build on the notion of the self. When the story of our history is finished, the focus still falls on the present. Moreover, as preciously discussed, the attempt to map out the territory of one's history is usually ignited by the feeling of uncertainty about the future. Anna's "what next?" query implies that the key to ride through the crisis of identity is not found in the picture of one's history but would rather fall in the hands of the present to chart down the road ahead. If the concern with the future trajectory takes the center of the self, there is little wonder that both the notebooks of the past diminish steadily and finally snap with echoes of distraction in the end, while the blue notebook accumulate its weight all the way to usher in the presence of the inner golden notebook. Out of the notebook of the present the seed of the future sprouts. The transmutation of the notebooks appropriately figures the temporal feature of their content.

After the diary entries of 17 September, 1954, Anna reaches the limits of language/writing. She verges on mental collapse. Meanwhile, the stage is set for Saul

⁷ Freeman strongly suggests that the influence of the past and the present on each other does not necessarily move in a unilateral direction but can be reciprocal.

Green's appearance. He provides the catalyst for Anna's final breakdown under the weight of her identity crisis. The experience of breakdown, however, is revitalizing. It drives Anna to come to terms with the inaccessibility of the true self with a feasible solution. Anna's breakthrough will be the focus of the next chapter.



Chapter Four: Breakthrough

For an individual to have the feeling of being alive, he/she must have a sense of identity (Gergen 38). If a sense of identity is indispensable to the feeling of being alive, identity crisis signals that the agent is exposed to the existential angst. *In the Golden Notebook* the exposure to existential angst strands Anna in paralysis of will. The energy to engage herself subsides because of the failure of her sexual relationships, the futility of her political maneuver and the writer's block. Meanwhile, the search for the true self by means of her sessions with Mrs. Marks and the scribbling in the notebooks finally comes to its dead end. When the imperative to put herself together for motherhood disappears with her daughter's departure, she is utterly set free from the chain of daily routines and left to the mercy of her solitary meditation. At this moment, Anna has almost cut herself off from the world outside. The diminishment of the social dimension prepares her mental collapse. Saul's intrusion into her flat does not pry open her little solitary flat to the normality of the outer world; instead, he exacerbates her isolation from society because he is her counterpart. Anna's mental collapse is unavoidable.

The Diminishment of Social Dimension

Saul is a visiting American and needs a place to stay. Molly puts him at Anna's door. He appears at the time when all the solid and supportive connections that uphold her self-identity have concurred to droop one after another. Frosh propounds that the self "is actually built up through relations with other people" and the relations with others are "*constitutive* of the person's inner world" (emphasis in original, 46). As the constitutive relations are dissolving, the social dimension of the individual crumples. Therefore, the collapse of the inner world, the self, looms up as a potential threat. Conversely, intimate and inveterate relations can postpone the dissolution of the

individual's self-identity. When Anna still lives with Molly, Anna's identity crisis is submerged because some of the constitutive relations remain binding. At Molly's house, Anna feels the need to hide her notebooks. She states, "in Molly's house, the notebooks were stuffed into a suitcase under the bed. . . . the notebooks were something I never thought about; and certainly not as work, or a responsibility. . . . And in fact I now see moving to this flat as giving room to the notebooks" (418).¹ The notebooks are one of the means that Anna instinctively employs to work out her identity crisis, and thus to clear a space for the notebooks is no less than a gesture to go through the full process of the crisis. Living independently deprives Anna of the warmth and advice that one seeks from a friend at the fateful moments. To move out of Molly's house condenses the social space that constitutes the healthy selfhood. The separation from Molly prepares for Anna's encounter with Saul and the subsequent breakdown he incurs.

When Saul moves into Anna's flat, Anna's seclusion from the social circle is not undermined but enhanced. It is noteworthy that Saul is presented as a "counter-part" of Anna at the extreme end (518). With him Anna is dragged into a more desperate soliloquy of insulation on account of their similarities. At the climax of their interactions, her flat is utterly cut off from the outer world, "like a ship floating on a dark sea, it seems to float, isolated from life, self-contained"(508-9). On him a more radical version of Anna's self-image is projected. With him Anna glimpses what would become of her if her mind keeps deteriorating. In a respect, Saul also embodies what Anna struggles against. The hazards of Anna's identity crisis can be better illustrated by a detour of Saul's syndromes.

¹ For a detailed discussion of the metaphor of the flat see Ellen Morgan "Alienation of the Woman Writer in *The Golden Notebook*."

Saul as Mirror

Sliding down further on the tunnel to breakdown, Saul is amnesic. Through some slices of their conversation, Anna observes that he seems to have memory disorder:

He had genuinely forgotten he had told me. And I remembered half a dozen occasions in the last few days – he had told me something, and then mentioned it a few minutes later again as if it were a new subject. Yesterday, for instance, he said; ‘Do you remember when I first came here,’ speaking as if he had been here many months. And another time he said: ‘that time we went to the Indian restaurant,’ when we’d been there that day for lunch (497).

Memory disorder has its significance in light of the temporal dimension of the self. The continuity of the self is attained through the act of self-narration. Self-narration can connect the disparate moments of life into a comprehensible narrative only through the function of memory. “Identity-creation,” Worthington remarks, “relies heavily on memory, through the agency of which a sense of personal continuity is achieved through time” (181). If personal continuity must be created through the agency of memory, memory loss signals that the individual is severed from his/her past and becomes discontinuous. If the feeling of discontinuity swells to the degree that the past actions seem to be performed by another person, it will bring about serious moral consequences. The individual can be absolved from the responsibility of his/her past actions because they are presumably not his/her doing. In this respect, memory loss can fling one into the direction for moral irresponsibility. Moreover, memory loss makes it difficult to link different historical episodes around a common theme or development. Nevertheless, “some sort of narrative is necessary for a sense of identity and purpose” (Kerby 87). Hence, memory loss poses a threat to the

maintenance of the self-identity by frustrating the connection of the lived episodes. Amnesia can be considered as a form of slight memory loss. Probably amnesia will not utterly frustrate the orchestration of the personal history into a comprehensible self-narrative but it enlarges the scope of possible mutations and interpretations by disturbing the temporal dimension. It can drive the individual to many pseudo self-narratives. Compared with the role-player who still retains the awareness of the staged performance, people who suffer from the memory disorder genuinely identify with their pseudo identities without the actor's "double consciousness." At its worst, they can develop into the mode of chameleons, changing identities compulsively in response to the environment. Indeed, Anna tells her psychiatrist Dr. Paynter that Saul "had no sense of time, and seemed to be several persons" at once (501). Gayle Greene observes that "his[Saul's] consciousness is so fragmentary that one side has no memory of the other" and the function of forgetting is in service of the maintenance of the self (297). In this way, chameleon-like personality can offer the individual an easy exit out of pressure and painful encounters and incur irresponsible attitudes much the same as the role-playing does. But worse than the player of masquerading, the chameleonic person might lose the control of his/her own performance because the responses have become so reflexive. Douglas Kellner warns, "when one radically shifts identity at will, one might lose control, one might become pathologically conflicted and divided, disabled from autonomous thought and action" (153). Taken together, memory loss sends a warning signal to the maintenance of the self. It poses threats to the human agency and might inflict moral paralysis on the individual.

Memory disorder, in the case of Saul, also disturbs the sense of temporal distance. In a novel permeated with identity problems, the awareness of the time flux serves as an important indicator of the mental health because of the temporal horizon of the self. Whereas the blue notebook is dated in resemblance to the diary, dating disappears

from its last segment, which records Anna's headlong plunge into breakdown. It seems to imply that Anna's grip on temporality is less tenacious as before. When Anna can still hang on to the rim of her sanity, she marks out the relation of the temporality with the self during a fight with Saul:

I was aware of myself as he saw me, a woman inexplicably in command of events, because she could look back and see a smile, a movement, gestures; hear words, explanations – a woman inside time. I dislike the solemnity, the pompousness of that upright little custodian of the truth. . . . I could feel a prisoner with him, because I longed to be free of my own ordering, commenting memory. I felt my sense of identity fade. (510)

The desire to annihilate the tyranny of the memory, and with it the awareness of the time flux, expresses that Anna has almost reached the end of her strength. Finally, during the three day of madness, she indeed “no longer had a sense of time” as she recollects later (517).

Saul is also narcissistic. Unlike Anna, who is leading an almost secluded life when he shows up, Saul is a blacklisted American writer drifting around for shelter without much hesitation to mingle with others. Yet resembling Anna in the vacuum of the emotional support, Saul founders all the emotional rapports that might anchor him, jilting the women who have developed the expectation to move beyond the superficial intimacy of sexuality. Fear of deep feelings is one of the features that describe narcissists. According to Frosh, the narcissists with a psyche in flight from the reality usually take refuge in the superficial relations. Because the relations are superficial, the breakups will not be painful.

So sticking to the surface, limiting one's investments in others (a typical contemporary metaphor) is safer, not just because it is excitingly, tantalizingly seductive, but also because it protects one against too much

pain, even though the cost is that reliance on surface functioning leads to feeling dried up and dead. (48)

Even though Saul evinces the narcissistic predilection for superficial relations, he does not invoke the association with sterility and lifelessness in his appearance at first glance. Contrastingly, he habitually takes up the pose of the stereotyped American in the film, a “sexy he-man, all balls and strenuous erection,” especially when he lapses into the “I, I, I” monologue (484). Nevertheless, in his diary a different story is told. When Anna reads his diary, she encounters a different Saul who is “self-pitying, cold, calculating, emotionless” (499). He comments on his ex-girl friend who attempts suicide tersely and coldly as “Pity, a nice girl” (501). Anna finds herself unable to connect the pitiless and lifeless Saul with the man she knows. Lurching forward from guise of confidence and vigor is a Saul whose inner world is dominated by death and sterility. Just as Anna realizes that Saul and she are people of the same kind, Anna is not blind to the possibility that she could grow into the ghastly self-image Saul poses. She struggles to avert the course that has trapped her and fend off the erosion of death and sterility.

Death Impulse

If the concern with fragmentation dominates the façade of *The Golden Notebook*, death impulse is the undercurrent. Throughout the novel, the bait of death has never lost its charm and attractiveness for Anna. To begin with the self-narration, the quest for Truth leads Anna to the nightmare in which her experience in Africa is turned into a film and twisted out of shape. In this dream Anna’s protest against the distortion only provokes the interrogation from the film projectionist who mocks her, “And what makes you think that the emphasis you have put on it is the correct emphasis?” (537). In a similar dream scene in the last segment of the black notebook, Anna comes across

the director of the television film who argues that the twisted film version does justice to her experience. Unable to convince him the otherwise, Anna feels compelled to re-examine the validity of her position and finds herself conceding that what she remembers is probably untrue. Gasping under the burden of Truth, Anna terminates the black notebook with the recount of this dream and the note, “If I were asked by Mother Sugar to ‘name’ this dream, I would say it was about total sterility. And besides, since I dreamed it, I have been unable to remember how Maryrose moved her eyes, or how Paul laughed. It’s all gone” (462). The recollection of the past becomes tormenting when the individual continually questions the authenticity of the recollected history, and finally it makes the remembrance of the past impossible. To press for the absolutely authentic presentation of the experience, i.e. the presence of Truth, does not bring Anna closer to it; instead, she is flung into the darkness of uncertainty and, to make it worse, deprived of the memorial past. The past left behind can come to us through the operation of the memory. The evaporation of the memorial past is no less than the disappearance of the past itself. Now that the conceptualization of the self is always contained within the temporal horizon—the picture of who I am is built on the story of my past, and in presenting the present “I” the trajectory of the future is implied—the fractured past-present-future nexus can frustrate the configuration of a viable self-identity and cancel out the human agency. Here, it is clear the last part of the black notebook develops in line with the mental collapse documented in the blue notebook. The quest for Truth courts the death of the subject.² Counterfactually put, for the individual to remain a responsible and active agent, he/she must relinquish the desire for Truth and reconcile with the heterogeneous and imperfect stories. The inner golden notebook attests to the illumination that Anna

² Worthington asserts that it is impossible to remain outside the protocols of reading. Only in madness and death can one achieve absolute freedom from the constraints of language (178-9).

acquires through the breakdown. In the inner golden notebook Anna admits that the real experience can't be described but one has to preserve "forms," that is, to accept of confines of language and narrative. Framing this illumination in the form of query, she address to herself, "And perhaps the condition of your existing at all is precisely that we preserve the forms, create the patterns – have you thought of that?" (549) At this juncture, Anna feels compelled to reconsider the necessity of Truth. If there is no way that one can pierce through the mist of language to arrive at Truth, then it becomes pointless to quest for such an absolute. Moreover, if we have long inhabited in a world without the transcendental absolute, it stands to reason that the very existence of the subject and the meaning of our existence presuppose the absence of Truth.

On the level of self-quest the lure of death is covert. Nevertheless, on the plane of practical involvements death impulse is forceful. Since the experience in African, death becomes Anna's secret obsession. The black notebook is particularly permeated with death impulse, which lurks in Anna's nostalgic mood when she recalls the atmosphere of despair and disillusion in her African experience. Nostalgia can lead to nihilism. Anna states, "it is so powerful, that nostalgia, that I can only write this a few sentences at a time. Nothing is more powerful than this nihilism, an angry readiness to throw everything overboard, a willingness, a longing to become part of dissolution (78). For Anna what is so dreadful about this nihilism does not come from the potential threat of the physical deterioration or death; instead it is the defection out of disillusion, the bitter nonchalance out of desperation that she finds most appalling. The nihilistic dissolution grows out of the futility of her political endeavor and infiltrates into other aspects of her life. The nightmare about the scene of the firing squad whose officer exchanges his position with the prisoner best bespeaks Anna's

fear. Locked in this nightmare, she feels “that there is no right, no wrong, simply a process, a wheel turning . . .” (308). The firing-squad nightmare is the dread at meaninglessness. Besides, the erasure of the line between right and wrong thwarts the operation of the moral evaluation. In consequence, the moral framework constituted by the evaluative and discriminative criterion is fractured. The moral framework is indispensable to human agency, as we have discussed in the first chapter. In this respect, nihilism represents death of morality and agency. This spiritual death is Anna’s chief enemy whom she battles all the way to defeat and ostracize.

While Anna and her group at the Mashopi hotel are striving to stick to their political dream and ideals, their bitterness and frustration find an outlet in their cynical jokes and irony. At that time death impulse is safely kept at bay. But when the group verges on dissolution by virtue of the overwhelming weight of disappointment and disillusion, death impulse rears its head. The night when all the miseries reach the point of explosion, Anna throws herself into the arms of Paul Blackenhurst, succumbing to his seductive flamboyance and irresponsibility. Anna’s union with Paul is significant. Firstly, she betrays Willi, with whom she has an affair that seems to be maintained more out of their mutual conviction than passion. Anna’s disloyalty to Willi thus takes on a symbolic meaning. It underlies her withdrawal from political involvement and properly foreshadows the disintegration of the group whose members were brought together by the communist ideals at the first place. Besides, Willi does not take up Paul’s cynical and playful attitudes despite the similarities they share. Willi’s frustration and defection drives him onto the path of the worldly success. In contrast, Paul is mindless of wealth and fame. He tends to indulge in digging out “incongruity,” an enthusiasm that testifies his awareness of the helplessness of their situation (111). To make it worse, he turns his intellectual superiority on the ignorant and takes pleasure in making fun of them. Paul’s strategy causes more harm and

malice. Maryrose makes a point on it when she rebukes Paul for his fooling Mrs. Boothby: “You won’t change her by making fun of her. You just hurt her feelings” (108). Like a two-edged knife, Paul’s outlet for his “frustrated idealism” exacerbates his sense of defeat and aggrieves others (101). Besty Draine’s comment points out his fault:

The ironic edge to his voice continually insists that he has attained intellectual awareness of the incongruities of life—at the price of the will to reconcile incongruities. In this respect, he is Anna’s shadow, carrying to an extreme her tendency to react to disappointment by wallowing self-pityingly in the atmosphere of defeat. . . . Paul allows his superior awareness to seduce him into ironic morbidity. (36)

Just as she suggests, Paul is like Anna’s extreme double.³ But I would like to add that it is one that she desperately fears about herself and wants to get rid of. More destructive than Willi’s disappointing worldliness, Paul’s moral morbidity approximate to Anna’s incubus, the spiritual death. The moment when Anna surrenders to Paul marks her provisional submission to the seduction of the moral sleep and irresponsibility. She feels:

I have never, in all my life, been so desperately and wildly and painfully happy as I was then. It was so strong I couldn’t believe it. I remember saying to myself, This is it, this is being happy, and at the same time I was appalled because it had come out of so much ugliness and unhappiness. (147)

The most feared shadow catches her. The ugly happiness out of their union is part and parcel of the feared nostalgia, the nihilistic exhilaration under the specter of destruction. Later it takes the form of the “joy-in-spite” dwarf and becomes Anna’s

³ For a detailed discussion of Anna’s doubles see Claire Sprague “Doubles Talk in *The Golden Notebook*” and “Multipersonal and Dialogic Modes in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Notebook*.”

recurring nightmare.

When Anna recounts to Mrs. Marks the recurring nightmare about the “joy-in-spite” dwarf, Mrs. Marks asked her to give it a name; Anna answers, “it was the nightmare about destruction” (419). She elaborates:

what he represented was pure spite, malice, joy in malice, joy in a destructive impulse. This was when I ‘named’ the dream as about joy in spite. And I dreamed the dream again, always when particularly tired, or under stress, or in conflict, when I could feel that the walls of my self were thin or in danger. (419)

Anna notices that the nightmare about the “joy-in-spite” dwarf recurs particularly when she feels the threat of breakdown of her self. She seems to testify that if she can not bear the strain of the crisis, the dwarf figure in her will dominate and the outcome will be destructive. Not only does Anna feel the dwarf figure lurking inside herself, but also discerns it prowling around the men she encounters. Among the men she associates with the dwarf figure De Silva is the most prominent. Sometimes De Silva talks like a loving father and husband, but more than often his behavior contradicts that impression. He floats around without any intention to support his family and wounds anyone who has a heart for him. Taken together, it is as if there were two personas co-existing in him. If all the characters in this novel have more or less suffered from the split personality, what makes De Silva worse than others is that the co-existence of the two incompatible personas does not seem to cause a stir of discomfort in him. When the callous and mean persona gets the upper hand, he is the incarnation of the “joy-in-spite” dwarf. Anna recollects:

As he spoke he smiled. It was a reminiscent, rather sly, enjoyable, interested smile. I recognized the smile – it was the essence of my dream, it was the smile from the figure in my dream. I wanted to run out of the room. And yet

I was thinking; This quality, this intellectual ‘I wanted to see what was going to happen,’ ‘I want to see what will happen next,’ is something loose in the air, it is in so many people one meets, it is part of what we all are. It is the other face of: It doesn’t matter, it didn’t matter to me—the phrase that kept ringing through what De Silva said. (438-9)

The essence of the dwarf figure is embodied in De Silva’s callousness. Callousness, however, is just a shield against feeling. Anna has observed that Nelson’s habitual hysteria is “a defence against feeling, because it’s too terrible, the guilt he would have to feel” (424). Saul maintains only superficial relations because deep emotions might cause pains.⁴ Almost all the men Anna encounters try to freeze themselves. De Silva is just the most successful in this attempt. Through De Silva, it is hinted that to avoid feeling is to invoke the dwarf figure. The consequence is the evaporation of warmth, emotion, and moral principles. Exemplified by De Silva is the breakdown of the subject who abandons the responsibilities dictated by morality, conscience, and compassion. Throughout the novel, Anna is haunted by the specter who entices her to alleviate the pains of her frustration and despair. She manages to resist the fun of the role-playing and the inducement of the dwarf figure. She tries to remain a decent, honest, and conscientious agent despite the frustration and despair which besiege her from the conflicts of her identities and the collapse of the ordered and meaningful world that follow the distortion of the communist ideals, the failure of sexual relationships, and the suspicious efficacy of writing.

Indeed, as Anna reaches the dead end of her quest for the true self, it comes to

⁴ Anna describes the pattern Saul repeats in his intercourse with women, “For with my intelligence I knew that this man was repeating a pattern over and over again: courting a woman with his intelligence and sympathy, claiming her emotionally; then, when she began to claim in return running away. And the better a woman was, the sooner he would begin to run” (512-3). Similarly, Saul’s pattern is also applicable to De Silva’s behavior. With his intelligence and sympathy, De Silva attracts Anna. But he discloses that he has no intention to commit himself emotionally when he tells Anna that he sends away the girl who keeps “falling out of her role” as a heartless lover (437).

the fore that to act as a responsible agent is held as the ultimate destination of Anna's struggle. For her, the acceptance of the set role-identities is either an act of self-limitation out of ignorance, exemplified by Rose, or that of self-delusion out of cowardice and fatigue as she discerns herself at Mrs. Mark's consulting room. Those who persistently hold on to their intellectual clairvoyance frequently bow down under the conflicts of their identities and respond to the environment like a chameleon to avoid agony. The chameleonic persons, as well as the role-player, can be regarded as an embodiment of the centerless subjectivity. They construct and reconstruct their identities in response to the demands of the circumstances. The hazard of the centerless subjectivities lies in its easy slide into irresponsibility as Anna has observed. Anna thus searches for a true self-identity that can solve the conflicts and turns down the alleviation by the role-playing and the abandon of responsibilities. She comes a long way before she grasps that the presence of the true self-identity is out of the question. The inaccessibility of the true self almost leaves Anna nowhere to go. At this juncture, the posture of cynicism and coldness seems to be the only effective protective cocoon to fend off the onslaughts of the existential angst. Anna is vulnerable and lost because she finds that the only alternative to self-limitation and self-delusion is the dwarf figure, the spiritual death. At both ends of the forked road no desirable results await. To elude the grip of desperation, she must strike a balance that would not be engulfed by moral paralysis and naïve self-limitation or delusion.

The strength to strike a balance comes from Anna's humanistic faith. As she is about to recover from the mental breakdown, she defines the responsible self the real core within the individual. Saul's fragmentary and conflicting self does not weaken her obsession with the "real" or the "true" even when she is held as a victim at his torturing volatility:

I say *he*, taking for granted that I can pinpoint a personality. That there is a

he who is the real man. Why should I assume that one of the persons he is is more himself than the others? But I do. When he spoke then it was the man who thought, judged, communicated, heard what I said, accepted responsibility. (emphasis in original, 515)

All of the multifarious aspects in Saul are false but the responsible one. In the passage above, Anna's definition of "the real man" in the chameleonic personality approximates to the true self in the fragmentary subject. For her, even the most schizophrenic person must have a core self that is responsible. When this responsible self dominates, people are honest and compassionate. They will not hide behind a mask to get around troubles or freeze their hearts for fear of agony. To Maryrose, the responsible persons will not suggest coldly that she should seek comfort in sex to be cured of her infatuation for her brother even though the situation is almost helpless. To the twisted practice of political activities, their conscience forbids them to turn to myth or fantasies. They will acknowledge the defeat and feel the pain rather than make a flight away from reality. Anna believes that the responsible self is the center of the subject, the self that one should cling to. As the responsible self is prioritized, Anna hints at her moral outlook which ranks honesty and endurance highly. If morality defines what is worthy of our respect, the responsible self as the center indicates that Anna insists that the world gravitates around the moral principles. Anna's short reply "But I do" flatly excludes the possibility of an otherwise thinking, leaving no room for negotiation. For her, to accept the otherwise is to declare that destruction or moral morbidity, represented by the "joy-in-spite" dwarf, is probably the deepest reality of existence. This is distressful and totally unacceptable to her.

This passage also echoes her dismissal of the prevailing anti-humanistic suspicion against "personality" at the first part of the black notebook (115). Similar to the way she comments on the indestructible core of the individual, intellectual

meditation in the passage quoted above does not force out a reconsideration but a strong re-confirmation of her belief. They both reveal that Anna refuses to adjust her mind even though she is almost cornered into speechlessness by intellectual analysis. Her belief in the “indestructible” and the “real” is less a conclusion than a faith that she tenaciously embraces against the weight of analysis. It is significant here that at the moment when she verges on madness, Saul’s dreadful diary does not petrify her further; instead she is brought to confirm her faith that there is a center to the subject again. Yet compared with the former, the statement about “real” is devoid of the emphasis on the mysterious “indestructibility” but dwells on the feature of being open, critical, and simultaneously responsible. As discussed in the first chapter, the narration of stories inheres a certain set of values and morality. Therefore, “To define myself is thus to become conversant with the values I operate by and am oriented toward in my ongoing actions and choices” (Kerby 59). There is little wonder that Anna’s highlight on her own moral outlook comes after the lengthy transcription of self-exploration in her notebooks. After the failed quest for Truth and the true self, Anna announces the values that she upholds, turning the focus from the ineffable “indestructibility” to the palpable “responsibility” in the individual. Being responsible is one of the features that one expects of a moral person. Therefore, we can find that from the plane of enigmatic transcendence Anna’s idea of the core within every person now lands on the solid territory of morality. The descent signals that Anna’s heart finally grows to the absence of Truth and extinguish the desire to move beyond the narrative/language.

Breakthrough

The intercourse with Saul drives Anna to go through the process of madness. After Anna accomplishes Lessing’s ritual of enlightenment, she finally arrives at the

solution to her predicament—imagination.⁵ Firstly, she holds up the imaginative vignette of “a gentle, wise, kind man” to Saul, urging him to embark upon the golden road to maturity so as to disengage from the morbidly circular pattern of his life (543). This piece of advice subtly indicates the direction that Anna should move into as well on account of their resemblance. Reciprocally, Saul pushes her to engage herself with the imaginative blueprints, doubling the momentum toward an artificial but imperative *telo* of life:

“Listen Anna, if we don’t believe the things we put on our agendas will come true for us, then there’s no hope for us. We’re going to be saved by what we seriously put on our agendas.”

“We’ve got to believe in our blueprints?”

“We’ve got to believe in our beautiful impossible blueprints.” (553)

To believe in the “beautiful impossible blueprints” is to imagine that life unfolds for a certain purpose. However, in the first place the artificial *telo* in the stories or narratives is “a kind of pain” for Anna (210). Therefore, the invocation of the beautiful impossible blueprints designates Anna has decided to reconcile with the artificial insertion of the teleological structure. On the one hand, it suggests that she is about to overcome her writing block since “the form”⁶ appears acceptable now (210). On the other hand, Anna seems to conclude that life cannot afford the absence of the *telo*. The attempt to live one’s life beyond narrative, the encounter with the purposelessness of life, is devastating. If life does not accord to the individual an authoritative and verified *telo*, its absence must be compensated by a tentative purpose, an imaginative blueprint. White asserts, “In this world, reality wears that

⁵ For a detailed discussion of madness in Lessing’s works see Draine “Nostalgia and Irony: The Postmodern Order of *The Golden Notebook*” (46). Lessing herself overtly declares, “To be pushed toward the point of irrationality is only a way of seeing things more clearly” (Ingersoll 65).

⁶ Anna’s term for the teleological development of the narrative.

mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience” (20). According to White, the restoration of the ordered and meaningful world must be negotiated through the agency of imagination. In the case of Anna, through the agency of imagination the artificial *telo* is inserted to avoid spiritual paralysis even though the futility of their effort to that *telo* is well understood. Then, the proposed solution is to engage oneself as if all the efforts would make a difference in the long run but secretly hold back from a wholehearted embrace at the prospect at the same time. To put it in another way, Saul and Anna conclude that the only way out of their dilemma and the answer to their existential question is to do “as if.” They cast themselves in the role of the boulder-pusher who labors on the mountain of human stupidity and force themselves to imagine that the rock falling back would stay a bit higher than it was so as to break out of the “cocoon of madness”(508).

Yet the reconciliation with the teleological structure strongly smacks of defeat. Anna seemingly decides to go back to the framed world of stories/narratives and the political illusion of the utopia. Clouds of self-delusion and evasion collect around the proposal of the beautiful impossible blueprints. Nevertheless, the open ending of *The Golden Notebook* dissipates the suspicion around Anna’s breakthrough. In the inner golden notebook, Anna and Saul depart with renewed strength to face their responsibility. Because “[t]o sit scribbling seems an admission of defeat, an acknowledgement of the writer’s impotence and the art’s irrelevance”, the gesture to face their responsibility is expressed by their determination to write and publish their works (Gasiorek 89). In the “Free Women” section, which is supposedly the work after Anna’s recovery from breakdown, the heroine Anna shows no intention to take up the pen but decides to be a welfare worker. Draine’s observation of the juxtaposition of the two contradictory endings is illuminating. She asserts that the

double endings create a thread of tension that obviates complacent settlement:

the ultimate expression of her balanced perspective is the novel as a whole, which refuses to settle for an easy view of any of the issues it raises, but rather creates for the reader that tension among versions of the truth which Anna must learn to recognize, tolerate, and transcend. (47)

As she implies, the non-closure of the novel bespeaks the load of uncertainty that the readers and Anna have to shoulder. The readers are left to wonder and explain for themselves what would become of Anna, and the writer Anna highlights the perpetual attraction of the conservative and secure life by including the ending of the defeated withdrawal. “The ‘truth’ is not in any one version of Anna’s experience but in what she—and we—understand by fusing the various fragments and perspective together” (Rubenstein 105-6). Due to this wedge of disparity in the double endings, the impulses for an easy settlement of life, the coherence of stories, and the equation of the experience with stories are frustrated. The violation of the conventional closure in narrative bespeaks Anna’s rejection of the conventional forms even though the quest for Truth beyond the narrative forms fails. Significantly, Anna’s uneasiness with the neatly framed world in narrative is not merely an aesthetic matter. Her struggle to break through the limits of the literary practices is also a correlative of her efforts to “expand one’s limits beyond what has been possible” (537). The juxtaposition of the double endings is a demonstration of her attempt “to forge a new shape for her life and her art which is a surrender neither to conventional form nor to formlessness” (Greene 287). In a word, even though she aborts the quest for Truth, Anna does not dismiss the reasons and motives that launch the project. She tries to reconcile with the absence of Truth without falling into the trap of self-delusion or self-limitation.

Moreover, the wedge of disparity not only thwarts the impulse for settlement, but also embodies the room of detachment or reservation on Anna’s part. The room of

detachment allows for the intellectual censorship to reevaluate and adjust his/her position. Thus the individual proceeds with “double consciousness,” the reservation of the actor from merging with the character he plays. The double consciousness makes the individual a split agent. Unlike the role-player who utilizes the double consciousness to hide behind the mask to elude the painful encounters, the responsible agent relies on the double consciousness to retain his/her intellectual clairvoyance when committing himself/herself. Magali Cornier Michael notices that when “Anna reemerges from her willful descent into madness, she retains a split self” (52). Indeed, the insight that Anna gleans from her breakdown is to confirm the strength of being split. Split or fragmentation is not necessarily a moral handicap if the individual can assume his responsibilities, making no attempt to duck away in the game of role-playing or to develop a chameleonic personality. For Anna, to assume the responsibility is to face the pain and bear the consequence with courage and grace. She realizes that “if what we feel is pain, then we must feel it, acknowledging that the alternative is death” (478-9). Although the line between the split conformist/role-player and the reserved participant is precarious, the detached participants set themselves apart from the club of the conformists by their attitude to frustration. The emphasis on being responsible and the grace of endurance turn Anna to the bright sides of schizophrenia.

Before Anna walks out of Mrs. Marks’ s consulting room, she has discerned that a split agent is probably exposed to a wider range of possibility. She states, “it seems to me the fact they are cracked across, they’ re split, means they are keeping themselves open for something” (416). After she emerges from mental collapse and accentuates moral responsibility, she finally arrives at the solution to the problem of “cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits” and “twist it into victory” (410). Split/fragmentation prevents her mind from degenerating into a

confined and sealed world but permits constant transfiguration in response to the new external stimuli. As long as the individual remains responsible, he/she escapes both the trap of the self-limitation and the grip of irresponsible playfulness. Elizabeth Abel asserts that the non-closure of *The Golden Notebook* dissolves the division between fiction and reality into a continuum of possibilities” (105). It is the continuum of possibilities that intensifies the jostling for supremacy and obviates static hierarchy. The balance Anna reaches at the end of the novel is similar to the “resting-point” that Lessing singles out for all the writers to arrive at against seducement of the easy but false escape from responsibility:

I believe that the pleasurable luxury of despair, the acceptance of disgust is as much a betrayal of what a writer should be as the acceptance of the simple economic view of man; both are aspects of cowardice, both fallings away from a central vision, the two easy escapes of our times into false innocence. One sees man as the isolated individual unable to communicate, helpless and solitary; the other as collective man with a collective conscience. Somewhere between these two, I believe is a resting-point, a place of decision, hard to reach and precariously balanced. It is a balance which must be continuously tested and reaffirmed. (Voice 11-12)

The non-closure of the novel embodies the hard-reached resting-point that invites contesting but declines the invitation of meaningless relativity and irresponsible attitude. The readers are not granted an absolute and flat ending but the uncertainty does not prevent them from following Anna’s stories and learning their lessons from her strains and self-exploration. Anna indeed strikes a balance that would embrace neither the nostalgic wholeness nor the nihilistic formlessness/meaninglessness. As a committed and responsible agent, she is flexible just as her self-narrative—*The Golden Notebook*—remains open-ended.

From the quoted passage above about the resting-point, it is also clear that Lessing revolts against the submission to despair and disgust. There is little wonder that her heroine eventually breaks out the shackles of despair and desperation and tries to shoulder her burden. Lessing's attitude can also explain why Anna labors to define the figure of the boulder-pusher when the figure Sisyphus is ready at hand. If Lessing fears that Camus's work with its "tired pity" is a surrender to despair, it is apt to suggest that Anna's laborious description about the boulder-pusher is a deliberate dismissal of Camus's Sisyphus (Voice 11). Whereas Camus's Sisyphus rejoices the process of rolling up the rock itself without the calculation of the results, the boulder-pusher strives after the improvement of the world. The vacuum of meanings and purpose in Sisyphus's world is not a place where everyone can inhabit, as Anna has demonstrated through the delineation of the moral paralysis. Sisyphus is indeed god-like and his task undoubtedly exceeds the limits of the human strength. Draine notices that Lessing penetrates the fragility of this existentialist idol and remarks, "More acutely than her precursors, Camus and Satre, Lessing senses that every bit of ground gained for consciousness is saturated with irony – and that an excess of irony leads eventually to bitterness, cynicism, and despair" (33). Cynicism and despair drains out the energy for action. By envisioning the figure of the boulder-pusher, Anna overcomes the paralysis of will and re-defines the meaning of her existence.

Anita Myles observes that many contemporary novels radiate the search of identity. The novelists explore "how the protagonists yearns earnestly to understand and to define who or what he is, and what is the purpose of his existence in this universe" (67). In *The Golden Notebook* Lessing presents Anna's self-exploration and self-definition. If Lessing remains true to her belief that the writer is an instrument for the good, Anna's solution is more than a design for the artistic consideration. The figure of the boulder-pusher can be also regarded as an example that Lessing sets for

all the people to maintain themselves in the fragmentary world.



Conclusion

“On a societal level,” Dieter Hoffman-Axthelem writes, “the establishment of personal identity is never an end in itself but a passing historical prerequisite for making forms of activity clear” (207). From this respect, identity serves as a sort of organizing point against which the individual makes sense of his activity. When the validity of this reference point is called into question, identity crisis arises. At a closer look, the picture of self-identity eventually harbors our answers to the meaning of life. Identity crisis thus can be grasped as a form of uncertainty about the meanings of existence. When identity crisis indeed raises the fear of meaninglessness, the individual is forced to re-answer the existential questions. If the feeling of uncertainty prolongs, existential angst ensues.

If identity crisis is bound up with the fear of meaninglessness, it then stands to reason to suggest that the moral dimension takes a very important place in the concept of self since “meaning” indicates the operation of the evaluative judgment and framework. Apart from the moral dimension, the self also accommodates a temporal dimension. The temporal nexus is tangible when people set out to define themselves—the instinctive response to survey the past in hope that it can explain who they are now, and once the link between the past and the present is established, the course for the future is seemingly hinted. Finally, the self-identity must be confirmed and supported by their community. Because of the solidity of feedbacks in the practical involvements, relations and commitments become the staunchest prop to sustain the individual’s self-identity. When the individual is strained under identity crisis, the maintenance of the daily performance is threatened. If the flux of the daily activity is indeed disrupted as a consequence of the identity crisis, this might trigger a downward spiral that leads to the breakdown of the self.

When *The Golden Notebook* begins, Anna’s relations and commitments have

already been under strain. She is a creative writer and a political activist. But in both she finds no desirable results. She is unable to write another novel because she suspects that writing has become a form of evasion and is irrelevant to the improvement of the world. The political activity which is directly relevant to the improvement of the world has in practice deviated from the communist ideals. The communist members, whether they choose to drop out of the party or to stay behind, mesmerize themselves in their ways to combat the bitterness resulting from the distortion of the ideals and the futility of their political maneuver. At last, Anna decides to break away from the Communist Party. On the same day, she realizes that her affair with Michael is drawing to an end, too. To her distress, she finds that she has “mis-defined” herself as a “free woman”. Her dependence on men goes as deep as any traditional female’s. Even when she is so willing to relinquish the posture of independence, she is still denied a shelter in the arms of her men because they have no intention to commit themselves emotionally. They assign her the role of the heartless free woman, secretly debasing her to the place of a sexual object. The last stroke is Janet’s departure, which denies her motherhood. At this juncture, the familiar picture of her self-identity falls to pieces. Anna’s identity crisis intensifies through this series of events. Each time when the relation or the commitment snaps, her life based on her self-identity suffers. Her maintenance of the daily performance is utterly fractured and the solid buttress to self-identity disintegrates. Such conditions further slide into a possible mental breakdown.

An examination of the three dimensions of the self also reveals the deterioration of Anna’s mental health. The dissolution of the daily routines decreases the opportunities for social intercourses. When the withdrawal from social intercourses indeed degenerates into seclusion, it signals that the social dimension of the self crumples. Similarly Anna’s temporal dimension is ruffled. When her lover Michael

complains about her motherhood, Anna feels the sense of unreality which springs from the confusion of the temporal distance of events. In the last part of the blue notebook, the disappearance of dating designates the rupture of the temporal stability. Another example is found in Saul's amnesia. Both cases show the inter-relatedness between temporality and self. With respect to the moral dimension, the disturbance is subtler and must be approached from the light of Anna's writing.

Apart from the practical involvements, writing as a form of narrative is also an important method to conceptualize and to uphold one's self-identity. Kerby quotes Ricoeur, "It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories that we tell about ourselves" (40). If self-identity emerges from narrative, Anna's notebooks can be considered as her various versions of self-narrative. Consequently, Anna's attempt at Truth, the authentic representation of reality and her experience, represents not only a writer's uneasiness with the mediation of language but also a quest for the true self. In the entry of 17 September, 1954, the flow of the episodes is meticulously documented without filtering. After the acknowledged failure of this record, a series of short and flat entries like annals ensue, with the attempt to maintain an absolute objectivity. The meticulous record contradicts the subjective evaluation of the events while the latter holds the narrative structure accountable for the inaccessibility of Truth. Both demonstrate that the quest is doomed and the true self is beyond reach. The failure is significant. Firstly, if evaluation operates on the moral horizon, the distrust of the evaluative judgment divulges that the quest for Truth is no less a struggle to transcend the moral dimension. The intention to move beyond morality is particularly obvious in the series of short entries since narrative structure is deliberately renounced to elude its inherent moral orientation. If the moral dimension is indispensable to the self, there is little wonder that the search for Truth and the true self leads to the death of the subject. It also

stands to reason that as Anna strives to recover from her breakdown, she feels compelled to emphasize the importance of moral responsibility and eventually singles out the responsible self as the center of the subject. With the highlight on the moral responsibility, as well as the invocation of the boulder-pusher, she gradually emerges from her identity crisis and overcomes the feeling of meaninglessness. Anna embraces the humanistic spirit that keeps faith in the strength of man and the grace in endurance. She looks up to the figure of the boulder-pusher to determine her direction. The figure of the boulder-pusher is her answer to the question of her existence. Besides, through her self-narratives, she acknowledges her moral framework. Her struggle to re-define her self, as Kerby predicts, has turned out to be a dialogue with the values she upholds (59).

Moreover, the doomed quest for Truth announces more than the impossibility to bypass the moral dimension. This abortive quest also suggests that if the mediation of language remains bedeviling, to transcend its limits is out of the question. It leads to the death of subject. If to transcend the constraints of language ushers in the specter of death and madness, Anna must come to terms with the form of the language/narrative. The reconciliation with the form speaks through the presentation of the novel as a whole since the presence of the novel designates Anna's conquest of her writing block and her recovery from the mental breakdown. The reconciliation, however, still betrays a touch of reservation. The juxtaposition of the two contradictory endings is a deliberate violation of the narrative closure. The conflicts create a thread of tension which aims to frustrate the impulse for certainty and security. Other than that, they also declare that Truth resides in neither version but remains beyond the narrative. The double endings seem to testify Anna's double consciousness after she rides through her identity crisis. It is like a resting-point in the intersection of various forces. Anna implies that we must endure the clashes and the impact so that we can open

ourselves to a variety of possibilities and live up to our potential. The artificial limits can be transgressed even though we are not allowed to fly into the field of the absolute unbound and free. We must dwell on the languaged world if we are responsible.

To be responsible is Anna's password to salvation. As she struggles to find the answer in her identity crisis, she is surrounded by the irresponsible agents, exemplified by the role-players and the chameleonic persons. It is proper to suggest that her obsession with the transcendental true self is her rejection of the centerless subjectivity embodied by the irresponsible characters. The moral hazards in the postmodern notion of the centerless subjectivity are cogently expressed through Anna's encounters with such split individuals as Saul and De Silva. If the Romanticist's discourse on the true self, together with its emphasis on the depth and personal significance, is the basis of the meaningful life as Gergen asserts, the challenge to the people living in the postmodern world is to restore the feeling of leading a full life without falling back on the romantic worldview (27). Overwhelmed by the view of fragmentation, Anna still clings to the vocabulary of "true" and "meaning." Therefore, Anna's struggle is not merely a matter of re-mapping her self-identity but can be amplified as an attempt to strike a balance that will not be engulfed by meaninglessness and the romantic worldview. Anna's solution is to look upon the Sisyphus-like boulder-pusher with endurance and hope. The faith in man which in Lessing's mind illuminates the nineteenth century literature also illuminates Anna's chaotic and fragmentary world. The figure of the boulder-pusher stands against the background of the destruction and meaninglessness. Lessing believes that "[t]he novelist talks, as an individual to individuals, in a small personal voice" (Voice 21) and due to the influence he might exert, the committed writer "must feel himself as an instrument of change for good or bad," as an "architect of the soul" (Voice 6-7).

Through the mediation of Anna, Lessing's voice comes across, whispering Lessing's prescription for the fear of fragmentation and meaninglessness. *The Golden Notebook* is indeed an attempt to "create a new way of looking at life" (76).

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