

Doris Lessing. An apocryphal conversation

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As someone who has kept a diary for decades and has consumed memories and intimate texts by writers and artists since my teen years, reading at the age of 39 *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing changed my way of dealing with writing. It even had an effect on my daily literary habits. Since then I have adopted the habit of separating different topics in different coloured notebooks, like Anna Wulf, the protagonist writer, keeping in my case notebooks with blue covers for my confessions, black covers for the notes on theory of art and thought, and red covers for professional projects; hoping that at some point I would find the energy to add another colour...and write fiction.

Doris Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature on 12 October, 2007 and died on 17 November, 2013. I have tried to find in my diaries how I recorded at that time these two pieces of news about my favourite writer: "Doris Lessing wins the Nobel. I'm delighted". "Doris has died, noooo, please no". As we can see, in the second case her first name is enough, since she is my "Doris" of reference. I would also like to point out that since Lessing's death, I have had some secret encounters with the writer. Encounters in dreams. To be precise, two conversations in water: inside an indoor swimming-pool, another one on the steps of her garden and a last encounter at a popular dance. What I am reproducing here are fragments of those conversations with Doris:

- You died at the age of 94. Reaching that old age allowed you to reflect on the passing of time...on maturity, and the way in which you dealt with the evolution of the effects in your work was key for me.

- You will understand that from my new position I'm not so interested in that matter any more, because my nature has changed, but you are right... What you are asking is how I dealt with being old, right? Well, what can you do? Let me tell you that there is no other choice but to live old age. But it is true that everyone's fate, aging, or even growing older, is so cruel that while we spend all our energy trying to elude it or postpone it, in fact we rarely prevent its realisation from hurting us severely and coldly.

- I find it so strange to see you dead... because for me, all your work is about surviving, about defeating death...

- The human race masters survival. I have seen how certain people survive in the middle of continuous disaster. I saw it as a child in Rhodesia and I have seen it as an adult in many places. They lead a miserable life, and if my novels are set on an often disastrous background, I have also wanted to leave some room for hope in those people who persevere and swim against the tide.

“The things that are important in life creep up on one unawares, one doesn’t expect them. One recognizes them, when they’ve appeared, that’s all”

- Doris, lately I have been afraid that my life decisions and my search for happiness may affect and harm my children.

- Susana, learn this: guilt destroys our energy. It consumes us. I don’t understand why there is so much guilt in our society. In my biography I describe how I ended up feeling so guilty for leaving my family, for leaving my husband, for taking radical decisions; but I realized that to make my way and fulfil myself, it had been necessary to take those decisions. I struggled to remove guilt from my side, but it is not something easy to do. It is even extremely difficult to write about it, at least in my case.

- Have you thought about what I told you in the swimming-pool, about “falling in love at a mature age”?

- There are few states more painful for the body, the heart and the mind than falling in love, as the mind observes how the person who supposedly governs it behaves in a crazy and even shameful manner. Because people often fall in love and do not fall in love on equal terms, or even at the same time.

- I know that you love the subject of dreams, and assessing them as part of reality, as possibilities of a parallel life and not of a “non-life”, hence your interest in sufism, I imagine... and the spirituality model it proposes.

- Look, some people have speculated that I became interested in sufism due to the analysis it makes of dreams, of oneiric experiences. And I have always been interested in dreams, since I was a child. If only partially, it has even shaped my novels; but my fondness for the oneiric field has nothing to do with my sufist orientation. This belongs to a very personal subject which I never talk about, which I only “live”, as I am doing with you now.