The Development of Feminist Thought towards Increasing Complexity in Ella Hepworth Dixon's Story of a Modern Woman, Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook and Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other.

Groot, Catherijne de

The Development of Feminist Thought towards Increasing Complexity in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman,* Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

MA Thesis

Rinke de Groot

Student number: -

Two-year Educational Master

Leiden University

Supervisor: Dr. E.J. van Leeuwen

Second reader: Dr. J.F. van Dijkhuizen

Date: 7-6-2024

Table of Contents

Introduction

As a socio-political movement and academic theory, feminism has developed into an increasingly complex body of critical thought and practice. From its origins in the late eighteenth century (Olympe de Gouges's *The Rights of Women and Female Citizens* [1791] and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* [1792]) to its current manifestations (fourth-wave feminism) in the twenty-first century, feminism has evolved by advocating for and critically responding to various changes in societal norms concerning women's roles in the public and private sphere, as well as ideologies of gender identity. This thesis focuses on the development of feminist thought towards increasing complexity with respect to how women's roles and identities were perceived and represented by feminist authors, in three major works of feminist fiction from the late nineteenth-, mid twentieth- and early twenty-first-century, respectively: *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) by Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing (1962) and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo.

The three novels analysed in each chapter of this thesis were written during a seminal period in the development of feminism, in which various aspects of the female role in society were widely discussed in the public realm and highlighted by feminist activism, literature and philosophy. Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* was written during the time in which the concept of the New Woman originated. This was a revolutionary concept at the time, urging women of the late nineteenth century to distance themselves from traditional Victorian ideals of womanhood and to pursue a more independent lifestyle. As Sally Ledger explains, "[i]f the New Woman was constructed as a threat to women's role as the mothers of the British Empire, then she was also, more generally, regarded as a threat to the economic supremacy of bourgeois men in Britain" (19). In chapter one, I will engage critically with the interpretations of Kate Rees and Kristin C. Ross concerning the reason why Dixon portrays moderate New Women in her novel. These critics agree that Dixon represents Mary Erle and Alison Ives as moderate

New Women in order to make the novel acceptable for a broader reading public. Instead, I argue that Dixon describes these characters as moderate New Women in order to portray two different types of realistic New Women. This way, Dixon draws parallels between moderate New Women and realistic New Women.

Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* was published in 1962, at the outset of the second feminist wave. In the chapter on this novel, I will focus specifically on how the novel responds to and engages with the sameness-difference debate that was central to the second feminist wave of the 1960s and 1970s. This debate concerned the disagreement between feminists about whether women should have the same rights and privileges as men, or whether they should have more distinct rights and privileges as women designating them as a specific and separate group. As explained by Linda J. Nicholson, "In the late 1960s and early 1970s two contradictory beliefs existed as part of the general culture: that the differences between women and men were deep and rooted in nature and, secondly, that women and men were basically the same" (3). In the second chapter, I expand on the definitions of Sameness and Difference Feminism as formulated by John Capps, Judith Evans and Linda J. Nicholson. I show that, in addition to Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Betty Friedan's *The Second Stage* (1981), Doris Lessing's novel *The Golden Notebook* can be linked to Gynocentric Feminism. This way, the novel already touches upon themes of the second feminist wave, which bloomed in the course of the 1960s. It needs to be mentioned that although the novel is also concerned with communism (Lessing was for a time active within communist politics), the scope of this thesis allows only for a focus on the specifically feminist themes in the novel.

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* can be linked to the concept of intersectionality of contemporary fourth wave feminism. Intersectionality is an analytical framework that focusses on the representation of marginalized groups who encounter multifaceted discrimination. Indeed, as Anna Carastathis explains, "In feminist theory,

intersectionality has become the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege" (304). In the third chapter, I build upon definitions of intersectionality as formulated by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Anna Carastathis. I show that Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* incorporates notions of intersectionality through her portrayal of black women's shared forms of oppression by individuals with a light skin tone and their similar responses to this oppression, but also the diverse manifestations of oppression and distinct responses to it.

As this thesis will show, the three literary works of English fiction portray an increasing awareness of the multifaceted nature of feminism that transcends any singular archetype of woman. In all three novels, the female writers seem to be aware of the complexity of feminism and argue that there exist a variety of feminist perspectives. However, although Dixon and Lessing dispute the idea of feminism as a monistic concept in their novels, Evaristo's novel shows this to have become received knowledge. This way, a development from arguing for the recognition of different feminist viewpoint to this becoming received knowledge is evident in the novels.

Each chapter is organized in a similar manner. First, a description of the theoretical and historical context relating to the seminal period in feminist history will be given. Next, a section dedicated to the novel's genre will show the genre's fundamental function in explaining the feminist themes of the novel. Then, an analysis focussing on key passages from the novel will demonstrate in what way the novel portrays the evolution of consciousness of the various manifestations of feminist thought. In all three novels that I explore in this thesis, London plays a significant role. Therefore, each chapter will contain a paragraph in which I analyse in what way the portrayal of London fulfils the development of feminism towards an increasingly pluralistic ideal. In addition, in each chapter I will provide examples of other literary works

from the specific feminist waves discussed in this thesis. These examples encompass both English and American literature because these feminist movements are not limited to England and, as Margaret McFadden has shown, an important "United States – British Isles axis" (7) in feminism developed in the course of the nineteenth century. This thesis does not aim to give a comprehensive description of the development towards the complexity of feminist thought. Instead, I look at the role of three key works of English fiction in this development as the scope of this thesis precludes further expansion.

Chapter 1: The Moderate New Woman in Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*

The female protagonists in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) – *Modern Woman* hereafter – are often interpreted as characters representing the upcoming New Woman at the end of the nineteenth century. However, critics frequently define Mary Erle and Alison Ives specifically as moderate New Women because they express both traditionalist and progressive ideas on the role of women in society. Dixon's description of moderate New Women characters in her novel is often interpreted as a strategy to satisfy the public who are critical of the New Woman (Reese & Ross). In this chapter, I will argue for another interpretation of Dixon's moderation of the New Woman figure; namely, I will argue that Dixon has not moderated her female protagonists for the sake of acceptance, but in order to create a realistic embodiment of the New Woman. In the novel, Dixon shows that the New Woman could be a woman who struggled with internal conflicts as she had to reject certain desires, and she could be someone who combined traditional Victorian gender roles and more progressive ideas on women's role in society. First, a description of the theoretical and historical context will be presented, focusing on Victorian gender ideology, the concept of the New Woman, varying public views of the New Woman and New Woman novels. Then, Dixon's characterization of Mary Erle and Alison Ives will be analysed, revealing two different versions of the moderate New Woman. I will also pay attention to the role of London in Dixon's representation of realistic New Women as Mary's view on London provides further proof for Dixon's descriptions of realistic New Women.

1.1 The New Woman within Victorian Gender Ideology

Within Victorian gender ideology, the assigned female gender roles were characterized by prescription of domesticity and inferiority. Ben Griffin explains that this oppressive ideology also informed Victorian law:

> In the middle of the nineteenth century a married woman could not own property of any kind in her own name and she had no legal right to the custody of her children. In fact married women had no independent legal identity in the eyes of the law: husband and wife were deemed to be one person, and that person was the husband. (4)

It is important to note that although gender roles and biological sex are interrelated, within contemporary Gender Studies, gender roles are considered to be a social construct relating to the expected behaviour of men and women, whereas biological gender, or sex, relates to the biological characteristics that define a person as male or female (See Kang, et. al. "The Sex/Gender/Sexuality System"). In this chapter, I will be concerned only with the female gender roles that were present in the Victorian era. The gender roles that were assigned to girls and women in the Victorian period consisted of the notion that they were, in all respects, inferior to men. Even in primary education, girls learned that their lives were subordinate to the lives of men. Moreover, in contrast to the public lives of men, women were responsible for the household and the upbringing of children (Galbraith 337-338). It is these gender roles assigned to women that the New Woman disagreed with and attacked.

The New Woman of the late-nineteenth century was a revolutionary concept development in the context of the feminist movement that at the time urged women to distance themselves from Victorian traditional ideals of womanhood and pursue a more independent lifestyle. The first feminist wave, which took place between the late-nineteenth and early-twenty-first century, lay the ground for the second wave. Dixon's *Modern Woman* is a literary product of this first feminist wave. The manner in which New Women pursued their goal of an

independent lifestyle differed, of course. On the one hand, there was the New Woman who was perceived as distinct from the category of nineteenth-century feminism (Rees 586). Although Reese does not explain the separate category of the New Woman in further detail, Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco provide a more extensive description: "The New Woman was famously associated with the quest for female enfranchisement and political representation, but often, rather than asking for new rights, she simply claimed them—or else she was willing to take to the streets in order to achieve them" (1). In harmony with late nineteenth-century feminism, the New Woman pursued voting rights and political inclusion. However, unlike earlier forms of Victorian feminist activity that sought to work through traditional political channels, such as the eventual passing of the Married Women's Property Act (1870), the New Woman would assert a claim to these rights forcefully by engaging in public demonstrations in order to pressure those with the power to bring about change to secure them. Otto & Rocco define this type of New Woman as a form of radical feminism (1). An example of a radical feminist activity is the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which was founded in 1903; through its militant campaign for women's suffrage in Britain the WSPU caught the attention of the public (Rosen xix). Ross mentions a similar type of New Woman when she says that the New Woman could be "a female who read voraciously, spoke her mind without reservation, dressed in less restrictive clothes or smoked" (76). The other type of New Woman is defined as "a woman who engaged in more defiant and threatening practices, such as cohabiting and bearing children out of wedlock" (Ross 76). This type of New Woman would show her criticism of traditional Victorian gender roles through less radical activities. Thus, the New Woman concerned women who shared the same goal, namely an independent lifestyle, but their views on how to achieve this goal differed.

Not only the view on the practices of the New Woman varied significantly, also the judgement formed about the New Woman was ‘‘double-coded’’ (Ross 76). According to Sally Ledger and Roger Lockhurst, the New Woman was:

> an image of sexual freedom and assertions of female independence, promising a bright democratic future; it could also mark an apocalyptic warning of the dangers of sexual degeneracy, the abandonment of motherhood, and consequent risk to the racial future of England. (xvii)

The New Woman meant different things to different sections of the British public. She could be an icon of female freedom but could also be seen as a hazard to society. In brief, the New Woman pursued the goal of an independent lifestyle in different manners and the view on her by the public differed greatly too.

1.2 Development of New literary Genre: New Woman Novels

The discrepancy in definitions and perspectives regarding the New Woman is mirrored in fictional representations about the New Woman. According to Ross, when a writer of a New Woman novel rejected the progressive character, the opinion of the author would be visible through for instance the portrayal of the woman next to another figure who was perceived as a threat, such as a dandy (77). Another way an author presented their dismissal of the New Woman would be to punish the female character in the novel. Indeed, the New Woman in narratives would often be an ‘‘unfortunate figure’’ (Ross 77). It happened regularly that a New Woman would be punished at the end of the story by making her suffer a form of mental disorder (*Lady Audley’s Secret*) or by showing how adopting the New Woman persona made it difficult for a woman to find a marriage partner (Ross 79-80). One example of a novel in which the New Woman character is punished is Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of D’urbervilles* (1891). Tess is punished for the way she deviates from societal norms as she is executed at the end of the novel. An

American example of a novel in which the New Woman character faces percussions is *The Awaking* by Kate Chopin (1899). In this story, Edna Pontellier explores her desire for independence and Chopin punishes her for this behaviour as the character commits suicide at the end of the story. It should be mentioned that when a novel describes the tragic end of the New Woman protagonist, this does not necessarily mean that the author of this novel rejects the New Woman identity out right. However, as Ross argues, it could indicate the author's refusal of the concept. Authors could also reject the New Woman by making their female character a so-called Old Woman whose only pursuits in life would be marriage and motherhood (Farmer 11). As the characteristics of the New Woman in novels was highly different from the traditional portrayal of women, the New Women were also often portrayed as a caricature in the press (Rees 606). In contrast to writers who criticized the New Woman, those who praised her saw in this modern figure "someone who would finally expose and correct the innumerable inequalities to which women had long been subjected" (Farmer 15). Writers who wrote about the New Woman tried to change traditional views on womanhood through their novels in which the protagonist was often a highly controversial woman (Rees 606). An example of a novel that advocates the New Woman is *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) by Margaret Oliphant. In this story, the female protagonist, Lucilla Marjoribanks, determines to become the leader of Carlingford and, after many setbacks, eventually succeeds. Oliphant thus presents the reader with a female protagonist whose ambitions contrast the traditional roles of her gender. The New Woman of the late-nineteenth century was both perceived as desirable and undesirable as represented in fiction or non-fiction writing.

1.3 Critical Interpretations of the New Woman in *Story of a Modern Woman*

Many critics agree that, in *Modern Woman*, Dixon represents Mary Erle as a moderate New Woman in order to make the novel acceptable for a broader reading public. Many critics

interpret Mary Erle as a moderate New Woman because she is less radical than most New Woman characters in novels are. Kate Rees, for example, describes Mary Erle as "[a] young female protagonist[] who resist[s] social and narrative norms, yet who offer[s] relatively modest and acceptable forms of rebellion" (581). Kristin C. Ross argues the same calling it a "strategy of muting the heroine's participation in the movement" (83). Critics have also paid attention to the character Alison Ives, arguing that Dixon divided the characteristics of the New Woman between her and Mary. Steve Farmer, for example, contends that Alison Ives embodies the ideals of the New Woman far more than Mary Erle does (32). This argument is repeated by Kristin C. Ross when she says that "much of the strident rhetoric has been given to Alison Ives" (83). To the question why Dixon would moderate her New Woman characters, the critics' answer often that she wants to describe characters that are acceptable to the reading public of the nineteenth century. According to Ross, Dixon responds to the positive and negative attitudes towards the New Woman by adjusting her female characters. She argues that Dixon "undoubtedly understood, and was acutely aware of, the necessity of catering to market demands in a way many other authors were not" (83). Rees agrees, saying that with Mary and Alison, Dixon "render[s] [her] central female protagonists more conventionally palatable" (590). Thus, it is a generally accepted interpretation that Dixon moderated the New Woman features of Mary Erle and Alison Ives in order to make her novel more acceptable to the general public. However, through the analysis of key passages from the novel, I will argue for a different interpretation of Dixon's moderation of her female protagonists; namely, that she wants to give a realistic description of the experiences of New Women in late-nineteenth-century England.

1.4 Dixon's focus on loss in the characterization of Mary Erle as a moderate New Woman

In *Modern Woman*, Dixon presents Mary Erle as a New Woman character; Mary challenges traditional Victorian gender roles such as domesticity and critiques the position of women in

late nineteenth-century England as victims of the patriarchy. From the outset of novel, it becomes clear to the reader that Mary Erle is not a girl who adheres to the prescribed roles of womanhood. When she is young, she resists traditional girlhood by favouring miniature guns over dolls: ‘‘At this time the child held the whole race of dolls in high scorn … She, on her part, was all for the violent delights of miniature guns and real gunpowder’’ (51). Mary rejects the gender role that is assigned to her based on the fact that she is a girl, which resonates the gender role rejections of New Women. Mary’s exposure to education also indicates her New Woman characteristics. Mary receives education from a professor when she stays with him and his family in Germany. It is this exposure to higher education that links her to the New Woman as university education is not in line with Victorian female gender roles. Indeed, Mary’s education in Germany ‘‘confer[s] a certain intellectualism to her character, aligning her more closely with the vilified New Woman’’ (Ross 86). Apart from her education in Germany, Mary also educates herself by reading novels with unconventional female protagonists. The New Woman characteristics of Mary become clear through her reaction to Brontë’s *Villette.* Mary longs for education and reads books to educate herself. In *Villette*, the protagonist, Lucy Snow, struggles for independence, and, at the end, lives out her life alone. Dixon writes the following when she describes Mary’s reaction to Lucy’s life: ‘‘How choky she felt at the throat when she read those last pessimistic, despairing words – words full of the sound and fury of angry seas and moaning winds. Why, poor patient hypochondriacal soul, were you destined never to be happy’’ (55). Lucy’s despairing fate touches Mary, and she realizes that a woman’s life is never intended to be pleasant. These words of despair are constantly repeated by Mary. For instance, when Mary hears that Vincent Hemming plans to marry another girl, Dixon writes: ‘‘She, like other women before her, must learn her fate with the eyes of the world fixed curiously upon her’’ (142). Later in the novel, she repeats these words saying ‘‘Women, she bethought her with a grim smile, should accept their fate with a graceful acquiescence’’ (169). Moreover, when Mary admits to

her traditional female role and engages into an amorous relationship with Vincent Hemming, her refusal of the prescribed gender role is described: ‘‘This man – a minute ago her friend, and now, in this infinitesimal atom of time, her lover … His hands, which held her two wrists as they stood there gazing at each other, felt like links of iron’’ (82). When she enters into an amorous relationship with Vincent, Mary conforms to her role as female lover. However, she immediately realizes that she despises this role as she sees Vincent as a man keeping her prisoner. She realizes that being with him coexists with a lack of freedom. Lastly, although Dixon refused to acknowledge openly that her novel was a New Woman novel, the connection between the names of Mary Erle and Marian Erle from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s narrative poem *Aurora Leigh* (1856) points to Mary Erle as a New Woman. Dixon herself called Elizabeth Barrett Browning ‘‘one of the earliest ‘new women’’’ (Zarif 716), and thus the close resemblance between the two characters’ names indicates a connection between Mary Erle and the New Woman (Zarif 716). In the novel, Dixon frequently alludes to the New Woman characteristics of Mary through the descriptions of Mary’s rejection of the traditional duties of women and her contemplations on the fate of women in late nineteenth-century society.

Dixon moderates the New Woman characteristics of Mary Erle in order to present the public with a more realistic version of the New Woman, in contrast to the radical version found often in New Woman fiction, because she describes her as a woman who has to refrain herself from certain desires. Indeed, Dixon clearly points to the conflicting character traits of a New Woman through describing Mary Erle struggles. On the one hand, Mary longs to be a free woman and distances herself from Victorian gender rules. On the other hand, she desires the love and affection of Vincent Hemming and realizes that, in order to become a New Woman, she has to ignore these desires. I already described that Mary gives in to Vincent Hemming. When this happened, Mary experiences her freedom being taken from her. However, immediately after that part, Mary describes her will to subject to Vincent: ‘‘In that one supreme

moment Mary Erle tasted for the first time in all its intensity, the helplessness of woman, the inborn feeling of subjection to a stronger will, inherited through generations of submissive feminine intelligences'' (82). Although rationally, Mary does not want to let Vincent limit her freedom, she still experiences a strong eagerness to let him do this. By describing this feeling as existing from birth, Dixon points to the trouble a woman experiences when trying to ignore this feeling.

The fight between feeling and rationality is emphasized throughout the novel. It reaches its climax when Mary rejects Vincent as a romantic partner. Before she rejects Vincent, Mary promised Alison that she would never hurt another woman. She puts this promise into practice when rejecting Vincent saying: ''I can't do it. I can't. I can't - … I have always loved you – but it's the other woman – your wife'' (184). Mary knows that, as a New Woman, she has to support other women and thus should not become Vincent's mistress. Although she rejects him, she still constantly has to fight the urge to become his mistress. Dixon pays attention to this struggle by describing the thoughts Mary has when she looks as herself in the mirror. Through the reflection of herself in the mirror, feeling and rationality are embodied as two different versions of Mary: ''When she looked in the glass a woman looked back at her with reproachful hunting eyes … What are we two? Two atoms of matter, breathing, living, loving, suffering'' (188). While Mary speaks towards her reflection, both thoughts on her decision are presented. On the one hand, she tells herself: ''Give him to me, give him to me'' (188). On the other hand, she also realizes that life consists of ''laws made for man's convenience and pleasure, not for mine'' (189). Ultimately, Mary realizes that in order to become the New Woman she wants to be, she has to give up the part of herself that longs for Vincent: ''What had she done that she was always to be sacrificed? Why was she to miss the best that life has to offer?'' (187). The last sentence of the novel stresses for the last time the fact that a New Woman has to give up a part of herself: ''Standing alone there on the heights, she made a feint as if to grasp the city spread out before

her, but the movement ended in a vain gesture, and the radiance of her face was blotted out as she began to plod homeward in the twilight of the suburban road'' (192). The last sentence points to the brightness and happiness that has faded from Mary's face as she had to give up love.

Through the descriptions of Mary Erle's struggle to embody the ideals of a New Woman, Dixon seems to have wanted to inform her readers that being a New Woman comes with the struggle of ignoring or rejecting certain personal desires. In her novel, Dixon denies the usual descriptions of the New Woman in literature as a controversial character (Rees 606). Indeed, Dixon describes that the New Woman experiences desires that are linked to Victorian gender ideology, but the New Woman actively rejects these desires. This rejection of desires often coexists with feelings of melancholy. Therefore, Dixon does not moderate the New Woman in order to please the reading public, but in order to give a realistic fictional representation of a New Woman.

1.5 Dixon's Characterization of Mary Erle as a Moderate Hybrid New Woman

Through Alison Ives, Dixon provides the reader with a realistic New Woman who combines traditional Victorian notions and more progressive ideas of the New Woman. Alison Ives is a New Woman because she commits her life to exploring the concept and social status of womanhood. Just as Mary, Alison realizes that many women are too dependent on men: ''All we women are so incredibly dependent on other people. It's absurd that we don't know how to do anything useful'' (71). Moreover, Alison is described as a woman who has ''none of the usual ambitions'' (149). Instead of focusing on her maternal duties, Alison focusses on the womanhood by training other women in becoming fit for society. For instance, she helps Eveline with developing her sense of humour as with humour she ''would never fall in love at all; and as to improvident marriages, they wouldn't exist'' (74). In addition to the fact that this

passage indicates Alison's devotion to women's role in society, it also describes Alison's view on marriage. Indeed, the passage shows her rejection of marriage as a social and legal institution. Another clear indication of Alison's focus on the role of women in society is the famous words she tells Mary as she informs her: ''Promise me that you will never, never do anything to hurt another woman'' (164). Moreover, she further explains that ''If women only used their power in the right way! If we only united we could lead the world. But we're not'' (164). In contrast to Mary, whose contemplations on female life are pessimistic, Alison's words are much more optimistic as she believes that female inferiority can be overcome. Dixon also incorporates moderated characteristics into Alison Ives' character, though they are much different from Mary's moderation.

Alison combines traditional views and progressive views on womanhood. For instance, Alison condemns Mary's aspiration of becoming an artist as ''No woman ever made a great artist yet'' (72). It seems that Alison is revealing a masculinist perspective of artistic genius. In her opinion, a female artist cannot be a great artist. However, she is wrong as various Victorian female artists were celebrated in their own day, such as the poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, novelists such as George Eliot and painters such as Anne Ansley. Alison also informs Mary that being a housewife is much more important: ''Schools of cooking, and not schools of art, are what we want … You may leave your painter genius to find his way to the front, whereas boiled potatoes are a daily necessity'' (88). In both passages, Alison's views seem to be in line with the Victorian gender ideology which relates the female gender to domesticity. Thus, although Alison displays characteristics of the New Woman through her devotion to the late nineteenth-century feminist cause movement in which women supported each other, she also shows views that belong to the traditional Victorian gender ideology. By adding the moderated characteristics to the character of Alison Ives, Dixon presents the reader with a version of a New Woman different from Mary Erle. Dixon shows that a New Woman

does not have to incorporate all New Woman behaviours and thoughts. Instead, Dixon offers a much more realistic version of the New Woman as a woman who does not reject all Victorian notions but combines these with more progressive ideas. Therefore, Dixon does not provide the reader with a moderate New Woman in order to please the public. Rather, in her novel, she provides the reader with the embodiment of a realistic New Woman. This way, she proposes a different view on the New Woman than most nineteenth-century writers as Alison is also not a highly controversial character.

In addition to the moderated characteristics of Mary's and Alison's personality, Dixon also emphasizes the realistic aspects of the lives of a New Woman through Mary's views on London. During the period in which the concept of the New Woman became a topic of public debate, London was both an important place for feminist campaigns and known for its vice and prostitution. According to Barbara Caine, nineteenth-century London was:

> the first and major city in which women established independent lives and in which they began to work on both a paid and an unpaid basis in public activities and institutions. London was the first British city to see women appointed to school boards and as Poor Law guardians and active members of local government. In the 1880s and 1890s, it also saw the growth of substantial communities of women engaged in philanthropy and social investigation. London remained the center for the various campaigns that originated at Langham Place, particularly those centering on education and employment and then on the suffrage. (770)

London was a place that provided a safe and flourishing environment for women who pursued freedom and independence. Still, the city was also associated with scandal as it was also seen as a place filled with prostitution (Caine 767-770). In *Modern Woman*, London is not described as a place of freedom, rather, it stands for the ''choking narrowness of life'' (Farmer 25). Indeed, in the novel Mary is often told that London negatively influences her health. For instance,

Doctor Danby tells her that she ‘‘lives too much in London. There is too much strain on the nervous system’’ (143). Mary eventually realizes the same: ‘‘London never did agree with me’’ (180). Steve Farmer describes Mary as a woman who ‘‘no longer sees a city that will listen to her when she speaks, but only an inexorable, triumphant London’’ (35). Through Mary, Dixon presents the reader with a New Woman who does not view London as a welcoming place; she associates the city with her struggle for independence. The stark contrast between Barbara Caine’s description of Victorian London as playing a capital role in Victorian feminism, and Mary’s view on London as a place of suffocation once again shows Dixon’s emphasis on the need to present a realistic and personalised image of New Woman.

2.7 Conclusion

The nineteenth-century New Woman was ‘‘many things to many people’’ (Farmer 16). Although the view on and the practices of the New Woman differed greatly, she was a woman who challenged the Victorian traditional gender roles. These gender roles for women encompassed the assigned task concerning domesticity and motherhood, and their inferiority to men. The acceptance of the New Woman differed between different strands of Victorian society. Some saw her as a threat to society while others saw her as an example of a woman choosing freedom. In novels about the New Woman, the author’s rejection or approval could be concluded from the portrayal of the New Woman character. Many critics have concluded from Dixon’s descriptions of Alison Ives and Mary Erle as moderate New Women that Dixon was trying to please the reading public who was critical of the ideas and practices of the New Women. However, in this chapter I have put forward a different argument, namely, that Dixon has moderated the two female protagonists not for the sake of acceptance but for the sake of realism. In contrast to the highly controversial and sensational representation of New Woman characters in many nineteenth-century fictions such as Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of D’urbervilles*

(1891), Dixon proposes a much more nuanced take on the New Woman figure that focused on how adopting the identity of the New Woman could inspire young women at the end of the nineteenth century, but also how adopting this identity involved loss and new forms of restriction. Mary Erle is a New Woman because she rejects certain Victorian gender roles and criticizes the place of women in late nineteenth-century Britain. However, Dixon also describes Mary's struggle with rejecting her desires for Vincent in order to adhere to the characteristics of a New Woman. This way, Dixon shows that New Women have to reject or ignore certain parts of themselves in order to become a New Woman. Moreover, Dixon shows that this is a challenging and difficult process. Dixon uses the character Alison Ives in order to portray a different type of realistic moderate New Woman. Alison Ives is a New Woman because of her focus on the role of women in late nineteenth-century British society. However, Alison also supports certain traditional views on womanhood such as the importance of being a housewife in contrast to being an artist. This way, Dixon shows that a New Woman is not someone who rejects all Victorian conventions regarding female gender roles but rather combines them with more progressive ideas.

Chapter 2: Gynocentric Feminism in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) remains a controversial novel amongst literary scholars with respect to its status as a feminist text. On the one hand, critics claim that the novel is aligned with feminist themes such as liberation, identity formation and the exploration of female sexuality. On the other hand, critics, including Lessing herself, express that there is no immediate connection between the novel and the second wave of feminism that came to inform academic debates about women's identities and roles in society during the 1960s. In this chapter, I will argue that the novel does indeed touch upon feminist themes and implicitly looks forward to the second wave of feminism that would boom during the 1960s. More specifically, I will argue that in *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing develops a theory of Gynocentric Feminism as she emphasizes the unique position of women in society. Firstly, a description will be given of the historical and theoretical context relating to second-wave feminism and the sameness-difference debate which gained attention during this period. Then, key passages from *The Golden Notebook* will be analysed focusing on both Anna's unique position in society and the way in which this unique position is expressed through the novel's unique form. Moreover, I will explore the role of London as a significant setting in relation to Lessing's specific literary variant of Difference Feminism in *The Golden Notebook*.

2.1 The Sameness-Difference Debate of the Second Feminist Wave

Second-wave feminism bloomed in the course of the 1960s and focused on broad societal and political transformations, including the sameness-difference debate. It was fostered by the growing momentum of feminism during the first half of the twentieth century and focused on developing "critical analyses of the structural features of patriarchal societies in consequence of which women and men, generally speaking, live markedly different lives from one another

structurally, materially, experientially'' (Code 30-31). Although supporters of Sameness Feminism and Gynocentric Feminism, also called Difference Feminism, share the same goal, namely gender equality, advocates of these two forms of feminist theory seek to achieve this goal using different strategies. Indeed, Sameness feminists argued for the equal rights and opportunities for women, whereas Gynocentric feminists argued for additional rights and privileges for women. The latter type of feminist substantiated their view based on their perspective on society as male biased: ''[there] are feminists who point to the male bias of our social institutions and the difficulty a woman has in being both a mother, say, and a professional'' (Capps 65). Gynocentric feminists believed that women could never have the same rights and opportunities as men because the structure of society causes obstructions for them. Therefore, women need extra privileges in order to balance out their rights.

The second feminist wave saw a change from Sameness Feminism to Gynocentric Feminism. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan expressed her view that women can only enjoy the same opportunities as men once they become like men. Therefore, they should overcome their womanhood. However, in *The Second Stage* (1981), she encouraged women to accept and admire their womanhood. In this book, Rosemarie Tong explains, Friedan expressed her belief that ''women, though different from men, can still be men's equals, provided society values things 'feminine' as much as things 'masculine'" (27). In the later book, Friedan points to the unbalanced characteristics of society as ''masculine'' features are rendered more important than ''feminine'' features. This way, Friedan recognized that in order for women to be equal to men, they need to get more opportunities.

Another feminist who played a crucial role in the establishment of Gynocentric Feminism was Kate Millett. In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett expressed the view that women and men should not be treated equally as women have a unique position in society: ''[b]ecause of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures, and their life experiences

are utterly different-and this is crucial'' (31). Millett acknowledged the different but important experiences of women. After the publication of her study, female writers started considering female literature as distinct from traditional, male literature as women have different experiences than men (Kubissa 24). This way, Gynocentric Feminism was prevalent in literature as novels written by women were viewed as describing the unique position of women in society. This chapter will show that in *The Golden Notebook*, which was published before *Sexual Politics*, ideas about the unique viewpoint of women, which allowed them to write stories distinct from male literature, are already incorporated.

In both Sameness and Gynocentric Feminism, a division regarding the approach to achieving equality is found. Judith Evans divides Sameness Feminism into what she calls Liberal Feminism and Early Radical Feminism. Liberal feminists argue for

> equality in the sense of attainment, and therefore treatment, and justifies it via sameness, 'androgyny'. It says: we deserve to be equal with you, for we are in fact the same. We possess the same capabilities; but this fact has been hidden, or these abilities have, while still potentially ours, been socialized, educated, 'out'. (Evans 13)

The other type of Sameness Feminism consists of women who believe that women as well as men have been significantly damaged by the patriarchy and capitalism. As a consequence, equality can only reach once these systems are removed from society (Evans 14). *The Feminine Mystique* contains arguments that relate to liberal feminism; Friedan argues that women should have the same capabilities as men, and therefore they should reject their feminine side. An example of an early radical feminist is Canadian American writer Shulamith Firestone who, in *Dialectic of Sex* (1970), expressed a desire for a revolution which will overthrow patriarchal and hierarchical systems of oppression (Evans 14). Linda Nicholson describes the division within Difference Feminism. The first orientation focused on the victimization of women due to the oppression caused by the male-focused society. The second variety concentrated on both

the positive and negative aspects of female life. The third type described ‘‘the distinctive positions of women … [which] provide a unique and positive standpoint for understanding society and for developing a liberatory vision’’ (3). Both Friedan’s *The Second Stage* and Millett’s *Sexual Politics* are associated with the third type of Gynocentric Feminism as they both emphasize the unique experiences of women. This chapter will show that Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* also shows a Gynocentric feminist viewpoint that emphasizes women’s distinct perspective on post-war mainstream English society.

2.2 Gynocentric Feminism and the Genre of the *Kunstlerroman*

The Golden Notebook shows a connection to Gynocentric Feminism through Lessing’s bringing together of formal aspects taken from different literary genres in the novel. As a response to the second feminist wave, feminist authors condemned the tradition of ‘‘male’’ literature and created their own genre of literature called women’s quest fiction. In this type of fiction, ‘‘woman seeks ‘freedom’ from traditional roles, looks to her past for answers about the present, looks to the cultural and literary tradition that formed her, contemplates the ‘role models’ it provides her’’ (Greene, ‘‘Feminist Fiction’’ 82). One variety of women’s quest fiction, and the form of quest fiction *The Golden Notebook* belongs to, is the *Kunstlerroman*, which describes the quest for something new through literary terms (Greene, ‘‘Feminist Fiction’’ 82). In order to distance themselves from genres primarily dominated by male writers, female writers sought for new forms that were not already overpowered by the male gender. A *Kunstlerroman* is an example of a genre that frees ‘‘women from the stereotypes to which the cultural and literary tradition confined them’’ (Greene, ‘‘Feminist Fiction’’ 83).

An example of a woman writer who challenged masculine literary conventions is the modernist novelist and short story writer Virginia Woolf. Her novel *The Years* (1937) is called a ‘‘radical documentary’’ as it encompasses ‘‘archiving, recording, witnessing, culling,

collaging, photographing and filming'' (Kennedy-Epstein 58). Similar to a scrapbook and documentary, Woolf's novel consists of different pieces of text, and it is the reader's task to interpret the scraps of text (Kennedy-Epstein 58). *The Golden Notebook* also questions whether women can condemn patriarchy by using masculine styles of writing. The novel, similar to *The Years*, consists of different types of texts of which the coherence is not always transparent. It is the reader's responsibility to connect the different pieces of text. This lack of coherence is linked to the fragmentation of women's consciousness and identity within patriarchal society.

The novel contains five sections, and these sections are separated by the four notebooks: black, red, yellow and blue. The black notebook is concerned with the years Anna spent in Africa and the only novel she has ever published: *Frontiers of War*. The red notebook is about her experiences with communism. The yellow notebook is concerned with the novel she is writing about her relationship with Saul. The blue notebook is dedicated to everyday life events. In order to fully comprehend the literary analysis of this novel, it should be mentioned that the characters Ella and Paul Tanner are the fictionalisations of Anna Wulf and Saul Green. Anna has created autobiographically inspired fictional characters in the yellow notebook. Each section is preceded by a chapter called ''Free Women'' which is concerned with women's position in society. Apart from the division of the novel itself, consisting of sections discussing different themes such as colonialism, politics, gender, and writing, the genres of the different chapters of the notebooks differ too. For instance, the first yellow notebook discusses the relationship between Anna and Saul in the form of a story of 52 pages, in which Ella and Paul represent the alter egos of Anna and Saul. The fourth yellow notebook, in contrast, represents the relationship in the form of short stories in which the names Ella and Paul are not mentioned:

> *4 A SHORT STORY
>
> A healthy woman, in love with a man. She finds herself becoming ill, with symptoms she hasnever had in her life. She slowly understands that this illness is not her, she

> understands the man is ill. She understands the nature of the illness, not from him, how he acts or what he says, but from how his illness is reflected in herself. (468)

In addition to utilizing different structural and stylistic devices to express the complexity of women's experiences in her novel, Lessing also uses different literary devices as she switches between using names and using pronouns. Genre differences in the same chapter of the notebooks are also found. For instance, in the first blue notebook, Lessing switches from diary entries to listing over 50 newspaper headlines:

> 23rd March, 1953
>
> STALIN DIES. *Express.*
>
> 23rd March, 1953
>
> 2,500 MAU ARRESTS. *Express.* (226)

Lessing applies the variation between genres to every dimension of her novel: the four notebooks deal with various different themes such as colonialism and gender, the chapters of the same notebooks are presented differently through using different genres, and even within the same chapter of a notebook different genres are utilized. In a *Kunstlerroman* women distance themselves from masculine traditions, and thus this type of novel reflects the unique position of women in society. This way, *The Golden Notebook* can be linked to the project of Gynocentric Feminism as an emphasis is placed on the different perspective of women which eventually provides them with unique place in society. The distinctive experiences of women eventually able them to create their own genre of literature.

2.3 Lessing's focus on the unique position of women in the characterization of Anna Wulf

In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing sheds light on the disinclination towards love and subsequent hollowness of the male characters in the novel. When it comes to love, the men in the novel seem unable to move further than verbally expressing their love. When the male characters

sense that the relationship starts to involve love, whether coming from themselves or from their female partner, they withdraw. Consequently, they always refrain from engaging in authentically amorous relationships. Anna describes this vicious cycle as follows:

> Then the man goes to the woman and says: I love you. And she says, in terror: What do you mean? He says: I love you. So she embraces him, and he moves away, with nervous haste, and she says: Why did you say you loved me? And he says: I wanted to hear how it would sound. And she says: But I love you, I love you, I love you – and he goes off to the very edge of the roof and stands there, ready to jump – he will jump if she says even once again: I love you. (433)

The passage above shows that the male characters are not able to confront themselves with their romantic feelings for others. They are not able to move further than expressing their love and thus are incapable of engaging authentically in a romantic relationship. This image is repeated constantly throughout the novel. For instance, Anna confronts Saul with this evasive behaviour saying: ‘‘You mean, when a woman began to care about you, or found you out, you moved on to the next’’ (503). Another description of the evasive behaviour of men would be in one of Anna’s short stories in which she says: ‘‘He realizes that his need for temporary refuge has trapped him into what he most dreads: a woman saying: I love you’’ (469). What is more, the male characters desire to know that a woman has slept with someone else; this functions as a confirmation that the woman is not in love with them: ‘‘But whereas he is excited by the knowledge she has been sleeping with someone else, she is frozen up because he is excited, not by her, but the fact she has been with someone else’’ (473). Thus, Lessing portrays her male characters as being unable to love a woman or accept that a woman loves them.

According to Gayle Greene, the men in Lessing’s novel are unable to meaningfully and emotionally connect to women by ‘‘limiting and dividing themselves’’ and thus ‘‘sacrificing a portion of the self’’ (‘‘Women and Men’’ 287). The male characters deny themselves access to

certain parts of their being in order to adopt the stereotypical masculine role of their time. The term "hegemonic masculinity" can be applied to the context that Lessing creates. Hegemonic masculinity is "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell 832). In order for a man to be considered honourable, they should adhere to all that the dominant gender ideology prescribes and thus ignore their feeling and emotion and instead focus on reason and action. From this perspective, men are as much interpellated by the dominant gender ideology as women; the crucial difference lies in the power dynamics within a culture that positions manhood and male roles at the centre and women within more marginal and subordinate positions within a society. This male inability of engaging in romantic relationships is not a component of Dixon's novel; she describes Vincent Hemming as someone who can pursue an amorous relationship with Mary quite openly and successfully.

In her experimental literary form Lessing expresses ideas relating to Gynocentric Feminism; she presents the reader with the character of Anna who, in contrast to male characters like Saul Green and Richard Portmain, confronts herself with her vulnerability and through this experience is able to grow personally. In the novel, Anna has the goal of becoming independent, as described her dream:

> She was standing on the edge of a wide yellow desert at midday … Anna knew she had to cross the desert. Over it, on the far side, were mountains – purple and orange and grey … she was enclosed by them, enclosed by these vivid dry colours. There was no water anywhere. Anna started off to walk across the desert, so that she might reach the mountains … She woke knowing that if she was to cross the desert she must shed the burdens. (359)

The metaphor of the desert that Anna has to cross relates to the independence that she seeks. The burdens, then, that she has to get rid of, can be linked to the fact that she continually has to

face her weaknesses in order to overcome them. Although not specifically described in the dream, it is conceivable that Anna desires independence from men because the novel emphasises Anna's inability to develop an independent personality. Indeed, it is often mentioned that Anna desires a personality that is not influenced by or subordinate to men. During the time Anna and Saul were romantically involved, Anna let her life be characterized by him:

> Lying in the darkness, inside Paul's[1] arms, she thought that those arms had slowly, over the years, shut out everyone else. She went out very little, because she did not enjoy going out by herself, and because she had accepted, very early on, that to go out together in company meant more trouble than it was worth. (203)

Anna is unable to develop meaningful connections other than with Saul. Moreover, in addition to her life, she also lets Saul define her personality, which she realizes later: "Now she saw that her whole personality had changed" (277). Anna does not only let Paul delineate her life and personality when they were in a relationship, Paul also influences her life greatly when they separated: "I had become part of him … I could no longer separate myself from Saul" (512). The only time Anna is able to separate herself from Paul is when she has the opportunity to become romantically involved with another man: "Ella went to bed, and for the first time in many nights, did not summon the memory of Saul" (286). Although Lessing's description of Anna's dependency on men is quite pessimistic, it is Anna's ability to constantly expose herself to her vulnerability which makes her eventually able to become a free woman.

To be able to fully understand the course of exposure to development, the influence of psychologist R.D. Laing on Lessing's work needs to be discussed. Laing was an influential (if controversial) psychiatrist and existential psychologist in the 1960s whose unorthodox views on schizophrenia (namely, the denial of its existence and calling it a label created by society),

[1] Don't confuse this Paul (Paul Tanner) with Paul Blackenhurst from the Black notebook. In this thesis, only the character Paul Tanner is analysed.

greatly influenced Lessing's ideas about women's mental health within patriarchal society (Kaufmann 102). Like Laing, Kaufmann explains, Lessing believed that ''only at the point of breakdown can something new enter, something that transforms our perceptions and enables us to see the relation of politics to personal malaise'' (110). In order to let Anna reach the point of breakdown, and subsequently be able to personally evolve, Lessing portrays Anna as constantly confronting herself with her weakness and yield until her point of breakdown. These experiences enable her to ''extend the limits of her own being'' (Greene, ''Women and Men'' 284). By highlighting the contrast between the male characters in the novel, who avoid love, and Anna who confronts herself with love, Lessing describes the experiences of Anna as a unique female experience. This way, Lessing develops a theory Gynocentric Feminism, focusing on the unique ability of women to expose themselves to love, which makes them vulnerable. This vulnerability, in turn, is fundamental in their journey towards becoming liberated individuals. Moreover, through its link to Gynocentric Feminism, the novel looks forward to the second wave feminism of the 1960s. In *Modern Woman,* Dixon also alludes to the unique position of women in society as she portrays two realistic female lives of late-nineteenth century New Women.

The last reason why *The Golden Notebook* expresses the same feminist goals of Gynocentric Feminism is because Lessing highlights the differences between women in her novel. Although the main emphasis of Gynocentric Feminism was placed on the differences between men and women and the unique position of women in society, Difference Feminism also argued for an acknowledgement of the differences between women. As Linda Nicholson argues, ''there were few texts that were not acknowledging differences among women'' (4). An example of such a text is *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) written by Angela Carter. The novel portrays various different female characters who have a different view on the role of women in society. For example, the character Tristessa is a dominant and powerful figure who challenges

female subjectivity while the character Mother is a nurturing and maternal figure who embodies traditional view of women as mothers. The character Doll portrays the exaggerated female qualities and shows the objectification of women. Although in *The Golden Notebook* the main emphasis is placed on the distinctive role of women in London, Lessing also pays attention to the differences between women. In Lessing's emphasis on the differences between women, the city of London plays a significant role.

London played an important part as an intellectual hub during the second feminist wave. It figured as a centre for the movement in Britain (Bruley 75). In Lessing's novel, however, Anna does not share the view of London as a city suitable for women who seek freedom from patriarchal oppression. Anna often describes her discontentment with the city: "To move, mile after mile, through the weight of ugliness that is London" (168). Moreover, Anna experiences an uplift of her mood when she leaves London: "They left the ugly trailing fringes of London behind, sunlight lay about them, and Ella's spirits rose so sharply that she felt intoxicated … 'You look very pleased with yourself.' 'Yes', it's getting out of London" (177). Thus, although London seems to be an attractive place for a woman trying to become more independent, Anna does not appreciate the city. This contradiction between the collective view on twentieth-century London and Anna's viewpoint shows Lessing's emphasis on the differences between women. Although most women enjoyed London during the second feminist wave for its welcoming stance on independence, Lessing shows that this is not the experience of every woman. Therefore, her description of Anna's experience with London once more strengthens my claim that *The Golden Notebook* is connected to Gynocentric Feminism. This contradiction between the collective view and the characters' view on London is also present in *Modern Woman* as Erle's negative experience with late nineteenth-century London contradicts the generic view on late nineteenth-century London as open to feminism.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is a work of second-wave feminist fiction as it is closely associated with the central concerns of Gynocentric Feminism. Lessing wrote her novel at the outset of the second wave, and as such it can be considered a pioneering work of literary feminism. Although the main aim of the second feminist wave was to inform the public of the male oppression of women in society, it also showed an interest in the sameness-difference debate. Sameness feminists argued that women should be treated equally as men. Difference or Gynocentric feminists, on the other hand, argued that women should have certain privileges and rights as the society they live in is male biased. Lessing's novel belongs to the category within Gynocentric Feminism which argues that women have a unique position in society and thus also a unique perspective on society. Firstly, *The Golden Notebook* can be associated with Gynocentric Feminism because it is a *Kunstlerroman*, a genre associated with a movement of women who wanted to distance themselves from male genres. Writers such as Lessing asked themselves how they could condemn the patriarchy while using male dominated genres. Therefore, a new, female-associated, genre was created. The *Kunstlerroman* consists of differences scraps of text, and in *The Golden Notebook* different themes, genres and literary devices can be found. Lessing also shows the distinctive position of women in society through describing the unique experiences of women concerning love, which enable them to eventually develop resilience. In the novel, men show a disinclination towards love and their evasive behaviour prevents them from personal growth. Anna, however, confronts herself with her weakness. She knows that her vulnerability is her dependency on men, especially on Saul. However, because she does not avoid her vulnerability but constantly confronts herself, she is eventually able to move on. This is an experience that the male characters in the novel do not share. Lastly, Lessing's description of the differences between women connects her to Gynocentric Feminism. Difference feminism was also concerned with

acknowledging the differences between women. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing distances Anna from the collective view on twentieth-century London as she describes Anna's discontent towards London, which was a view not commonly shared by feminists. This way, Lessing shows that feminism does not consist of one collective thought but that experiences between women may differ.

Chapter 3: Intersectionality in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) has often been linked to intersectionality because of the descriptions in the novel of the lives of twelve black, mostly female, characters in Britain. The novel focuses on intergenerational and intercultural relations regarding the theme of oppression. In this chapter, I argue that in her exploration of intersectionality, Evaristo reveals shared forms of oppression and responses but also highlights the diverse manifestations of oppression and distinct responses to it. This way, the novel has the potential to empower women through awareness of the intersectional nature of their oppression. First, a description will be given of the theoretical context relating to intersectionality in feminist theory. In the descriptions of the theoretical context, I will also focus on one social movement that is closely related to intersectionality: namely the Natural Hair Movement. Writing in an American context, Jeffries and Jeffries explain that "hair ranks high among the many issues African Americans struggle with throughout their negotiations of an aesthetic identity in a White-dominated society," and women, "in particular, subject themselves and are subject to norm referenced ideals of beauty that for centuries have been grounded upon a European standard" (160). This is equally true for black women growing up and living in London. In relation to the hegemony of European standards for beauty as well as gender roles, the genre of the novel, 'fusion fiction', and key passages from *Girl, Woman, Other* will be analysed focusing on the complex descriptions of oppression on the basis of race and gender and the black women's responses to it in developing a copying strategy. I will also explore the role of London as a pivotal setting within Evaristo's literary version of intersectionality. It is important to note that Evaristo never intended to represent all black women in her novel. As she has explained in an interview with Alison Donnell: ''My aim with *Girl, Woman, Other* was to explore the variety of who we are as black British women. Not to be representative'' (100).

3.1 Intersectionality in Feminist Theory

Intersectionality is an analytical framework that focusses on the representation of marginalized groups who encounter multifaceted forms of discrimination. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in a 1989 article in which she condemns the monistic approach to discrimination at the time. In the article, Crenshaw focusses on three discrimination lawsuits which occurred between 1976 and 1983. She concludes that there is a "single axis framework" (140) and consequently the experiences of black women with discrimination are unrepresented. Crenshaw argues that:

> this single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise privileged members of the group. In other words, in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women. (140)

According to Crenshaw, discrimination is often linked to either race or gender. She thinks, however, that black women enocounter "double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex" (149). In order to overcome the monistic view on oppression, Crenshaw argues for an acknowledgement of the various forms of oppression that intersect with each other and influence a woman's experience of oppression. Over the years, Crenshaw's advocation for representational intersectionality has developed into an analytical framework that places an emphasis on the representation of marginalized groups based on for instance their race, sex, sexual orientation and social class. Sara Strauss interprets intersectionality as part of the fourth wave of feminism. She explains that because of the contemporary feminist activism and new feminist thoughts (such as intersectionality), one could argue for a fourth wave of feminism. Strauss even calls *Girl, Woman, Other* a key literary text of fourth wave feminism (14-16). I support the argument

presented by Straus as the concept of intersectionality, which is a key aspect of the fourth feminist wave, is a prevalent theme in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

When intersectionality is used as an analytical tool, four aspects of this framework are researched, namely simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity. Simultaneity relates to the fact that the multiple forms of discrimination intersect and strengthen each other. Intersectionality also highlights complexity, irreducibility and inclusiveness, arguing that women's experiences consist of an interplay of different forms of oppression, cannot be diminished to one category, and its representation functions as a reaction against the prevalence of white women experiences (Carastathis 307-309). In this chapter, I will focus mainly on the representation of complexity, irreducibility and inclusivity in Evaristo's novel with respect to the descriptions of the oppression against black women by individuals with lighter skin tones and the black women's reaction against this oppression.

Intersectionality shows a somewhat contrasting view on the representation of marginalized groups. On the one hand, it is concerned with highlighting the similar experiences of a marginalized group as a result of the synergistic interaction between systems of inequality. On the other hand, intersectionality acknowledges that experiences cannot be reduced to one category and thus acknowledges that experiences are unique (Carasthatis 305-309). In this chapter I argue that this binary distinction is also present in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

The Natural Hair Movement[2] can be linked to intersectionality as the movement highlights the interplay of gender and race in relation to discrimination. Jeffries & Jeffries explain that "[i]nternalized oppression was concluded as the factor that facilitated generations

[2] See my bachelor's thesis in which I compared Adichie's *Americanah* to Morisson's *The Bluest Eye* in their relation to the Natural Hair Movement. In *Americanah* (2013), the protagonist of the novel, Ifemelu, moves from Lagos to the United States and is confronted with discrimination based on her natural hair. The novel is a product of the Natural Hair Movement as Adichie, similar to the movement, argues that black women should feel comfortable wearing their hair naturally. An example of an English novel that is related to intersectionality is *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith. In this story, one of the characters, Irie, straightens her hair in order to look like white women. Consequently, she has to deal with the painful consequences of this procedure.

of African American's support of a cultural standard of aesthetics associated with a visual preference of skin color, hair texture and length, and general body size that are negatively correlated with Black African physical features" (161). The Natural Hair Movement opposes this Eurocentric standard of beauty and encourages women from African descent, across the world, to wear their hair naturally as opposed to wearing wigs or relaxing their hair (Cruz-Gutiérrez 67). The European standard of beauty entails features such as being ''fair-skinned, youthful, thin, toned, [and] able-bodied" (McKay et. Al 1). In relation to hair, the Eurocentric standard of beauty elevates long, straight hair above African hairstyles such as braided hair, afros or dreadlocks. Moreover, because of the elevated status of long, straight hair, black women with natural hair often encounter discrimination since their natural hair is perceived as unprofessional (McKay et. Al 2). As a result, many black women decide to use chemical relaxers that changes the texture of their hair. However, many adverse effects are associated with chemical relaxer such as scalp infections, hair breakage and psychological issues (Aryiku et al. 1689). The discrimination based on hair is mainly associated with black women in contrast to black men as black women experience the discrimination more intensely. For black women, ''hair is not just hair; it contains emotive qualities that are linked to one's lived experience'' (Thompson 831). The Natural Hair Movement encourages women to embrace their natural hair and their African heritage. Shauntae Brown White researched the experiences of black women who decided to wear their hair naturally and concludes: ''[t]hose women felt that their decision was a 'sense of freedom', 'an exciting freedom that makes an ethnic statement', and 'an affirmation of my African self'. While natural hair is a freedom of expression, some found it liberating not to be dependent on someone else to care for their hair'' (303). As the Natural Hair Movement focusses on a form of discrimination that is twofold, namely based on gender and race, the movement can be interpreted as an expression of intersectionality. Evaristo's novel

can be linked to the Natural Hair Movement as she, in line with this movement, describes black women who oppose discrimination, and, as a result, wear their hair naturally.

3.2 Intersectionality and the Genre of Fusion Fiction

Evaristo uses the literary genre fusion fiction in *Girl, Woman, Other* in order to present the irreducibility and complexity aspect of intersectionality on the one hand, and the inclusivity aspect of intersectionality on the other hand. Fusion fiction is an innovative literary genre that can be characterized by its ‘‘non-compliance with key syntactic rules; for example, its omission of most punctuation marks and Evaristo’s refraining from capitalizing sentence-initial words’’ (Strauss 21). Evaristo explains why she turned to fusion fiction as a fruitful literary mode through which to tell her story: ‘‘(it) allows me to simultaneously get inside the characters’ thoughts as if they are speaking in the first person, but to also present them externally, while segueing their past with their present, and their stories also flow into each other’s’’ (Donnell 101). Thus, the generic building blocks of fusion fiction allow the writer to achieve two particular goals: present the characters’ inner thoughts and experiences, and how the experiences of multiple black female women relate to each other. Carole’s thoughts on her future are an example of how Evaristo describes the inner thoughts of her characters:

> not me, not me, not me, she told herself, I shall fly above and beyond
>
> be gone from tower blocks with lifts stinking of piss
>
> be gone from rotten low-paid jobs or the dead-end hole que
>
> be gone from raising my children alone[3] (128)

As Sara Strauss argues: ‘‘The future perfect in prominent, initial position of the lines emphasizes the young woman’s strong resolution to achieve her aim and leaves no doubt in its future accomplishment’’ (24). Through the repetition of the same grammatical construction,

[3] The layout of the quotes matches the manner they are presented in the novel.

Evaristo highlights Carole's thoughts and determination to have a lifestyle different from her mother. This way, Evaristo highlights the complexity and irreducibility aspect of intersectionality. The shared experiences of black women are emphasized through the fact that Evaristo has omitted many full stops in her novel (Strauss 21-22). As a result, the stories of the characters merge into each other, and thus Evaristo shows that the black women's experiences are associated with each other. In this manner, Evaristo emphasizes the inclusivity aspect of intersectionality. The genre of fusion fiction of *Girl, Woman, Other* can be contrasted against the *kunstlerroman* of *The Golden Notebook*. The *kunstlerroman* is mainly associated with the life of one individual and focusses on their inner thoughts. The genre of fusion fiction, however, highlights both the inner thoughts of individuals, but also the shared experiences of the characters.

3.4 Opposition of Black Women: Evaristo's Call for Inclusivity, Irreducibility and Complexity

Through the descriptions of various characters sharing similar experiences with multifaceted discrimination, Evaristo adeptly illustrates the call for the inclusivity approach of intersectionality. By portraying the experiences of Carole and Bummi, each of whom is subject to disparate treatment by white people, Evaristo shows the ''the multidimensionality of marginalized black British women's lives'' (Sarıkaya-Şen 306). The complex nature of the discrimination Carole experiences is described in the following passage:

> she's used to clients and new colleagues looking past her to the person they are clearly expecting to meet
>
> she will stride up to the client, shake his hand firmly (yet femininely), while looking him warmly (yet confidently) in the eye and smiling innocently, and delivering her name

> unto him with perfectly clipped Received Pronunciation, showing off her pretty (thank-god-they're-not-too-thick) lips coated in a discreet shade of pink (117)

In this passage, it becomes clear that Carole has faced racial discrimination. It is described how she ensures that she can demonstrate to her client that she can speak flawless English, countering any biased beliefs. Additionally, she expresses her relief that her lips are not remarkably thick, which diminishes her African features. After this part, in which Carole addresses how she is discriminated against based on her race, Carole addresses that she is also discriminated against by clients based on her gender: ''who invited her to a working lunch at the Savoy, only for her to discover it was his private dining room in the Royal Suite'' (117). This passage shows that because of Carole's gender, her clients do not regard her as a professional and thus presume that she will sleep with them. This way, Evaristo highlights the double discrimination of Carole, based on both her race and her gender. Bummi is another black female character in *Girl, Woman, Other* who is subject to disparate treatment based on both her gender and her race. Bummi moves from Nigeria to Britain and encounters discrimination based on her race: ''her first-class degree from a Third World country would mean nothing in her new country especially with her name and nationality attached to it'' (167). Moreover, it is not only her name and nationality that prevent her from being recognized as a woman with a valid degree in Britain. It is described that her gender also proves to be a boundary, and eventually, Bummi has to sleep with a pastor in order for him to extend the loan she requires in order to establish a business. These passages show descriptions of black women who share experiences with discrimination that are different from white women's experiences of discrimination as the black women are discriminated against based on both their gender and skin colour. This way, Evaristo follows the inclusivity approach of intersectionality as she describes the shared experiences with discrimination of a marginalized group of people. Evaristo shows that the black women in

the novel are not only discriminated against because of their skin colour, but also because of other factors such as their gender.

Dominique represents the complexity and irreducibility aspects of intersectionality. Through the contrasting experiences with unfair treatment of Carole and Bummi on the one hand, and Dominique, on the other hand, Evaristo shows that the experiences of black women cannot be reduced to one category of oppression. Carole and Bummi are discriminated against by men, white and black, whereas Dominique encounters opposition from another black woman. In the story, Dominique meets and befriends Nzinga, an African American radical feminist. Before this encounter, Evaristo already briefly alludes to the different types of radical feminists:

> the radical feminists wanted women-only quarters, self-governed by a co-op
>
> the lesbian radical feminists wanted their own quarters away from the non-lesbian radical feminists, also self-governed by a co-op
>
> the black radical lesbian feminists wanted the same except with the condition that no whiteys of any gender were allowed inside (18)

By enumerating the different types of feminists, the novel incorporates features of complexity and irreducibility as it is described that feminism cannot be reduced to one category, but instead can be divided into various sub-categories. Nzinga is a black radical lesbian feminist[4] who is ‘‘wise and knowledgeable about how to be a liberated black woman in an oppressive white world’’ (80). Nzinga and Dominique fall in love and start living together in ‘‘wimmin’s land called Spirit Moon’’ (85), a place where only black lesbians are allowed to live. Soon, Dominique realizes that she perishes under Nzinga’s authority over her:

[4] See similarity between Nzinga and black radical feminist writer Audre Lorde. Lorde wrote in 1980 a paper called *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference* in which she describes the multidimensional discrimination of black women and thus relates to intersectionality.

> Dominique began to regret allowing Nzinga to do everything and make decisions for her.
>
> She started to yearn to do the housework herself, yearn to cook, to clean, to do a job that was, more intellectually demanding
>
> her life was becoming empty of purpose other than to love Nzinga unconditionally, and, increasingly, obey her (97)

What Dominique first interpreted as a "truly womanist life" (102) changes into a life characterized solely by adherence to Nzinga's directives. Moreover, what Dominque once saw as expressions of love she now takes a more pessimistic point of view: "it felt like less a sign of affection more like a strangling" (103). When Dominique decides to leave Nzinga, she feels glad to leave Nzinga, but also the radical feminist version of herself, behind: "she was hyper, she was high, she was coming back to life" (108). Dominique's experience with opposition from Nzinga, which is characterized by a deprivation of her rights by a black woman, contrasts the experiences of Carole and Bummi as they encounter discrimination by men. Through highlighting this contrast, Evaristo shows that the experiences of discrimination of black women are complex and irreducible.

3.5 Responses to Opposition: Evaristo's Call for Inclusivity, Irreducibility and Complexity

In addition to highlighting the similarities between the opposition that black women face, Evaristo also emphasizes the need for inclusivity in society through her description of the black women's response to opposition. The response of the characters in the novel can often be related to the Natural Hair Movement, discussed above. Darja Zorc-maver argues that "[t]he female characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* deal with oppression and stigma in several ways" (126). It is true that every female character in the novel has their own story and their own specific reaction against opposition. However, what I want to argue is that the female characters' hair styles

symbolizes the development of the characters' reaction to opposition. It often happens that a character hides her natural hair when she lets the opposition undermine her, and when the character later chooses to fight the opposition, she starts wearing her hair naturally. Evaristo alludes to the Natural Hair Movement in the novel by associating the acceptance of natural hair with embracing racial differences. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, the oppressive effect of the Eurocentric standard of beauty is mentioned by Dominique: "you have to ask yourself if you've been brainwashed by the white beauty ideal sister, you have to work a lot harder on your black feminist politics, you know" (79). Evaristo mentions the Eurocentric ideal of beauty and its influence on black women. Moreover, she describes how the black women in her novel hide their natural hair when they have been negatively influenced by the ideal of beauty. For instance, Carole capitulates to the ideal and starts wearing a wig: "his hand stroked the back of her head, she wished he wouldn't, the wig might come off" (124). Through the descriptions of Carol's experiences with covering her natural hair, Evaristo also emphasizes the negative consequences of wigs: "even when her scalp festered underneath the stinky patch of cloth from which her fake hair flowed" (137). When Dominique lived under the authority of Nzinga, she could not wear her hair naturally either: "why should she wear her hair (usually a thick, wavy mixture of Afro and Indo) almost shaved to her scalp, cut off by Nzinga herself with the barber's clippers she bought for this very purpose?" (97). Significantly, the Eurocentric ideal of beauty is so hegemonic in British culture that even a radical black feminist can subconsciously integrate such ideals into their personal standards.

What the discussion above has shown is that in line with the Natural Hair Movement, Evaristo equates hiding one's natural hair with a submission to the Eurocentric standard of beauty. Similar to feminists such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Bell Hooks who support women in wearing their hair naturally, Evaristo also parallels opposition against the Eurocentric standard of beauty with black women wearing their hair naturally. For instance, when Amma

visits a black women's group, she describes the woman who opens the door: ''Elaine, sported a perfect halo of an afro'' (12). Also, when Carole chooses to stop wearing wigs, the freedom she felt is described: ''she felt freed when it was unstitched for the very last time, and her scalp made contact with air she felt the deliciousness of warm water running directly over it again without the intermediary of man-made fabric (137). Although Carol still decides to have her hair straightened, as otherwise it would be harder to find a job, the description of the freedom Carole feels without a wig indicates Evaristo's stance against wigs. Grace's character arc highlight's the beauty of natural hair as she learns slowly to embrace her natural look: ''she couldn't believe how much he loved her thick, coarse hair she'd been embarrassed by it'' (393). Although Grace used to be ashamed of her natural hair, the appreciation by others allows her to slowly embrace it and to develop confidence in her own appearance. Through describing the similarities between the characters based on their stance against discrimination and the coherent way they wear their hair, Evaristo represents the shared experiences of a marginalized group concerning discrimination based on hair.

Evaristo emphasizes complexity and irreducibility as she also describes distinct responses to opposition. In contrast to the characters described above, whose reaction against opposition can be linked to the way they wear their hair, Evaristo also presents characters who react differently. I will first discuss the example of Megan/Morgan. This character changes their gender expression to nonbinary in the course of the novel, and therefore changes their name into Morgan which suits their nonbinary identity better. For this reason, I will address them as Megan/Morgan in this chapter. They encounter opposition based on their gender orientation as they find out that they are nonbinary. As a way of expressing their nonbinary gender, Megan/Morgan shaves of all their hair: ''their head is still shaven, once a week their bald pate is made smooth a shiny courtesy of a razor run once in one direction over shaving foam and

once in the other'' (329). Instead of wearing natural hair, in order to conform to their identity, Megan/Morgan finds identify confirmation in having no hair at all.

Another distinct reaction against opposition is to accept subordination, of which Penelope is an example. Darja Zorc-Maver argues that the characters in the novel ''do not subscribe to the role of powerless victims but are critical to the world around them'' (126). However, Zorc-Maver fails to mention that Evaristo does portray a character who, after supporting feminist ideals, deliberately opts for a life as a powerless victim of patriarchal ideals. Evaristo describes Penelope's struggles to pursue feminist ideals: ''She tried to be happy food shopping for one, happy to go to sleep alone, happy to wake up in an empty bed'' (297). By using the verb "to try" Evaristo indicates that Penelope attempts to find contentment in her life but does not really succeed. Her failure also becomes clear from the following passage: ''Penelope wanted to embrace self-love and self-acceptance. Getting rid of the full-length mirrors in her home was a good start'' (297). It appears that Penelope is only able to love herself once she is unable to look at herself. Being confronted with the challenging life of a feminist, Penelope decides to abandon feminist ideals:

> She (Sarah) talked about having children and said, Mum, the day I have kids is the day I give up work, I don't want to be a working mother
>
> that's fine, Penelope reassured her, and meant it
>
> all she wanted was for her daughter to be self-fulfilled
>
> at this point in her life, feminist politics can sod off
>
> look where it got her? (301)

In contrast to what Zorc-Maver argues, Evaristo presents a character who decides to subscribe to the role of powerless victim of patriarchal ideology and shares these thoughts with her daughter. Both Dixon and Lessing also describe powerless victims of patriarchy. Dixon's descriptions agree with Evaristo's depiction of Penelope as Mary Erle continually laments the

powerless position of women in society. Lessing represents men as equally powerless victims of patriarchy who occupy a position of privilege, which blinds them to the fact that they could dissent from their ideological prescribed gender roles. Contrary to the characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* who pursue feminist ideals, Penelope follows a different course of action. Thus, by creating the characters Megan/Morgan and Penelope, who both respond to opposition in very different ways to the other black characters, Evaristo depicts the complexity and irreducibility of the intersectional character of oppression in her novel.

Evaristo's emphasis on both the shared as well as the distinct experiences and responses within the marginalized group, results in an awareness of the lives of black women in twenty-first-century London. Evaristo's novel has the potential to empower black women as she acknowledges the very different lives of black women facing the same forms of oppression. As a result, the novel empowers black women by foregrounding their very different experiences while simultaneously revealing the need for solidarity. Evaristo's call for inclusivity, complexity and irreducibility contrasts with Dixon's and Lessing's novels as these earlier feminist authors focused solely on experiences involving the pursuit of female autonomy and liberation of white middle-class women.

The portrayal of the characters' perspective of London also exemplifies Evaristo's commitment to irreducibility and complexity as vital components of an intersectional understanding of oppression in contemporary British society. Winsome, for instance, moves from London to a fishing town situated in the south of England. However, due to the numerous instances of racism that she faces in this town, she desires to move back to the city: "the next day I told Clovis, you can stay here but the mother of your children is returning to London" (266). Winsome perceives London as a safe space where she does not encounter so many instances of racism, compared to the town she used to live in. However, Ada Mae and her brother move to London but leave after three months: "London didn't last, they didn't even

make it to three whole months'' (359). By describing two contrasting experiences of London, Evaristo clarifies that experiences are complex and cannot be reduced to simple categories like city (progressive) and country (conservative). These descriptions once again empower black women as they find it acknowledged that their experiences may differ.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Evaristo incorporates the complexity, irreducibility and inclusivity aspects of intersectionality through her descriptions of oppression of black women by people with a lighter skin colour and these black women's responses to this oppression in *Girl, Woman, Other*. Intersectionality is an analytical framework that was first introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. In her article, Crenshaw highlights the underrepresentation of black women's experiences with oppression. Indeed, the double discrimination that black women encounter is often not acknowledged. Although Crenshaw primarily focused on the combined effects of discrimination based on gender and race, intersectionality has developed into a framework that incorporates other aspects such as sexual orientation and class. This chapter focused on the representation of intersectionality in *Girl, Woman, Other* and primarily looked at Evaristo's description of complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity in the novel. Evaristo incorporates the literary technique 'fusion fiction' in order to pay attention to both inclusivity, and complexity and irreducibility. Evaristo makes use of a non-compliance with syntactic rules in order to present individual thoughts but also shared experiences. Evaristo is also concerned with inclusivity as her novel functions as a representation of a marginalized group. This is done through highlighting the similar experiences with oppression that black women have, and the similar use of their hair as a symbol of their response against opposition. Evaristo describes the multifaceted discrimination that black women encounter, namely based on both gender and race, and shows that these

experiences differ from the experiences of white women. Moreover, Evaristo emphasizes the relation between natural hair and the response against oppression. Many characters hide their natural hair when they submit to the Eurocentric Standard of Beauty while they wear their hair naturally once they decide to no longer submit to this standard. This way, Evaristo's novel can be linked to the Natural Hair Movement, a movement that encourages women of African descent to wear their hair naturally. Evaristo pays attention to the complexity and irreducibility of intersectionality by showing that the experiences of a marginalized group cannot be reduced to one category. Through the character Dominique, Evaristo shows that not all black women are discriminated against by men as Dominique is oppressed by a black radical feminist. Next, Evaristo shows that not all women express their response against opposition through their natural hair as Megan/Morgan expresses her freedom through her shaved head. Moreover, Evaristo uses the character Penelope to show that not all black women advocate feminism. When considering Evaristo's descriptions of London, and the different viewpoint the characters have on London, Evaristo once again highlights the irreducibility of a marginalized group of people. Through her exploration of inclusivity, complexity and irreducibility in the novel, Evaristo empowers black women as she sheds light on the shared experiences of black women, but also acknowledges deviations from these shared experiences.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the development of feminist thought towards increasing intricacy in three significant British literary works from the late nineteenth, mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. More precisely, I examined the evolution of the understanding that womanhood is not a singular concept but a multifaceted concept. The three major works examined were Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). As this thesis has shown, all three novels delineate the feminism of their respective periods as a multifaceted concept that transcends any singular archetype of woman. Still, in these novels, the development of feminism towards an increasingly complex body of thought is found. Here I will critically reflect on the similarities and differences between the novels in terms of how they explore crucial feminist questions regarding women's roles and identities during the time in which they were published. In each of the three novels analysed, the authors demonstrate the existence of multiple manifestations of the feminist wave of their period. This way, the authors show that within each respective period, a diverse array of interpretations of the feminist critique exist.

Chapter one argued that Dixon created the moderate New Woman characters Mary Erle and Alison Ives in *Story of a Modern Woman* in order to present the reader with two realistic New Women. Her portrayal of Mary Erle and Alison Ives contrasts with the image of the radical New Woman as presented in much literature of the late nineteenth century. This argument differs from the statements of critics such as Rees and Ross who argued that Dixon has created two moderate New Woman fictional characters in order to please the public who were critical of the New Woman and all that she entailed. Dixon's novel shows that a New Woman does not have to adhere to all the norms associated with the concept. Rather, Dixon shows that adopting this identity involved loss and new forms of restrictions. This way, Dixon proposes a view on the New Woman arguing that the name for this concept should be plural: New Women.

The second chapter has shown that Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* looks forward to the second feminist wave of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, in the novel, Lessing develops a theory of Gynocentric Feminism as she highlights the unique position of women with regard to their openness towards love in her novel. Lessing also describes the existence of different interpretations of feminist ideologies. However, in contrast to Dixon's novel, Lessing does not try to convince her reading public of the multiple manifestations of feminism. Instead, Lessing constructs her novel based on a singular feminist interpretation of women's role in society, namely Gynocentric Feminism. In her novel, Lessing highlights the unique position of women in post-war mainstream England and shows that this unique position allows them to perceive the world differently. Moreover, Lessing shows that the distinct position of women enables them to develop on a personal level. This way, Lessing contrasts the other view on women's position in society of the second feminist wave, Sameness Feminism, which advocated for equal rights and privileges for women commensurate with those enjoyed by men.

The third chapter concerned Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. Here, I argued for the link between intersectionality and the novel as Bernardine reveals common forms of oppression and corresponding responses, as well as the varied expressions of oppression and unique responses to it. Evaristo focusses on the alternative interpretations of feminist critical theory as her novel functions as a representation of a marginalized group of women in society. As a reaction to the ubiquitous descriptions of the experiences of white women, Evaristo focusses on the experiences of black women in London instead. In line with the concept of intersectionality, she shows that black women have distinct experiences as a group, but within the group there also exist distinct personal experiences. This way, Evaristo underscores that the experiences of white women are not representative, and attention should also be paid to the experiences of black women.

Although the three novels all describe the feminism of their eras as a multifaceted idea that goes beyond any single stereotype of woman, the novels differ in their representation of this idea, and this way, they show the development of feminist thought towards intricacy. In *Modern Woman,* Dixon showed that feminism cannot be depicted as one single concept. Lessing's novel, however, shows that this multifaceted idea is incorporated into an entire movement. This way, the novel shows a development towards more understanding of womanhood as a complex concept. In Evaristo's novel, this understanding seems to have developed into an even complexed ideal as Evaristo highlights that feminism should also pay attention to women from marginalized groups. Moreover, Evaristo also highlights that experiences are personal and thus are complex and cannot be reduced.

One of the largest differences between the novels, concerning their representation of complex feminist thought, is the focus of Dixon and Lessing on one or two white women, while Evaristo focusses on twelve black women. In her novel, Dixon describes the experiences of two white women: Mary Erle and Alison Ives. Lessing describes the life of Anna Wulf, also a white woman. Evaristo, however, pays attention to black women in her novel and hardly describes any white women. Although both Dixon and Lessing already show in their novels that feminism is a complex ideal, Evaristo's novel shows the most complexity as she explores both the interplay between gender and racial discrimination and, in her descriptions hereof, focusses on twelve distinct characters. She highlights that feminism should concentrate on different skin colours, and that one or two female characters with this skin colour is not sufficiently representative.

Another significant difference between the novels that relates to the development towards complex feminist consciousness is the focus of Dixon on the role of women in society whereas Lessing and Evaristo focus on the concept of womanhood. Dixon primarily focuses on the position of women in society as she describes the struggle of Mary when she has to reject

or ignore certain feelings in order to become a New Woman. Moreover, Dixon shows that the New Woman could both reject and incorporate notions of the New Woman. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing moves from thinking about gender roles to self-questioning what it means to be a woman in the twentieth century, through the form of a notebook. Lessing argues for the unique position of women in society and the corresponding distinct experiences which enable them to grow personally. This way, Lessing focusses more on the psychological aspects of feminism. Evaristo builds upon these psychological aspects but relates these to black women. In line with Lessing, Evaristo does not focus on the gender roles of women but rather on the concept of womanhood. However, in contrast to Lessing, who focusses on a white woman, Evaristo connects womanhood to black women in her novel. This way, she shows that the self-questioning of Lessing is not representative for every woman as the experiences of black women differ from those of white women.

In all three novels, the authors use London as a pivotal setting that contributes to the theme of the novel. In *Modern Woman* and *The Golden Notebook*, Dixon and Lessing use London to contradict the general view of the time on London as a city suitable for women who seek freedom. Through the contrast between the general view on nineteenth-century London and Mary's view, Dixon emphasizes the realistic moderate characteristics of the New Woman. Lessing's descriptions of the negative view on London of Anna portrays her focus on Gynocentric Feminism as she emphasizes the differences between women. In contrast to Dixon and Lessing, Evaristo describes both positive and negative views of London in her novel, in relation to the characters' experience of discrimination. This way, her descriptions fit her focus on intersectionality in her novel as she shows that black women's experiences are complex and cannot be reduced to one category. As London is used by the authors in order to support the themes of their novel, the portrayal of London in the novels also show the development of feminism towards a more complex ideal. Indeed, whereas Dixon and Lessing provide the reader

with one view on London, namely as un uninviting place for women, Evaristo incorporates multiple views and thus shows that feminism a complex multifaceted concept. Indeed, Evaristo portrays London as both an uninviting and a welcoming place for women.

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the development of the understanding that womanhood is not a singular concept in three notable works of English fiction. However, several avenues for further research remain to be explored. These future research directions include the role of the male characters in the novels I have researched. The scope of this thesis did not allow me to look closely at the position of the male characters in the development towards the complexity of feminist thought. Another future research direction includes the exploration of social class in the novels described. Dixon and Lessing focus on one or two middle-class women while Evaristo focusses on twelve women from different social classes. It is interesting to research the portrayal of social class in the development towards the perception of feminism as a multifaceted concept.

Works Cited

Aryiku et al., S.A. "Clinical and Anthropological Perspectives on Chemical Relaxing of Afro Textured Hair." *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*, vol. 29, no. 9, 2015, pp. 1689-1695.

Bruley, Sue. "It didn't just come out of nowhere did it?': the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1960s Britain." *Oral History,* vol. 45, no. 1, 2017, pp. 67-78.

Caine, Barbara. "Feminism in London, Circa 1850-1914." *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2001, pp. 765-778.

Carastathis, Anna. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory." *Philisophy Compass* vol. 9, no. 5, 2014, pp. 304-314.

Capps, John. "Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Sameness-Difference Debate." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society,* vol. 32, no. 1, 1996, pp. 65-105.

Connell, R.W. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society,* vol. 19, no. 6, 2005, pp. 829-859.

Code, Lorraine. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. Routledge, 2000.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* vol. 1989, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-167.

Cruz-Gutiérrez, Cristina. "Hair Politics in the Blogosphere: Safe Spaces and the Politics of Self Representation in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* vol. 55, no. 1, 2019, pp. 66-79.

Dixon, Ella Hepworth. "The Story of a Modern Woman." *The Story of a Modern Woman*, edited by Steve Farmer, Broadview, 2004, pp. 42-192.

Donnell, Alison. "Writing of and for Our Time." *Wasafiri,* vol. 34, no. 4, 2019, pp. 99-104.

Evaristo, Bernardine. *Girl, Woman, Other*. Penguin, 2020.

Evans, Judith. *Feminist Theory Today.* Sage, 1996.

Farmer, Steve. *The Story of a Modern Woman.*Broadview, 2004.

Fehlbaum, Valerie & O'Brien Hill, Georgina. "Introduction." *Women's Writing,* vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-4.

Galbraith, Gretchen R. "Victorian Women." *History of Education Quarterly,* vol. 36, no. 3, 1996, pp. 337-338.

Greene, Gayle. "Feminist Fiction, Feminist Form." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* vol. 11, no. 2/3, 1990, pp. 82-88.

Greene, Gayle. "Women and Men in Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook*: Divided Selve." *The (M)Other Tongue*, edited by Garner et al., Cornell University Press, 2019, pp. 280 -305.

Griffin, Ben. *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights.* Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Jeffries Baynes Rhonda & Jeffries Devair. "Reclaiming Our Roots: The Influences of Media Curriculum on the Natural Hair Movement." *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2014, pp. 160-165.

Kang, Miliann, et. al. *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies.* UMass Amherst, 2017.

Kaufmann, Linda. "Anna Wulf's Schizoanalysis." *Feminist Critical Negotiations*, edited by Alice Parker and Elizabeth A. Meese, J. Benjamins , 1992, pp. 101-144.

Kenney-Epstein, Rowena. "The Politics of Form: The Golden Notebook and Women's Radical Literary Tradition." *Doris Lessing and the Forming of History,* edited by Kennedy-Epstein et al., Edinburgh University Press, 2017, pp. 56-70.

Kubissa, Luisa Posada. "Philosophy, Feminist Literary Criticism and 'The Difference." *Journal of Literature and Art Studies,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2016, pp. 23-32.

Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle.* Manchester UP, 1997.

Ledger, Sally, and Roger Lockhurst. *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880 - 1900.* Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lessing, Doris. *The Golden Notebook*. HarperCollins, 1962.

Ludvig, Alice. "Intersecting Voices in a Female Narrative." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp. 245-258.

McFadden, Margaret. *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth Century Feminism.* University Press of Kentucky, 1999.

McKay et al., Ashley. "Western Beauty Pressures and Their Impact on Young University Women." *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies,* vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1-11.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

Morgan, Ellen. "Alienation of the Woman Writer in 'The Golden Notebook." *Contemporary Literature,* vol. 14, no. 4, 1973, 471-480.

Nicholson, Linda. *The Second Wave.* Routledge, 1997.

Otto, Elizabeth, and Vanessa Rocco. *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s.* University of Michigan Press, 2014.

Rees, Kate. "Plotting New Womanhood on Either Side of the Channel: A Comparison of Tinayre's *La Rebelle* and Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*." *Comparative Literature Studies,* vol. 54, no. 3, 2017, pp. 581-609.

Rosen, Andrew. *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903 – 1914.* Routledge, 2012.

Ross, Kristin. C. "Preparing the Girl for 'the fight of her life': Female Education and the New Woman in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman.*" *Women's Writing*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, pp. 75-95.

Sarıkaya-Şen, Merve. "Reconfiguring Feminism: Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other.*" *The European Legacy*, vol. 26, no. 3-4, 2021, pp. 303-315.

Strauss, Sara. "Intersectionality and Fourth-Wave Feminism in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other.*" *Women: A Cultural Review,* vol. 24, no. 1-2, 2023, pp. 14-32.

Thompson, Cheryl. "Black Women, Beauty, And Hair as a Matter of *Being*." *Women's Studies*, vol. 38, no. 8, pp. 831-856.

Tong, Rosemarie, and Tina Fernandes Botts. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Routledge, 2016.

White, Shauntae Brown. "Releasing the Pursuit of Bouncin' and Behavin' Hair: Natural Hair as an Afrocentric Feminist Aesthetic for Beauty." *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2005, pp. 295-308.

Zarif, Mariam. "Hepworth Dixon, Ella." *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Victorian Women's Writing*, edited by Mariam Zarif and Emily Morris, Springer, 2021, pp. 715-718.

Zorc-Maver, Darja. "Stigma as an Attribute of Oppression or an Agent of Change: The Novel *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo." *Acta Neophilogica,* vol. 53, no. 1-2, 2022, pp. 119-131.