

ON BANALITY OF INTELLIGENCE: READING DORIS LESSING'S "TO ROOM NINETEEN" FROM THE STANDPOINT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" is a veiled critique of intelligence as an ideological stance undergirding patriarchy. The story revolves around the life of a married couple named Susan and Matthew Rawlings who have grounded their marriage in intelligence. As the time goes by, Susan is plagued by boredom and restlessness to the extent that she puts an end to her life. Her unquestioning compliance with the requirements of an intelligent life leads to an emotional crisis which results in her self-willed death. I would like to contend that Matthew and Susan's conformity with intelligence equals a negation of emotion and affect. Therefore, the theme of the story is not the "failure in intelligence", as Lessing adumbrates at the beginning of the story, but the failure of emotional intelligence. After elucidating emotional intelligence, I will proceed to read the story through this concept and explore its social and personal implications.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, patriarchy, feminism, rationality, emotional management

Introduction

At the very beginning of "To Room Nineteen" (1963) the narrator self-consciously adumbrates that this is a story about "a failure in intelligence" (Lessing, p. 875) which is an intriguing way to commence a fictional narrative. The story revolves around the life of a married couple named

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Susan and Matthew Rawlings “whose marriage was grounded in intelligence” (p. 875). As the narrator informs us, they have meticulously worked out every aspect of their lives “through their foresight and their sense for what was probable” (p. 876). In other words, their approach to life follows a regimented pattern that forecloses any unexpected events or developments on account of which “nothing was a surprise to them” (p. 876). The couple are known for their distinctive level-headedness. However, as it becomes clear, no matter how carefully they have mapped out their lives, unpredictable incidents could result in unexpected emotional and mental crises. The bulk of the story describes Susan’s attempts at coming to terms with a certain sense of “flatness”, “aridity” and “emptiness” in her life which intensifies following her husband’s confession to unfaithfulness. Susan’s disaffection with her marital life becomes so exasperating that she seeks refuge outside of the house. Unable to account for her insane restlessness, she ultimately commits suicide by asphyxiating herself in a rented room in a hotel.

Most critics have read the story as a critique of patriarchy and the debilitating effects of a restrictive male-centred conception of female personal and social roles. Situated at the intersection of social rights movements of the 1960s, including second-wave feminism, the story resonates with social, existential and cultural issues. Susan’s self-willed death is preceded by emotional crises that unhinge her, leading to a self-proclaimed madness. Her descent into insanity is arguably the corollary of a pervasive and restrictive patriarchal ideology which unilaterally defines the roles and needs of women. Many critics consider the story as a woman’s obsession with finding her authentic self in view of the exigencies of her domestic relationships as formulated by male-informed societal expectations. Having said this, the objective here is to address a concern of different kind. We intend to take a more nuanced look at the concept of intelligence itself because though it is right to equate it with hegemonic patriarchy, there are semantic and interpretative implications to it that can be brought to light by opening it up to a deeper analytical examination.

Intelligence, Patriarchy and Rationality

The OED defines intelligence as the ability to learn, understand and think in a logical way about things. This definition of intelligence is perfectly expressive of the political overtones that

Lessing aims to convey in her story. To define intelligence as an intellectual capacity or the ability to reason cogently and logically implies a cognition-based process of understanding which is distinguishable from its intuitive counterpart. Furthermore, such a conceptualization of intelligence by virtue of being defined in terms of reason and rationality has often been associated with patriarchal values and outlook. From this perspective, “the failure in intelligence” can mean the failure of its male-informed conception as an interpretative and performative framework. This kind of intelligence is underlain by a stringent adherence to exclusivity, categorization and unilateral establishment of values. The distinctive characteristics of this kind of patriarchal ideology are clearly demonstrated in the representation of women and the assignment of certain limited roles to them. Through its often-dualistic logic, it confers predefined identities to women amounting to a cultural frame of reference which is inseparable from the meaning of “intelligence” referred to by Lessing in her story. According to this frame of reference, intelligence is a male-conceived notion that construes womanhood in terms of certain modalities. It is on the basis of these prevalent modalities that gender roles are judged and evaluated. This is even reflected by the title of the story which signifies the restrictiveness of such modes of being and knowing for women.

While part of the title, through its emphasis on spatiality, harks back to two seminal works of feminist tradition—Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own” (1929) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s “The Madwoman in the Attic” (1979) – it can be argued that the eponymous number “19” resonates with a patriarchal penchant for perpetuating the dichotomization of gender roles. Number nineteen consist of 1 and 9 which are the first and last single-digit numbers. The sum total of 1 and 9 is 10 which invokes the binary system of one and zero that in turn points to the duality of options available to women in the patriarchally-informed systems of domination and representation. Situated between the two extreme ends of a numeric spectrum, Susan undergoes a mental and emotional crisis that was set off by an internal turmoil analogous to what Hamlet experiences. Susan’s story is, therefore, a kind of Hamletian soliloquy focused on being and non-being or better yet, between, self-affirmation and self-negation. In other words, Susan is in the grip of an existential crisis that is wreaking havoc on her personal and social identities. She feels a deep sense of alienation as patriarchal expectations are driving a wedge between her perception or knowledge of her own self and the idea of that self as defined by

society. In short, Susan's internal turmoil is a whirlpool of emotions that drives her to insanity and suicide.

Our argument is going to focus on this aspect of Susan's inner struggle by proposing that the failure of intelligence happened because Susan considered her dissatisfaction, inner turmoil, restlessness and self-doubt as unjustified. The point is that she fails to factor in her emotions and instead of acknowledging them as justified and well-founded, she becomes more and more entangled in an intricate process of self-questioning and self-doubt until it becomes certain to her that her desire for freedom and her need of "a room of her own" are undoubtedly irrational and insensible. In other words, the dilemma that she is facing is occasioned by the clash between two views of herself: "If behaving like the Angel causes her severe stress and self-division, not conforming to the paragon's rational standards of behaviour leads to even more distress" (Hunter 1987, p. 97). Caught between an intuitive sense of her legitimate emotions and "the excessive rationalization of feeling involved in interaction with her family" (Hunter, 1987, p. 97), Susan fails to strike a balance between these two forces in order to resolve the crisis. What has been said so far serves as a point of departure for discussing the focal point of this story which is not "intelligence" *per se* but "emotional intelligence". The discussion follows from this argument that Susan's growing sense of frustration has a lot to do with emotional intelligence that accounts for her failure to reach equilibrium in her life. The thesis presented here is that the failure that is mentioned in the story is caused by Susan's inability to maintain a healthy measure of rational thinking and emotional sensibility. In other words, it is more accurate to say that the story is about "the failure in emotional intelligence" rather than intelligence *per se*. Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to provide an overview of the definition of emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence Defined

Emotional intelligence (EI) which is often measured as an Emotional Quotient or EQ, describes the capacity, or skill to perceive, assess, and manage the emotions of one's self, of others, and of groups. The term gained recognition through the works of a number of academicians including Mayer and Salovey who can be credited with its systematic theorization. Their work has inspired other researchers including Daniel Goleman to explore its applicability in other areas and disciplines. Therefore, Mayer and Salovey extensive research on emotional intelligence is going

to serve as the theoretical framework for developing the argument about the failure of intelligence in Lessing's short story.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) believe that emotional intelligence “represents an ability to validly reason with emotions and to use emotions to enhance thought” (p. 5). Salovey and Mayer (1990) consider emotional intelligence as a subcategory of social and personal intelligences as it includes the “ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to cause this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (p. 189). Similarly, for Goleman (1998) emotional intelligence is a set of competencies that distinguishes how people manage feelings, interact, and communicate. There are different ways to define emotional intelligence, but what they all share is the fact that it is concerned with the “intelligent intersection of the emotions and thoughts” (Mayer, 2004, Introduction section).

Mayer and Salovey initially introduced a tripartite conceptualization of emotional intelligence in their article titled “Emotional Intelligence” (1990) that included the appraisal and expression of emotions by self and others, regulation of emotion in self and others, and utilization of emotion in order to do flexible planning, creative thinking, redirect attention and motivate (p. 190). This framework was later developed into a four-branch model that consisted of managing emotions, understanding emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, and perceiving emotions accurately in oneself and others. Generally speaking, emotional management refers to the ability that can help one to regulate emotions in the self and others and direct them toward the achievement of a productive end. This, of course, calls for an accurate assessment and knowledge of emotions which must be accompanied by the ability “to discriminate among them” in order to utilize “the information to guide one's thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer 1990, p. 189). A set of empirical data and observations can be used to assess these four components. Brackett and Geher (2006) elaborate that:

The first domain of EI, perceiving emotions, is measured by asking individuals to identify the emotions expressed in photographs of people's faces (Faces) as well as the feelings suggested by artistic drawings and landscapes (Pictures). The second domain of EI, use of emotion to facilitate thought, is measured by two tests that assess people's ability to describe emotional sensations and their parallels to other sensory modalities

using a nonfeeling vocabulary (sensations), and to identify the feelings that might facilitate or interfere with the successful performance of various cognitive and behavioral tasks (facilitation). The third domain of EI, understanding emotion, is measured by two tests that pertain to a person's ability to analyze blended or complex emotions (blends) and to understand how emotional reactions change over time or follow up on one another (changes). Finally, the fourth domain of EI, managing emotion, has two subtests that assess how participants manage their own emotions (emotion management) and how they would regulate the emotions of others (social management). (pp. 34-35)

EI has been applied in different fields including pedagogy, learning, family psychology, to name just a few. Since "To Room Nineteen" is centred on the marital and familial relationships, it can be an interesting way to analyze the failure of their marriage in light of this notion.

"To Room Nineteen" and Emotional Intelligence

As it was mentioned above, to measure EI, questionnaires and interviews are frequently used. However, in the absence of such tools, there is no choice but to rely on a close reading of the text. One thing should be noted, Matthew and Susan are typical characters who have been conditioned by the social norms and values of their times. Susan typifies an educated, middle-class suburban wife who, in comparison with her predecessors decades ago, has gained a lot of ground in terms of social mobility and rights. Though the story depicts a typical British family in the sixties, during which women were no longer in a subordinate position deprived of their basic rights and privileges, there were, in those days, still residual misconceptions about the role women could play within family and society. In other words, the dichotomizing and reductive assumptions about women still persisted to the extent that they affected the verity and legitimacy of women's feelings. Such conditions might have led to a kind of morbid self-accusation that crippled the senses of judgement and discretion similar to the one that happened to Susan as she found herself torn between what she inwardly felt and the kind of truth about herself imbued by patriarchal values. Gaining a clear understanding of one's cognitive and emotional vicissitudes can be instrumental in restoring equilibrium between affect and intellect. This is what is missing in both Matthew and Susan. Matthew's approach to Susan's restlessness is informed by a

supercilious rationality which prevents him from seeing beyond the immediate common solutions and procedures. In other words, Matthew suffers from the inability to read and engage appropriately and constructively with his wife's mental and emotional states, which means that he lacks interpersonal skills, while Susan, on the other hand, shows severe deficiencies in her intrapersonal competencies.¹

The kind of intelligence which is being taken to task in the story is characterized by a propensity for exclusion which disallows any affective engagement or considerations because it is totally given over to rationalization. In short, rational thinking reigns supreme at the expense of feelings. Emotional intelligence is an attempt to redress this unequal and disproportionate prioritization because it “suggests that intelligence may understand emotion, and that emotion may facilitate intelligence” (Mayer & Ciarrochi, 2006, p. xv).

In an intimate relationship such as marriage, the ability to express and decode verbal and nonverbal emotional messages is of paramount importance. As far as the ability to perceive emotions is concerned, however, as Julie Fitness (2006) argues, there seems to be a lack of attention having been paid to the individual's inability “to identify their own emotions and distinguish amongst them . . . which can be responsible for experiencing social and interpersonal difficulties” (p. 131). This statement provides a point of departure to chart the emotional developments in Susan. The aim is to trace these ups and downs in view of the different criteria that make up emotional intelligence which include the ability to see, utilize, understand and manage emotions.

¹ According to Howard Gardner, interpersonal intelligence constitutes “capacities to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of other people” while intrapersonal intelligence is “the key to self-knowledge” which includes “access to one's own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior” (as cited in Goleman, 1995, p. 56). The difference between these two skills is accentuated through the narrator who discloses Susan's mental and emotional conditions while Matthew's inner feelings and thoughts remain unknown to the reader. The immediacy and availability of Susan's emotional status enable the reader to more readily judge her emotional incompetencies. On the other hand, through the story, Matthew makes no particular attempt to understand his wife's predicament as he fails to go beyond the restrictive conventions of his time. Accordingly, his mindset, as reflected in his responses, betrays not only shortsightedness and lack of empathy but also a tendency to conventionality and conformity. For all these reasons, he appears a person with severe deficiencies in interpersonal skills rendering him incapable of empathizing with Susan.

The Failure of Emotional Intelligence: The Negation of Emotions

It is often argued that there is a correlation between happy marriages and the ability to see and identify emotions. Both Susan and Matthew seem to be equipped with a perceptiveness helping them to understand changes in their emotions and sensations. This is because Matthew and Susan have attained some sort of maturity as they married “in their well-seasoned late twenties” (Lessing, p. 875). Unlike many of their friends, their love was founded on knowledge and familiarity rather than spontaneity and hastiness. What they had in common was “their sensible discrimination” (p. 876) which was also evident to others as they believed that “they were well matched” (p. 876). They have managed to navigate their marital life to circumvent pitfalls that have destroyed other marriages. They have not only been wary of such pitfalls but have managed to understand and “chart inner storms and quicksands” (p. 878). Therefore, “everything was all right. Everything was in order” which is not surprising for “two people, endowed with education, with discrimination, with judgement” (Lessing, p. 878).

Two years into their marriage, Susan becomes pregnant. This means that she has to quit her job and move into a house in the suburb. Over the years she gives birth to four children which was “typical of this couple” (p. 876). Their life seemed well-planned and their relationship fine-tuned as this “balanced and sensible family” was following a pre-defined course of action thanks to “their infallible sense for choosing right” (p. 877). Before long, however, Susan starts wondering about “the central point, the wellspring” (p. 877) from which their life originates. Susan concludes that “this thing, this entity” which is “a wellspring to live from” is the reciprocated love between her and her husband (p. 877). As we can see, there is much emphasis being placed on this couple’s cognitive and analytical abilities which betrays an affective blindness adding to the ironic overtones of the story as Susan, with the passage of time, becomes more withdrawn and introspective because she feels “a certain flatness” permeating her life (p. 877). Already we can sense that despite being apparently in tune with her life, Susan is beginning to feel a growing sense of discomfort if not irritation. Otherwise, why would she contemplate the *raison d’être* of her marriage?

The full implications of this sense of aridity come to light following Matthew’s confession to unfaithfulness. This crisis catches Susan completely off guard. The purported sense of aridity

that Susan has been feeling could be the same factor that pushed Matthew toward an extramarital relationship. The fact is that the “wistfulness which is the distinguishing mark of intelligent marriage” cannot be wiped out or ignored through feeding on “psychological, anthropological, sociological” books (Lessing, p. 878). It has to be acknowledged and dealt with. However, Susan prefers not to take it seriously. According to Fitness (2006), “the extent to which spouses’ abilities to accurately identify their own emotions is important for marital happiness” (p. 131). Despite her sophistication and maturity, Susan dismissed this lapse as “absurd” (p. 879). Instead of addressing the problem, probing its root causes, they did what “sensible people” do: “they put the thing behind them” (p. 879). Intelligence helped Susan to not only justify Matthew’s unfaithfulness and exonerate him, but also to help her cope with the natural resentfulness:

For it was inevitable that the handsome, blond, attractive, manly man, Matthew Rawlings, should be at times tempted (oh, what a word!) by the attractive girls at parties she could not attend because of the four children; and that sometimes he would succumb (a word even more repulsive, if possible) and that she, a good-looking woman in the big well-tended garden at Richmond, would sometimes be pierced as by an arrow from the sky with bitterness. (Lessing, p. 879)

The whole episode preceding and following the confession to betrayal is dismissed as “banal” (p. 878). Thus, “intelligence continued to assert that all was well” (p. 880). Intelligence, as such, normalizes and naturalizes her abnormal conditions. Here intelligence becomes coextensive with patriarchal ideology. Intelligence also forbids emotional outbursts barring “quarrelling, sulking, anger, silences of withdrawal, accusations and tears” (p. 880). By prioritizing rational justification over intuitive feelings Susan is in fact shutting down her capacity for emotional engagement with her surroundings. Had she trusted her so-called “gut feelings”, she and her husband could have created a basis for the resolution of an imminent crisis. According to Hunter, intelligence in the context of this story equals “a form of self-conscious rationalization that leads” Susan and Matthew “to deny intensely felt emotions” (Hunter, 1987, p. 94). By internalizing patriarchal reasoning, Susan has become alienated from her visceral feelings. As Fitness argues, “for individuals to be able to accurately perceive and utilize emotions in the marital context, they need to understand what emotions are all about—how they are caused, what they motivate people to do, and their likely consequences” (Fitness, 2006, p. 132). A good

example of this inability to understand why Susan felt in a certain way happened when she dropped off the kids at school yet she had no desire to go home. There is something unpleasant about being at her big white house which creates restlessness and tension in her. Though she has been looking forward to relishing the solitude after the kids “are off her hand” (Lessing, p. 881), once she is alone, she does not feel relieved. Instead, she is afflicted with a sense of “irritation, restlessness, emptiness” (p. 882). She prefers to go to the garden where she wonders what is wrong with her. She seems to be at a loss as to what has caused this tension. Yet she fails to find a definitive answer and instead repeats what Matthew proposed to be the truth about her feelings which is deeply informed by a tendency for naturalization:

All this is quite natural. First, I spent twelve years of my adult life working, living my own life. Then I married, and from the moment I became pregnant for the first time I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. To the children. Not for one moment in twelve years have I been alone, had time to myself. So now I have to learn to be myself again. That's all. (Lessing, p. 882)

These superficial justifications are not doing Susan any good because they serve as coverups betraying Susan’s inability or reluctance to dig deeper into the neglected part of her own self. Susan’s inability to resolve the conflict between rationalization and her visceral feelings leads to frustration and bitterness. It is this bitterness that later bleeds into her relationship with her children. On one occasion, this “calm mother” shouts “with anger at the twins” (Lessing, p. 883). To comfort her, Matthew, first, ascribes her anger to a lack of adjustment to the new situation involving kids going to school and then he drives “the misery out of her with his big solid body” (p. 883). A combination of justificatory remarks and sexual intimacy is a palliative that recurs through the story whenever Susan turns to Matthew for comfort and support.

Emotions Misunderstood and Mismanaged

Susan is a modern and upgraded version of the Victorian “Angel in the House”. She belongs to the same lineage of mothers/wives who, according to Woolf (1986), are the paragon of sympathy and selflessness:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. ...in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it---she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. (p. 2007)

This Angel-Mother is marked by a tendency for capitulation, self-denial and complaisance. Thus, Susan corresponds to the image of an Angel-Mother as she has been bearing the brunt of the marital life by giving up her job and moving to the suburbs to play “the role of hub-of-the-family” (Lessing, p. 881). She has made these sacrifices without considering the emotional damage that they have entailed. In all these decisions, she has ignored her feelings denying them any legitimacy. From a point onward, she refrains from tapping into her emotions because she has renounced them in total submission to patriarchal rationality.

Whenever Susan feels something is wrong with her, she either blames herself for feeling that way or accepts her husband’s rationalizations. For instance, it is Matthew, the “intelligent husband”, who explains away Susan’s boredom by arguing that “she is blossoming from the root of what she had been twenty years before. As if the essential Susan were in abeyance, as if she were in cold storage” (Lessing, p. 881). Later, sensing Susan’s frustration, it is again Matthew who suggests the designation of a room to Susan as “Mother’s Room” where she ironically “felt even more caged there than in her bedroom” (p. 887). All these solutions fail because Susan and Matthew are inept at either perceiving the emotions or appraising them in view of the changing circumstances. The implication is that both Susan and Matthew are heedless of the brewing crisis in their lives. Matthew’s solutions are mere palliatives that simply erase the problem rather than delve into the depths of it. Susan’s compliance with her husband’s solutions and suggestions shows her disconnection from her feelings. It also shows her inability to use her feelings to facilitate her cognition which is why she comes to believe that she is “a madwoman” (Lessing, p. 892).

Susan’s desire for seclusion indicates her emotional bankruptcy as she is unable to share her emotions with Matthew because they are not “sensible” (p. 882). The other problem is that she

cannot think exclusively about herself because “as soon as she forced her mind to think about Susan (for what else did she want to be alone for?), it skipped off to thoughts of butter or school clothes” (p. 884). The obtrusion of such mundane concerns prevents her from devoting time to exploring her moods and feelings. What compounds the situation is her lack of knowledge about her emotions. This emotional self-estrangement displays itself in the form of an enemy whom she sees in the house. She often sees this so-called enemy in the garden. On one occasion she sees him holding

a long crooked stick, which he had picked off the ground, or broken off the tree above him. He was absent-mindedly, out of an absent-minded or freakish impulse of spite, using the stick to stir around in the coils of a blindworm or a grass snake (or some kind of snakelike creature: it was whitish and unhealthy to look at, unpleasant). The snake was twisting about, flinging its coils from side to side in a kind of dance of protest against the teasing prodding stick. (Lessing, p. 888)

Despite the demonic attributes of this stranger, he can be taken as Susan’s embodiment of her suppressed urge for freedom. The incarnation of this desire in the form of a man, an alter ego, aside from its prelapsarian allusions, is noteworthy because Susan has earlier described her life as “a snake biting its tail” (Lessing, p. 877). So, the stranger poking and prodding this snake is stirring it into action by shaking off the stagnation and inertia plaguing her life. According to Irene Watson, based on a Jungian interpretation, the stranger is her animus who “is an ally rather than an enemy” (Watson, 1989, p. 54). She believes that Susan needs to “recognize the power, the wholeness, the strength of her devil/animus” to “complete the process of individuation” (Watson, 1989, p. 54-55). What she considers to be the split between ego and self is analogous to what we have been arguing about Susan’s affect and cognition. Hunter similarly points to the existence of a conflict between Susan’s “image of the Angel-mother” and “some of her strongest feelings – of restlessness, rage, irritation, and resentment” which has resulted in a self-division (Hunter, 1987, p. 95). Both Susan and Matthew fail not only to understand these feelings but also manage them as they continue “to deny the validity” and “the right to expression, of such primitive emotions” (Hunter, 1987, p. 95).

Susan's inability to talk about her "utterly ridiculous" emotions which "she despised, yet ... she was feeling so strongly she could not shake them off" (Lessing, p. 884) intensifies her desire for "a room or a place, anywhere, where she could go and sit, by herself, no one knowing where she was" (p. 888). This compelling desire forces Susan to distance herself more and more from the house and her life. Her attempts at finding privacy and dissolving into anonymity are indicative of her failure to serviceably manage and regulate her feelings. This failure stems from her inability to put her cognition at the service of deciphering her emotions, because, as it was mentioned early, she is never "free from the pressure of time, from having to remember this or that" (p. 884). As a result, she is possessed by the desire for "a place, or a state of affairs" where she can "forget herself" and "let herself go into forgetfulness" (p. 884). The failure to fulfil this desire has resulted in resentment which she knows is "poisoning her" (p. 884). She feels the agonizing urge yet she cannot reconcile herself to its irrationality as she considers "this emotion and thought" absurd (p. 884).

What is worse, Susan is unable to voice her feelings just because she considers them lacking in validity and sensibility. Like "a prisoner" (p. 884) she has walled herself in by cutting herself off from her emotions. In other words, her intellect and feelings are in a state of mutual exclusivity: this is where emotional intelligence can be influential in dissolving the antithetical relationship between cognition and affect. To put it differently, she is in a three-fold predicament: she does not have a full knowledge of her emotions because she cannot locate their origin, moreover, she cannot give vent to these emotions as she finds them incongruous which results in her failure to manage them.

Lessing's adoption of a peculiar narrative voice that interweaves two levels of argument is noteworthy in this regard. The story is filled with retractions and revisions which shows the clash between intellect and emotion. For example, at some point Susan uses the term "bondage" to describe her marriage and her responsibility for children (Lessing, p. 886). However, no sooner than she said it, she wonders "why had she used it? She had never felt marriage, or the children, as bondage. Neither had he, or surely they wouldn't be together lying in each other's arms content after twelve years of marriage" (p. 886). Instances like this are repeated in the story questioning the validity of what she has just said. On such occasions she faults herself for being "an irrational

person” (p. 886). These moments represent her self-split where the two voices are at odds with each other.

A Room of Her Own

Susan’s stay in the hotel room grants her a respite, a temporary relief from the burden of being her inauthentic self as she thinks that “nothing existed of me except the roles that went with being Mrs. Matthew Rawlings” (Lessing, p. 895). Compared to her house, the room allowed her “to become more her own” (p. 895). It is in the room nineteen that she can cast off her older self and approach a state of forgetfulness. This room grants her a brief respite from the demands of her intelligence-based existence. What she does in the room is utterly unmeditated and spontaneous:

Sometimes she talked aloud, saying nothing—an exclamation, meaningless, followed by a comment about the floral pattern on the thin rug, or a stain on the green satin coverlet. For the most part, she wool-gathered—what word is there for it?—brooded, wandered, simply went dark, feeling emptiness run deliciously through her veins like the movement of her blood. (p. 895)

The relief and solace that the room nineteen provides is temporary because Matthew learns of her clandestine hourly stay in the rented room and suspects that she is having an affair. Confronted with the question that she is having a secret affair, she complies entirely with the patriarchal interpretative framework by confessing to having a rendezvous with a man. Why? Because it makes more sense to play out the role of a bored and insouciant housewife with a jaded palate for marital life than a woman seeking her authentic self in the teeth of a gnawing self-doubt. How can she bring herself to say that she is looking forward to “the short blissful hour of being alone, really alone” (Lessing, p. 889) when “she can sit by [her]self three or four times a week in a rented room” (p. 890). There is no way she can talk about her need for woolgathering in the room nineteen without being branded as irrational. No doubt, she, finding herself in the grip of such sentiments, deemed herself mad: “Yes, she was mad” (p. 890). The definitiveness with which Susan imputes madness to her sensations speaks volumes for a

wholesale acceptance or even internalization of patriarchal values and ethos which have occasioned a total estrangement between her and her feelings.

After Matthew discovers her hangout, the comfort of the room vanishes, and Susan no longer finds it peaceful and relaxing. On top of it, Susan needs to present the proof of her infidelity by introducing a man as her date which is again a demand on her to act intelligently. Facing the challenge of substantiating her story, she finds herself between the devil and the deep blue sea. She chooses death over a life filled with the demands of intelligence where emotional outbursts are irrational and she is unable to simply talk about her innermost feelings because she has been conditioned to recognize them as insensible.

Susan's Final Solution

On one of the rare occasions that Susan complains about her need for more freedom, Matthew responds by saying “but Susan, what sort of freedom can you possibly want-- short of being dead!” (Lessing, p. 886). This is an interesting response not only because it foreshadows Susan's suicide, but also because it suggests how emotional deficiency can be life-negating. Matthew's casual response to this complaint is imbued with inconsiderate matter-of-factness. Matthew questions the legitimacy of Susan's need for freedom through a solipsistic counterargument:

Am I ever free? I go to the office, and I have to be there at ten—all right, half past ten, sometimes. And I have to do this or that, don't I? Then I've got to come home at a certain time—I don't mean it, you know I don't—but if I'm not going to be back home at six I telephone you. When can I ever say to myself: I have nothing to be responsible for in the next six hours? (p. 886)

This is an intelligent reply as it forecloses further discussion of the matter as it discourages Susan from pursuing this issue while it persuades her that “she was an irrational person” which is a fact that she has to live with just as “some people had to live with crippled arms, or stammers, or being deaf” (p. 886). Susan's desire for freedom is a private matter for which she has to work out a solution on her own. It is nonnegotiable because the exigencies of intelligent marriage have conditioned Susan and Matthew to address problems in a rational way. Susan's taking refuge in

the room nineteen is a last-ditch attempt to secure a modicum of mental composure. Therefore, when her secret is disclosed, she is left with no choice but to end her life. Death is the ultimate getaway toward freedom just as her husband indicated. Intelligence with its rigid logic proves destructive. Without emotion, intelligence fails to create a nurturing environment to cultivate a sense of understanding and support. Susan's final solution is prompted by the banality of intelligence: an unimaginative solution for an intelligent life. Banality, a term that has become associated with evil through the work of Hanna Arendt, signifies the lack of imagination and empathy in humans when committing grave and unforgivable crimes. Its opposite could be empathy which is part and parcel of emotional intelligence as it entails "the ability to read emotions in others" (Goleman, 1995, p. xii). Susan's self-willed death is occasioned by the aridity and dullness of her relationship with Matthew whose vapid mindset forestalls any alternative way of engaging with life beyond the patriarchal norms and expectations.

Conclusion

Lessing's story begins with a self-referential hint about its theme of "failure in intelligence". The story then describes the lives of Susan and Matthew portraying the bleak and arid emotional landscape which Susan faces after marrying Matthew. What is interesting about the writer's central theme is the fact that intelligence is no longer considered as a monolithic term but as a multifaceted notion having diversified into different subcategories one of which is emotional intelligence. We found this term more relevant to account for the strained relationship between Susan and her husband. Susan and Matthew are trapped in a network of expectations that predisposes them to think and behave in a certain way. Alienated from herself, Susan, a middle-class educated woman, is more likely to bear the brunt of a mundane life. Blind adherence to intelligence has rendered her life arid and humdrum which results in restiveness and boredom. It is not only Susan's failure to understand the root cause of such emotions that is wreaking havoc with her life but also her inability to deal with these emotions that leads to the escalation of the crisis. Understanding, managing and using one's emotions are components of emotional intelligence which are neglected by Susan through her unquestioning acceptance of rationality and intelligence. As a result, she fails to tap into her emotions or recognize them as a reliable

basis for mediating her actions, thoughts and interactions. Had she acknowledged the validity of her emotions and created a balance between the demands of an intelligent life and her emotional needs she would have never been pushed to the brink of desperation and ultimately suicide.

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