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The Cartography of Love in Doris Lessing's "love, again"

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Abstract: In her late novel, *love, again* (1996), Doris Lessing represents a penetrative insight of love, providing the widest perspective of love than in any of her previous work. The abundance and variety of plausible *les affaires d'amour*, which transgress the boundaries of gender, age, geography, and social status, make *love, again* Lessing's most "loveful" novel. The narrative responds to this multiplicity accordingly. The essay explores the theme of romantic love of the central female character, Sarah Durham, who is at the centre of the narrative and whose emotional landscape is meticulously mapped. It also aims to unveil the ways Doris Lessing exploits a longstanding tradition of interpreting love in Western philosophy and culture – from Plato to contemporary theorists, including Alain Badiou. Special attention is paid to the interweaving of love and friendship in the relationship of woman and man as well as friendship's "healing" power for unrequited love encapsulated in the character of Stephen Ellington-Smith. Also, by tracing the transformative impulse of love, the essay tries to bring light on the constructive (in the case of Sarah) and problematic (Stephen) consequences of love.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, interpretation of love, Stendhal, transgressive love, sensibility.

Introduction

Doris Lessing consolidated and further influenced the women's liberation movement as her novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962) was acclaimed (against her stated intent) as a feminist bible. Not only did it inspire the second wave of feminism, but it also gave models of social behaviour to a new generation of women – emancipated, open to new kinds of romantic, sexual and familial relationships. Lessing's (2007a, p. 26) "free women" – Anna Wulf and Molly Jacobs – became the epitome of, what one of them defines as, "a completely new type of woman". The author's novel of 1996, *love, again* introduces another "free woman" who is from the beginning emancipated from a traditional female script. The protagonist is Sarah Durham, a sixty-five-year-old widow, with two grown children who no longer need her maternal care (they do not appear but are mentioned about on a few occasions). Sarah's artistic profession – she is a playwright and a manager of a London fringe theatre, *The Green Bird,* – adds to her spirit of independence, and is evocative of Anna Wulf, who is a novelist.

So far *love, again* has not generated response by literary critics anyway comparable with the author's most celebrated novels such as *The Golden Notebook, The Summer Before The Dark* or *The Fifth Child*. It is commonly read as a psychological novel, an "anatomy of love" from "a master of

human psychology", however in what way love transforms fictional lovers require a more scrupulous look. The article also analyses, on the basis of narratological reasoning, how the theme of love determines the novel's structure, narration and characterization.

1. "Julie Vairon's irresistible sweep"

The novel begins and further evolves around the staging of a play about another lady from the world of art – a late nineteenth-century quadroon from Martinique, Julie Vairon, a recently rediscovered bright personality, a unique composer, a brilliant painter and writer, who lived a dramatic life: had three lovers, whom she lost, had a dead child, and eventually drowned herself in the pool. The play about the tragic love of a liberated woman of her time and an outstanding artist that is performed by the London fringe theatre nowadays, has enormous success and is very well received first in France and Britain, and further in many other places on different continents.

Not only the international audience but all those involved in the big co-production of *Julie Vairon* – British, French, Americans – are enchanted by this flamboyant romantic figure, and are as if under her spell. Lessing's use of love and art as foregrounded constituents of the novel, is, as suggested by Virginia Tiger (Tiger, 2007, p. 30), reminiscent of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Indeed, as in Shakespeare's drama, in the theatrical scenery authors, producers, actors of the play become infatuated with one another. The carnivalesque atmosphere – of rehearsals, performances, informal follow-up discussions – induces among them love affairs that cross the boundaries of gender, age, geography, and social status. Love as passion, love as sickness, love as suffering and pleasure, with a happy or tragic outcome, love, interwoven with friendship, – this abundance and variety of plausible *les affaires d'amour* make *love, again* Lessing's most, so to say, "loveful" novel. The narrative responds to this multiplicity accordingly; indeed, the story is very dynamic as the love relations evolve, sometimes taking dramatic turns. Yet, the narration meticulously maps and nuances the emotional landscape of the central female character in love; the depth of penetration in the psychology of this character is allusive of the first volume of Lessing's autobiographical *Under My Skin* (1994) which Doris Lessing had published not long before this novel. It is further preserved in the second volume of the author's autobiography, *Walking in the Shade,* that appeared a year after the novel.

Among the diverse love scenarios, the two central stories are those of Sarah Durham and Stephen Ellington-Smith, an English aristocrat, patron of arts. These two are bonded over their shared love experience and co-writing of the script for the play. Furthermore, the combination of the two factors – professional and private – gives rise to their strong friendship.

2. Aschenbach's passion: woman's case

Most of the novel *love, again's* heroine is erotically obsessed with Bill Collins, a twenty-eight-year-old actor, playing Julie's lover, an "excessively beautiful young man," in Sarah's words (Lessing, 2007b, p. 112). The reader is therefore almost permanently submerged in amorous calculations, internal tortures, and devastating hesitations of the woman who is "raged with desire" (after thirty years of celibacy). Sarah's abundant, most of the time uncontrolled passion as well as the physical response of her body is counterpoised with her attempts to rationalize this new state, and in order to do that she, among other things, refers to examples from literature, and not exclusively British. Of particular interest in this article are the works by Thomas Mann and Stendhal.

The first Sarah mentions is *Death in Venice*: "She was thinking of Aschenbach's passion as an elderly man for the boy in Venice" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 106). Indeed, Sarah's love is largely reminiscent of that in Mann's story. The novella is an influential literary antecedent that becomes a major source of intellectual allusions in the novel (V. Tiger counted sixty-five such allusions). Among them, there are recognizable textual borrowings. For example, in one of the French episodes, Sarah adorably observes Bill, who is standing on the balcony and calls him "a young god" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 149). It corresponds to Mann's episode when Aschenbach stares at Tadzio on the beach and likens him to the Greek god of love, Eros.

In addition, Mann's intertext explains the scale of Sarah's passion, as well as its quality and consequences. Up until now, age has never bothered her; now it is turning into a burden. Sarah's awareness of age factor responds with acute pain as she experiences, in her own words, deprivation that can hardly be tolerated and feels like "a miserable old ghost at feast" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 141), which, as the context suggests, means being excluded. While Sarah is challenged by possible disapproval from conventional society (which in the novel is brilliantly represented and epitomized by the figure of her brother, Hal) and even from a more liberal artistic fellowship, Lessing's insight into the condition of being elderly and in love tests love against age factor stereotypes.

Another facet of Gustav von Aschenbach's love (also a writer!) is that it is unrequited, it cannot be returned. However, the improbability of return does not calm Sarah's passion. If we talk about literature, this kind of love is exemplified in Petrarcha's sonnets to Laura (*Il Canzoniere*) or Dante's sonnets to Beatrice (*Vita Nuove*). For Sarah to realize that her feelings will never be mutual is painful. While she does not create poems, she likens herself to a fictional aged person in love, in so doing, she gains some control over her excessive passion.

To communicate the frustrations of unrequited love, Lessing favours psychological realism of introspection. Sarah's frustrations are unfolding not only is her voice (although it is not a first-person account, the focalizer is with her) but also in the voice of another woman, who also suffered from unrequited love, Julie. The structure of the novel resembles that

of *The Golden Notebook*, but while the latter is composed of five parts that are dealing with different dimensions of the heroine's personality, in *love, again* narration is counterpointed with fragments from Julie's journals. This narrative device emphasizes the exhausting raptures of love for both women as well as emphasizes different outcomes of unequal love affairs, predetermined culturally and historically. Whereas the socio-cultural stereotypes of the beginning of the twentieth century would not let Julie marry her beloved, and she eventually finds her death in the river's whirlpool, Sarah survives. Julie's transgressive love (to use Mary Ward's term), which "strays beyond accepted moral or social boundaries" (Ward, 2009, p. 44), is a synecdoche to the lives of those free women, who were ahead of their time. Julie, a victim of stereotypes, dies in 1912, just before the lives of women start to change. Lessing's interest in socio-cultural conditioning of this change becomes one of the central issues of concern in her novel of 2008, *Alfred and Emily* wherein the figure of her mother, Emily McVeagh, is put at the heart of the narrative. The combination of her interpreted but still remembered life with the one which is imagined (the binary of factual and fictional) strongly suggests the notion of women's fulfilment. In the novel, the author specifies what exactly Emily MacVaugh had missed in her life (living in Persia and Southern Rhodesia), using the conditional clause: "...if she were in England she would be running the Women's Institute or, like Florence Nightingale, be an inspiration for the reorganization of hospitals" (Lessing, 2008a, p. 2). The historical figure of Florence Nightingale exemplifies a possible historical role model for Emily and women alike who at the turn of the twentieth century inclined social activities.

References to *The Death in Venice* can as well be interpreted as Lessing's literary response to her ageing desires. The strong autobiographic component of the novel, how it foregrounds the narrative has been a subject matter of some scholarships since its publication. The most recent, of 2018, belongs to Lara Feigel, – *Free Woman: Life, Liberation and Doris Lessing*. Tracing life events, which inspired Lessing to write *love, again,* she suggests the importance of the writer's late-life infatuation with a composer, Philip Glass, whom she met in 1983 and with whom she collaborated on two operas (made out of her Canopus novels). "From the start, Lessing seems to have responded passionately to the man as well as to the music. Here was another man seventeen years younger than her; intelligent and amusing, forceful but also emotionally articulate" (Feigel, 2018). Being in her mid-sixties, she "seems to have enjoyed the sensation of rediscovering physical and emotional intensity".

Consequently, *love, again* "was written partly to survive the humiliation of Lessing's own requited passion for the composer". According to Feigel (2018), "The terror and joy of this period go into *love, again,* which she published in 1966, just before their second opera was performed". Describing a passion of an ageing woman, Lessing delegated her own life experience to Sarah. Nevertheless, her self-identification with the fictional character was partial as long as "[the writer] had a

stronger system of defences in place than Sarah" (Feigel, 2018). Indeed, and literature was one of them.

3. "If this was not illness, then what could you call it?": love as a sickness

The second literary antecedent in its efficiency to represent Sarah's love is Stendhal's *On Love .De l'amour)* – the book that, in Lessing's words, "is a more useful guide to the follies of the heart than any [she knows]. It has the wit that is the result of an absolute and unsentimental truthfulness" (Lessing, 2003). This admiration for the French writer's book is part of Lessing's foreword to the Hesperus English edition of *Memories of an Egotist*. Seven years before the publication, in *love, again,* Lessing had delegated her fascination with the book to the protagonist (Sarah refers to Stendhal's study on love on several occasions), and even before the main text, in one of the novel's paragraphs, Stendhal is praised, along with Marcel Proust, as a great cartographer of love.

As a host of intertextuality, *On Love* is interesting in terms of applicability of the general concept it presents (even if its scientific value is doubted) in regard to Sarah and Stephen, while Stendhal's dictum "Love is of all ages" is relevant to all the fictional lovers.

According to Stendhal, love is sickness, and lack or absence of will is one of its symptoms. Stendhal claims that passionate love is, therefore, entirely uncontrollable. In her observations of passion, Sarah's condition is also defined (and it is repeated several times) as sickness.

> She was poisoned. A fierce poison ate her up [...]. [...] Certainly, she was ill: if this was not illness, then what could you call it? She felt, in fact, that she was dying, but she must put a good face on everything and pretend nothing was happening (Lessing, 2007b, pp. 36–37, emphasis added)

As seen from the quote, among the symptoms mentioned by the protagonist is Stendhal's lack of will.

4. Love "as the operation of the mind," or Stendhal's crystallization

Stephen's own story emphasizes Sarah's idea of inequality in love that, if trust Stendhal, is a common thing. His form of love correlates with Stendhal's concept of crystallization by which he explains the birth of love and its evolution, appropriating a natural phenomenon.

> At the salt mines of Salzburg a branch stripped of its leaves by winter is thrown into the abandoned depths of the mine; taken out two or three months later it is covered with brilliant crystals; the smallest twigs, those no stouter than the leg of a sparrow, are arrayed with an infinity of sparkling, dazzling diamonds; it is impossible to recognize the original branch.
>
> I call crystallization the operation of the mind which, from everything which is presented to it, draws the conclusion that there are new perfections in the object of its love (Stendhal, 1950, p. 14)

Stendhal uses this vivid metaphor not only to illustrate the idea of change, inherent in any love affair which is seen as process, but to emphasize the degree of the imagination of a man (or woman) in love. Further in the book, crystallization is defined as a "combination of sweet illusions" (Stendhal, 1950, p. 111). However, such an illusion has an aesthetic quality too as long as "[...] in love it is only the illusion formed by ourselves which we enjoy" (Stendhal, 1950, p. 25).

Stephen, as he confesses, fell in love with the long-dead woman, and is ever since "besotted with phantom" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 64). In his imagination, Julie Vairon becomes his only possible (or ideal) lover. For hours, he can talk about her beauty, her gift as a composer. Stephen dreams of spending one night with Julie. Yet, at some point his imagination unavoidably entraps him, and to the extent that in real women, surrounding him, he sees just Julie.

The protagonist crystallizes his illusionary image of love, but the fact that his object of love is unattainable in all senses makes it, on the one hand, highly dramatic (and ultimately fatal), and on the other hand, transforms him into a Platonic lover. It seems that for him, earthly beauty is no other than a shadow of Plato's absolute perfect beauty (as described in his dialogues *Symposium, Phaedrus*). Thus worshipping the beauty and virtue of his mistress, Julie, he may adore his love. If we take into consideration that Stephen is an erudite and a great connoisseur of poetry – this suggests that process of crystallization that evolves in Stephen's mind can be put in a broader context of a longstanding tradition that has vivid literary representations. In particular, the poetry of troubadour and trouvèrs which he, in fact, refers to a few times.

We may say that Stephen's love for Julie is allusive of troubadour's doctrine of courtly love. As we know, it is in poetic narratives composed and sung by the lyric poets in Proven#al in the 11th to 13th centuries that the conventions of courtly love were often passed on. Similar to a troubadour, Stephen is in "the arms of love," and for him love is a service too – in his version of the courtship of the young lady he writes the script and co-produces the play about Julie Vairon's life, works with the archives connected with her life and her artistic aspirations etc.

Stephen's remark about the kiss with Molly McGuire, an actress from Boston playing Julie Vairon to whom he attributed all the merits of Julie Vairon, can as well be interpreted in terms of the conventions of courtly love. The man confesses: "What can you say about a man of fifty who knows that nothing more magical ever happened to him than a kiss in the dark with...?" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 169). And it is exactly with this degree of erotism that the "pure love," traditionally identified with courtly love, is described by Andreas Capellanus in his famous treatise *About Love (De amore libri tres,* 1184): "[...] it goes as far as the kiss and the embrace and the modest contact with the nude lover, omitting the final solace, for that is not permitted for those who wish to love purely" (Capellanus, 1990, p. 122).

However, the novel problematizes the outcome of such love – Stephen commits suicide. Because the focalizer most of the time is with Sarah, thus

keeping in the shadow the man's self, and towards the end of the narrative it goes beyond the inspection of his mind completely, whether he dies of the unrequited love or for some other reasons (such as a consequence of mental disorder) remains ambiguous. Not only the reader is left in darkness, in Sarah's view too, the man's desperate act looks absurd and irrational.

With Stephen, Doris Lessing subverts sensibility as a typical feminine domain. The author's notion of sensibility is not something that is applicable mostly to women – both protagonists, as they fall in love, are sensitized. Furthermore, it is a man who is not a survivor. Stephen's sensitivity factor is complicated with his ability, or to be precise, inability to cope with existential challenges: he is married to a woman who prefers another woman, is a father of three sons, but feels lonely and depressed, so his escape into the world of art and love turns out to be just a temporary relief rather than a proper solution.

Lessing's engagement in the debate about constitutive features that can be attributed to women and men is manifested in her novel of 2007, *The Cleft*. By the end of it, the reader can indeed relish lists of qualities assignable to men and women respectively, finding pleasure in the debate about them in the essentialist perspective; however, the author herself neither stops at denial nor prioritizes universal traits over social arrangements. Doris Lessing invokes the help of the sceptic in order to doubt any stereotypical position, from whatever side it comes (Miroshnychenko, 2014, p. 316). For this reason, the deep conflict of the protagonists, Maronna and Horsa, is ultimately resolved with a profound emotional experience shared by both – when Maronna, distressed, feels pity for Horsa, her "poor child," and Horsa, in his turn, dreams of them both in a wonderful place: "[...] we'll go together, I'll make a ship better than any we've made, we'll land together on that shore and..." (Lessing, 2008b, p. 258). Likewise, in her earlier novel, with the character of Stephen, Lessing discards the stereotypical essentialist appreciation of sensuality as an a priori feminine quality.

5. "This friendship is a thousand times more precious to me than being in love": love and friendship

The friendship with Sarah that Stephen Ellington-Smith enjoys has a restricted emotional and intellectual impact too.

In his book, Stendhal argues that for a lover "*[...] there is no moral need more imperative than that of a friend*, before whom to dilate on the fearful doubts which at every instant beset his soul; for in this terrible passion, always a thing imagined is a thing existent" (Stendhal, 1950, p. 88, emphasis added). Thus for a person in love, a friend is endowed with a mission: he (she) should be "always at hand": "[...] the *friend in need* ought to tire him with talking of his love and his mistress, and the same time manage that a host of little events force themselves upon his notice" (Stendhal, 1950, pp. 111–112).

Sarah and Stephen are friends, even though to the outside eye, it would look like a love affair. Feeling lonely in his love, Stephen seeks Sarah's help, her advice, and Sarah, in her turn, would appreciate his support too. Thus this kind of friendship is born out of love of two, who in Stendhal's words, are "preys to mortal uncertainties," and it is further fuelled by the frustrations of love. Yet, there is another pillar to buttress their relationship – a common cultural background. However, what is more, this spiritual bond evolves thanks to a strong external factor, a figure of Julie Vairon.

In their friendship Sarah is conscious of her part, seen by her as follows:

> But she was in a certain role with him: someone strong, to whom he could show his weakness and not be afraid. Would their friendship survive her saying, 'I am in love to the point of insanity,' with a young man, and one he didn't have much time for? [...] it would be unkind to tell this suffering man who relied on her (who had put a desperate hand into hers), 'I am weaker than you are. Worse, I'm ridiculous,' and expect him to add this burden to his (Lessing, 2007b, pp. 132–133, emphasis added)

As the quote shows, to perform certain roles is inevitably a part of their friendship, even though their distribution contradicts the nature of one of them (Sarah) and even induces a collision between ethical issue and code of sensibility. Though Stephen and Sarah are classical friends in misfortune, the woman ultimately prefers to be the man's friend in need. In the end, fulfilling a moral duty of a friend rather than "dilat[ing] on [Stephen] the fearful doubts," makes Sarah stronger and redefines her agency in the woman's relationship with men.

Friendship is healing for unrequited love, and, in Sarah's view, it is even bigger than love. As the woman says, it "is a thousand times more precious to me than being in love, or the pretty hero. [...] Until this morning everything between [them] had been open, simple, honest" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 175). This comment exemplifies the importance of friendship which is virtualized by Sarah for openness, simplicity, honesty, and, as their relations develop, for trust. For Stephen likewise, – he calls Sarah "one of my best friends."

Another facet of their friendship is connected with art. They are both artistic personalities, as it was mentioned before, and their friendship is also founded on a mutual interest in literature and music. Not only Sarah, Stephen too refers to literary examples in search for possible solutions of his ambiguous feelings. Furthermore, they both consider literature more useful than psychological books, so they read Stendhal, Proust, Goethe and other writers who combine "love with a very cold intelligence" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 217).

While friendship is constructive in its quality (it helps Stephen to reduce uncertainties), it is ultimately inadequate in power. Therefore, the outcome of Stephen's story justifies Stendhal's point that "there is no friend for the lover."

6. "Access to another dimension of reality"

As the novel suggests, love does have huge transformative power – it changes the life of Sarah Durham, acting in two ways.

First of all, escaping the ruinous outcome of "Aschenbach's passion," the heroine (and it is part of her recovery) becomes aware of the fact that the sufferings she was going through had little to do with Bill or any other man. Sarah arrives at understanding that "People carry around with them this weight of longing, [...] and then, for no obvious reason, just like that, here he was (who?), and onto him is projected this longing, with love. If the patterns don't match, don't fit, they slide apart, and the burden finds its way to someone else. If it doesn't go underground again – become 'latent'" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 212). Thus, one day when she meets the model she has in mind, she experiences precisely the situation of which Stendhal writes, "crystallization recognizes its object by the commotion it inspires and consecrates forever to the master of its fortunes the fruit of all its previous dreams" (Stendhal, 1950, p. 48). Sarah falls in love with Henry, a thirty-five-year-old American director of the play, who returns her feelings (but also remains faithful to his wife). While her first love is passionate, the second is more mature (a marker of transformation). Eventually, she admits that it was sweet to be with Henry.

Another transformative consequence of Sarah's love is that her memories surface forcing her to reconsider them. The process of looking back is followed by rejection of false memories and thus giving the heroine true understanding of one of the reasons to seek love.

Symbolic are the final episodes of *love, again,* when Sarah sits on a bench in a London's park staring at a young woman with two kids, who severely criticizes her daughter and prefers the son – hugging, kissing him and playing with him. That irritation towards the girl and demonstrative love towards the son, according to Millicent Bell, "awakens the suppressed memory" of Sarah (Bell, 1997, p. 491) – she thinks of her mother, Mrs Milgreen, her brother, Hal, and herself being a witness not a participant of a love scene. She even remembers "certain brisk and practical tones of her mother's voice" (Lessing, 2007b, p. 347). Whereas at the beginning of the narration the heroine gave evidence of being conscious of the unreliability of her memories as well as the reason of that, now, on the concluding pages of the novel, the retrospective look into her childhood frees her from the hidden memories (of being unloved), giving such an understanding of thirst for love that reconciles body and spirit. Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis in her study of the novel interprets this metamorphosis as "the beginnings of access to another dimension of reality" (Perrakis, 1999, p. 105), as "a breakthrough to a new, more capacious sense of self, an acceptance of modes of self-knowing or being not possible earlier" (Perrakis, 2007, p. 1). Love thus goes beyond erotic and through a profound reflection becomes a way to formulate the new truth of life, which suggests a deeper understanding of the nature of love.

The way Alain Badiou approaches the idea of love is thus highly applicable here. In his book of 2009, *In Praise of Love (Éloge de l'amour*),

the French theorist presents his philosophical conception of love as "a quest for truth." It begins from "the encounter of two differences, [...] contingent and disconcerting" (Badiou, 2012, pp. 22, 29). The encounter then "unleashes a process" which, according to Badiou, "is basically an experience of getting to know the world." In this epistemological dimension, love is no longer "simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship." It is regarded as "a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two" (Badiou, 2012, p. 29). Duration, process and consequences of love relate to the issue of knowledge and self-awareness. Badiou helps us to understand what for Doris Lessing could also be an acceptable idea. Like Badiou, the writer of *love, again* presents truth-seeking and transformative power as immanent to love. If so, in the title love is not capitalized for the reason that it is indeed an open project, something one does again and again (and despite ageing) until the construction of the world – as an individual authentic project – comes to an end.

Conclusions

To conclude, as the novel's leading theme, love determines its structure, which is centred around a variety of love stories with a major focus put on the female protagonist, Sarah and her passions. The focalizer is also mostly with the heroine so that her dynamic inner life, unlike those of other lovers in the variety of the fictional les affaires d'amour, is presented in detail.

Even though love is presented as a highly subjective experience, the novel emphasizes societal clichés that are perilous to a genuine love – the socio-cultural restrictions of love in the life of a woman (Julie Vairon) at the beginning of the twentieth century or gendered stereotypes as regards to an ageing female lover almost one hundred years afterwards (Sarah).

In love, again, Lessing invested her own wide experience in the central character, and the combination of autobiography and literature provides a wider perspective of love than in any of her previous work. Evoking ideas from Plato's idealism, troubadour's aesthetics of courtly love, Petrarchan and Dantenian interpretations of love, Thomas Mann's artistic views and others, the writer celebrates the conceptualizations of love which constitute the canon in the Western philosophy and culture. Yet, Stendhal's book De L'amour is likely to be a major literary antecedent as its concept helps to understand the complexities of love as it grows (or crystalizes, to use Stendhal's trope), not to mention numerous formal correspondences between the two texts.

Furthermore, in its layered allusions to some of the great characters of the European novel, theatre, and poetry, love, again suggests an even broader depiction of love in which the identification of the key characters with a complex of literary precedents becomes the empathetic authorial strategy. As a result, in Doris Lessing's cartography of love, friendship is presented as a possible remedy for unrequited love, to use Stendhal's

definition, even though it induces a collision between ethical issue and code of sensibility. Friendship is thus more than love, in Sarah's case at least. For Stephen, it is equivocal, but it is also about friendship's boundaries – it helps him to deal with pain but does not save his life. Moreover, this is the dialectical statement love, again ultimately makes.

Lessing also uses literary allusions – both explicitly and implicitly – to empower fictional lovers with truths that may transcend the time. Suggesting an enormous transformative power of love passion for the central heroine (but not exclusively), the novel is in tune with Alain Badiou's interpretation of love as an existential project (Éloge de l'amour). In other words, it is in both cases rendered as "an experience of getting to know the world", and, in that sense, love is what may happen again and again.

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