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“Intelligence” in Doris Lessing’s “To Room Nineteen”

Introduction

“This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: the Rawlings’ marriage was grounded in intelligence.”(Lessing 413). These are the opening lines to Doris Lessing’s short story “To Room Nineteen”. “To Room Nineteen” was first published in Lessing’s 1963 novel *A Man and Two Women*, and has since been widely read and studied (Brown 9). This short story is Doris Lessing’s contribution to the twentieth-century second-wave feminism and as the opening lines suggest, the story is about a failure in intelligence. It portrays a woman, Susan Rawlings, sick of her dormant life as a middle-class housewife in mid-twentieth-century London. Her inability to defy the theme of “intelligence” leads to her eventual suicide. Evidence used in this paper will be taken from a variety of sections in the short story, and from a variety of critical sources. To get a greater understanding of what “intelligence” is, a definition along with an explanation of how this definition affects Susan Rawlings, will be given towards the beginning. To support these claims Rula Quawas and her article; “Lessing’s ‘To Room Nineteen’: Susan’s Voyage into the inner space of ‘Elsewhere’”, is used. This paper will then explore how “intelligence” has such authority over Susan’s personality, and how she uses “intelligence” to conquer “irrationality”. To prove this, Lynn Sukenick and her article “Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing’s Fiction” is brought to attention. Sukenick’s idea on the presentation of the female image is connected to Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which is also used to further strengthen the previously mentioned claims. Moving towards the next part, this part will demonstrate how “intelligence” structures the story. The story’s reoccurring parentheses in relation to the use of “intelligence” will be compared to statements from Kevin Brown’s article “Lacking a Story of Her Own: Susan Rawlings and Narrative in Doris Lessing’s ‘To Room Nineteen’”. The last part of this paper will be a thorough close-reading part where all the previously mentioned claims will be referred to in one single paragraph. All of these claims work together to form the thesis of “intelligence” being one of the main reasons Susan seeks eternal solace in Room Nineteen.

Section explanation

Parts of this paper will be referring to different sections in the short story and it will therefore be helpful for the reader to get a better plot-understanding of the sections before entering the body of this paper. See table in appendix 1 for a simplified version of this.

The first section describes Susan and Matthews relationship before they were married and after they have married and had kids. Their life together before marriage is portrayed as very sensible and smart. After the sensible description of their early years together, their life together is questioned. Although their marriage is a little flat sometimes, they come together in love (pp. 413-416).

In section two Matthew confesses to infidelity. Susan thinks him confessing is very absurd. She continues to be bothered by the infidelity, but attempts to rationalise it. Susan sees this rationalisation as the price to pay for their marriage, even though she starts feeling like she does not matter. (pp. 416-419).

Section three revolves around Susan starting to feel restless as all her kids go off to school. Susan is expecting to start her own life now, but is unable to due to this restlessness. This she also tries to rationalise. She eventually realizes that it is the constant pressure of always having something to remember, and never feeling free, that is causing her condition. She eventually tells Matthew of her problems, and he asks her if she needs a holiday. This he tells her, but not without also mentioning how he has just as little freedom as Susan, making Susan feel remorseful and question her own problems (pp. 419-426).

Section four sees Susan attempting, and failing, to solve her feelings of restlessness by escaping to three different locations. The first location is a private room Susan gets in her own house. The second location is a rented room in an establishment outside the home. The third location is in Wales. After all this, Susan has gotten nothing but a small taste of freedom. At Susan's request, Sophie Traub from Hamburg is employed as the family's au pair. (pp. 426-435).

Section five shows Susan discovering Fred's Hotel, and Room Nineteen. Here she does nothing but sit in silence. After a while, she starts going to Room Nineteen five times a

week. Sophie Traub is essentially the mistress around the house when Susan is not there (pp. 435-438).

In section six Susan is searched out by Matthew, and Room Nineteen is ruined for her. The room is now filled with restlessness and demons. Matthew confesses to having an affair again, and Susan lies about having an affair, not wanting him to know the truth about her going to Room Nineteen. After this, all Susan can think about is how alone she is (pp. 438-443).

Section seven is the last section and revolves around Susan's last moments. Matthew suggesting they go out with their affairs together leads to Susan leaving for Room Nineteen. In Room Nineteen she lies contently in the bed, killing herself (pp. 443-447).

Definition and Effect

‘Intelligence’ is a well-covered topic amongst literary scholars covering Doris Lessing. A scholar that is regularly referred to is Rula Quawas and her text; ‘Lessing’s ‘To Room Nineteen’: Susan’s Voyage into the inner space of ‘Elsewhere’’. Quawas’ text is long and thorough as it covers Susan Rawlings’ need to escape her reality. It explores why she does this, and how. Her need to escape is portrayed as a result from her tiring of her role as emotional provider, and slipping into a room that becomes her own ‘elsewhere’ (Quawas 107). Her societal role is presented as a consequence of her cultural surroundings and Quawas puts it nicely as she says; ‘[...] she finds a gap between the dominant cultural ideology or her social role as Woman and her own lived experience as a woman.’ (Quawas 113). Susan goes through her first chunk of adult years following the societal norms to a tee. When her marriage is eventually challenged with infidelity, her picture-perfect idea of who she is starts cracking. Susan herself never seems to realise it, but she is a victim of this ‘dominant cultural ideology’ (Quawas 113).

‘Because the masculinist point of view is by definition the rational and intelligible one, anyone occupying the cultural position of Woman [...] is likely to be dismissed as gibberish, mere symptoms of hysteria.’ (Quawas 113).

Quawas explains how ‘intelligence’ in ‘To Room Nineteen’ is measured from the masculine point of view, meaning that ‘intelligence’ works in favour of Matthew. Matthew is portrayed as the sensible one and most of Susan’s decisions are made based on what she believes he will think. In section 3, when Susan’s kids go to school and she starts feeling

trapped and never free, she tries to voice her feelings to Matthew. Matthew then goes on to question her feelings and explains that he also has responsibilities that he has to attend to. This response gives Susan no relief;

“ Susan hearing this, was remorseful. Because it was true. The good marriage, the house, the children, depended just as much on his voluntary bondage as it did on hers. But why did he not feel bound? Why didn't he chafe and become restless? No, there was something really wrong with her and this proved it.” (Lessing 426).

As portrayed here, Susan does not question Matthew's opinions and statements. Although she was previously of a different opinion, she recognises his words as the truth right away, and immediately feels remorse for uttering what she previously believed to be her own truth. As Susan lists their responsibilities, she mentions “The good marriage,[...]” (Lessing 426). It becomes her opinion that her and Matthew's marriage is a pleasant and successful one. One that he puts just as much effort into as herself. This is an opinion she forms, despite Matthew having previously confessed to being unfaithful, and her knowing that he is continuously unfaithful after this as well. These times without telling Susan. The only fault Susan finds with Matthew, is the fact that he would even tell her about his infidelity. She is uncomfortable with his affairs, but convinces herself that with him being the handsome man that he is, having affairs is inevitable (Lessing 418). Susan then words her and Matthew's commitment as “voluntary bondage”. This is an interesting choice of words because they so clearly reveal Susan's true feelings. “Voluntary” and “bondage” are two words that represent completely different concepts. Susan views her responsibility to the house as “bondage”, and although she puts “voluntary” in front of this restraining word and tries her best to convince herself and everyone around her, it is clear throughout the short story that her role is anything but voluntary. Mid-twentieth century London is heavily controlled by the masculine point-of-view. The “intelligent” expectations in this society are for middle-class women to fulfil their roles as devoted and happy housewives. No matter what underlying feelings Susan has, her devotion to the house is expected to be one hundred percent voluntary. Susan also gives Matthew the same amount of credit for the keeping of the children and the house. She depicts Matthew as tied down alongside her. But is he though? Although he mentions having to go to work and coming home at a certain time, can this really be compared to Susan's around-the-clock commitment to her house, her children, her employees, and her husband? Apparently, according to Susan, after being told by Matthew, it most certainly can. Matthew portrays his

commitment as just as challenging, if not more challenging, and because Matthew is the status-quo for what is sensible and “intelligent”, Susan can do nothing but reprimand herself. Not only is Matthew the handbook for what “intelligence” is in the masculine society he and Susan exists in, as Quawas mentions, if Susan feels or thinks something that duels with this society’s set norms, it is likely to be written off as gibberish or hysteria, even by herself. Susan is affected by the society around her just like everyone else, and although it is not in her own best interest to have these thoughts about herself, she cannot seem help it. All of this mixed together ensures that Susan easily proclaims that there is something profoundly wrong with her, and only her.

It is as Susan lives by this masculine “intelligence” and her social role as a Woman, she starts questioning herself. In the same section mentioned in the previous paragraph, section 3, the quote reads; “She had to accept the fact that, after all, she was an irrational person and to live with it. [...] She would have to live knowing she was subject to a state of mind she could not own.” (Lessing 426). As Quawas explains in her statement, Susan is experiencing a gap between the role she has been given by society, and what her internal woman is experiencing. Susan saying she cannot own her mind, alludes to the fact that there are two separate individuals in her frame. The part of her that is “irrational” and that she has no ownership over, is the part that does not adhere to the societal rules set for her. At this point, Susan wants to mould herself into the accepted housewife. However, experiencing the previously mentioned gap, she copes with it by somewhat accepting not having full control of her mind. Susan knows there is a discrepancy inside her, a small part of her that is challenging this masculine point-of-view, but as the masculine point-of-view is the intelligent point-of-view, she writes herself off as irrational. It is in this gap, and this irrationality, she starts experiencing her mental health faltering.

Power and Response

As referred to earlier in the text, Susan Rawlings dwells in London in a time where her existence as a woman is based on her ability to control and handle her own household. A woman’s worth is largely calculated from her ability to satisfy the people surrounding her, that being her husband and her children, and also often employed help. Lynn Sukenick’ article “Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing’s Fiction” comments on why rationality is so important to Susan; “Rationality is personality; for Lessing it is intelligence that gives one a sense of self and preserves some approximation of integration in the face of invading

irrationalities.” (Sukenick 521). In Lessing’s fiction “rationality” is what the characters create and cultivate their personality upon. It grants the characters a place in society and from there grants them a sense of self.

Susan is a woman who prides herself on always choosing the “intelligent” route. Matthew and her did not move in together too quickly, they got just the right number of children, and she quit her job to stay home with them. Her entire personality is hardly anything but “intelligent”. The troubles that then occur, is when she starts experiencing thoughts and impulses than do not fit with her chosen personality. The following quote is taken from section 3, and portrays the aftermath of Susan having struggled to keep herself sane and because of this has escaped to places she can be solitary;

“Then she returned to the family, wife and mother, smiling and responsible, feeling as if the pressure of these people – four lively children and her husband – were a painful pressure on the surface of her skin, a hand pressing on her brain.” (Lessing 424).

Susan’s response to her faltering mental health, what she would deem irrationalities, is to put extra effort into her “intelligent” role as a wife and a mother, and to blame herself for any distressing feelings. Her role in the family is clearly stated as a wife and as a mother. Although she is struggling, she puts a smile on and accepts the responsibility that comes with these roles in this “intelligent” masculine society. This goes along with Sukenick’s idea on intelligence being a form of protection against irrationalities. Matthew and the children constantly being in Susan’s immediate vicinity is to her a; “[...] painful pressure on the surface of her skin” and a “[...] hand pressing on her brain” (Lessing 424). This alludes to the fact that Susan can feel someone other than this “intelligent” Susan in her skin and mind with her. Her family is putting pressure on the “intelligent” Susan, pressing on her personality, or put more clearly, challenging her “intelligent” personality. This is distressing for Susan as her “intelligent” personality is all she has known for years. Susan knows something is wrong but as she has been so heavily conditioned by society to believe her life as a housewife is a gift, she cannot help but place the blame with herself.

“ [...] she possesses an enlightened consciousness that is full of flashing signals and loud warnings about conformity to an image that is often pressed on women like a gift but which, when it does not fit them, is no gift but a burden.” (Sukenick 534).

This ‘‘gift turned burden’’ is what Betty Friedan in the 1960s coined as the ‘‘feminine mystique’’. Her book by the same name is widely recognized for its comments on the standards and expectations American women were held to in the mid-twentieth century. Several of Doris Lessing’s works are often mentioned alongside *The Feminine Mystique* as having played a big part in the twentieth century’s second wave feminism. Friedan started her studies as she realized something was wrong with the lives of American women, her included. She was a working woman who started questioning her feelings of guilt and hesitation towards her family.

‘‘The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity. [...] The mistake, says the mystique, [...] women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.’’ (Friedan 43)

Susan Rawlings seems to be a victim of the gift turned burden that is the ‘‘feminine mystique’’. The ‘‘feminine mystique’’ is what the ‘‘intelligent’’ Susan lives by. She is a woman who has fully given into her ‘‘femininity’’, the femininity that is submission in all sense of the word to men, and the masculine ‘‘intelligence’’. As mentioned earlier, in section 3, she does not question her husband, and if she finds faults with her surroundings, she looks inwards at herself; ‘‘[...] Why didn’t he chafe and become restless? No, there was something really wrong with her and this proved it.’’ (Lessing 426). It is this concept that keeps Susan from exploring her new and pressing impulses. The ‘‘feminine mystique’’ states that if a woman has problems, it is because she has not fulfilled her role as an ‘‘intelligent’’ woman properly. The rational solution for Susan is then to try even harder to fulfil the expectations of a woman. This is hardly helpful for her. Susan’s inability to understand her impulses, leads to her seeking solutions in the wrong places and therefore pushing her mental health further towards the brink.

Structure and Revising

Kevin Brown is the author of the article ‘‘Lacking a Story of Her Own: Susan Rawlings and Narrative in Doris Lessing’s ‘‘To Room Nineteen’’, and has interesting ideas on the parentheses that appear in the short story. This paper argues that these parentheses, along with ‘‘intelligence’’, are structural devices. An example of these parentheses is; ‘‘For it was inevitable that [...] Matthew Rawlings, should at times be tempted (oh, what a word!)’’ (Lessing 418). Brown states how Susan; ‘‘[...] revises in a way that makes the story more to

the liking of an imagined audience, the friends and society that have forced her story along this path.” (Brown 11). The commentary parentheses can be used to show Susan not writing a new story, but revising the already existing story. (Brown 11). The commentary parentheses are Susan’s way of polishing and making sure nothing is forgotten in her storytelling, in the same way she does in her day-to-day life as a housewife under the rule of *The Feminine Mystique* and the “intelligent” masculine point-of-view. These parentheses appear with varying degree to show Susan’s inability to rewrite her own story and as a result of this also shows her splitting herself into a different person. The old “intelligent” Susan’s inability to rewrite, leads to the appearance of the “new” Susan who has no place in the “intelligent” society and must escape into the void of room nineteen.

Before jumping into the different sections, it is important the reader learns of this paper’s understanding of the narrator in “To Room Nineteen”. The short story is narrated in the third-person mode, while differing between an omniscient point of view, and taking a very close look at Susan’s perspectives; “She spoke to herself severely, thus: [...] First, I spent twelve years of my adult life working, living my own life. Then I married, [...]” (Lessing 420). However, as it is an omniscient narrator, much of the short story reads like it is Susan doing the narration. This is never said in the short story, but the following sections will work to prove this claim.

In the first section, the section that describes Susan and Matthew before and after their marriage, the marriage between Susan and Matthew is considered the central reason for living, or the closest thing to it. The section is riddled with “intelligence” and synonyms for it, showing what Susan and Matthew strive for. The number of parentheses is fairly low. Each individual section in this part of the paper will contain a set of numbers that each represent the amount of parentheses on each page in the section. In this section, it looks like this; (2-1-3-2). In this section they are mainly just adding details of information, showing that the “intelligent Susan” is there to brush up on and remember everything that might have been forgotten in the plot, but this current state of affair is how ought to be (pp. 413-416).

In section two the marriage is challenged with infidelity. This section is riddled with anything that is the opposite of “intelligence”, that being “banal” and “absurd”, showing Susan’s attitude towards the infidelity. However, intelligent as the couple are, and Susan’s inability to rewrite, they then decide to move past it. The high number of parentheses show that, although she tries not to be, Susan continues to be bothered by the infidelity. In this

section a different kind of commentary parenthesis appears. The parentheses that appear here do not add additional information, but are more questioning. The narration is questioned and critiqued, showing Susan is in a challenging situation. At the end of the section everything is eventually forgotten for the sake of ‘‘intelligence’’. Like the previous section, where the existence of ‘‘intelligence’’ means less commentary, the end of this section also ends with barely one parenthesis. This shows that there is nothing for Susan to question as ‘‘intelligence’’ is restored and both Matthew, Susan, and their love, is again ‘‘intelligent’’ (pp.416-419).

In the third section the children start school and Susan starts having her troubles of restlessness. She keeps herself sensible, but as the plot progresses, she becomes more and more ‘‘irrational’’ and less, what Susan deems, ‘‘intelligent’’; ‘‘Resentment. It was poisoning her. (She looked at this emotion and thought it absurd. Yet she felt it.)’’ (Lessing 424). This lack of intelligence also coincides with the number of parentheses starting low and eventually rising (0-0-2-1-2-4-1-1). The number of parentheses go back down when she eventually tries to voice her restlessness to Matthew (pp. 419-426).

Section four shows Susan attempting, and failing, to solve her restlessness by creating different escape locations for herself. Susan continues to be, in the narrators own words, ‘‘mad’’ and ‘‘unreasonable (Lessing 431). However, this only seems to be Susan’s own opinions as she still acts ‘‘intelligently’’;

‘‘[...] she was walking up the stairs, down the stairs, through the rooms into the garden, along the brown running river, back up through the house, down again... It was a wonder Mrs Parkes did not think it strange. But, on the contrary, Mrs Rawlings could do whatever she liked, she could stand on her head if she wanted, provided she was there.’’ (Lessing 431).

As described earlier, the ‘‘intelligent Susan’’ is the housewife who is there to ensure nothing is forgotten and everything is polished. To everyone else, she still acts like the ‘‘intelligent Susan’’, and therefore the number of parentheses is low (1-0-1-1-0-0-0-2-0). To Susan herself, however, this seems to be the point where she is split into two people. She diagnoses herself as mad and proceeds to marvel at her split complexion in the mirror. One that resembles a sensible face, and one that resembles a madwoman (Lessing 433). It is during this scene that Susan proposes getting the au pair girl Sophie Traub. Sophie is the last person to be referred to as ‘‘intelligent’’ in the short story. This, by what seems to be Susan.

In section five Susan discovers Room Nineteen. As she settles into the room, there seems to be another shift in Susan. For the first time in the novel, she experiences the feeling of being free. Her undisturbed time in Room Nineteen never mentions “intelligence” or has any parentheses (2-2-0-1). This means that the “intelligent Susan” who has a pressing responsibility to make sure nothing is forgotten, is not in Room Nineteen. The person in Room Nineteen is Mrs Jones, the fake name she gave the manager when renting the room, and she is; “[...] no longer Susan Rawlings, mother of four, wife of Matthew, employer of Mrs Parkes and of Sophie Traub,[...]” (Lessing 437). Susan plays two different roles. The role of Mrs Jones in Room Nineteen, and the role of Susan Rawlings, mother and wife in the big white house (pp. 435-438).

In section six, Susan stops going to Room Nineteen when she learns Matthew has searched her out. There are no longer any appearances of “intelligence”, but Matthew is still portrayed as the sensible one. Susan knowing that Matthew and his “sensitivity” knows where she is, makes her unable to stay in Room Nineteen as her restlessness returns. This can be seen by the parentheses (-0-1-4-0-0-3). The page with four parentheses is where Susan tries to escape into the void of Room Nineteen, but is unable to. The pages with zero parentheses is the part where Susan is standing on the outside of her house, looking inn, and seeing Sophie with her kids. She seems to have come to terms with the fact that the “intelligent Susan” has been replaced with the “intelligent Sophie”; “Well... Susan blinked the tears of farewell out of her eyes, [...]” (Lessing 441). The narrator also goes on to explain how Susan feels like a visitor in her home, further solidifying the idea that Susan is no longer the head of the house. The lack of parentheses also shows that the “intelligent Susan” is no longer around to manage and control everything. The parentheses return when Susan is again told Matthew is having an affair, and as a result of her own wording, she is forced to make up a lover of her own. Susan struggles to keep up with the “intelligent Matthew” and her conflicting thoughts return (pp. 438-443)

In the last section, section seven, after learning of Matthew’s infidelity, Susan gives up and properly settles with the thought that she has no place with Matthew and the house anymore. The “intelligent Susan” is no more, and as a result of this, this section has no parentheses (0-0-0-0-0). There are no longer any conflicting or confusing thoughts, or the incessant need to fix and polish everything. The new Susan’s idea of sensible is to leave for Room Nineteen, and stay there forever (pp. 443-447)

Summary Close-Reading

Up until this point this text has explored “intelligence” from several different viewpoints. It has gone from establishing that Matthew is the “guide” for what “intelligence” is, to showing how Susan struggling with the gap that appears between the role given to her by society and what her internal woman is experiencing, leads to her not having full control of her mind and eventually writing herself of as irrational and her mental health starting to falter. The text then displays Susan using rationality to protect herself against irrationality, and how this is a result from her being a victim of the feminine mystique. The feminine mystique is the reason Susan believes diving further into the “rationale” is the solution for her “irrational” ideas, and this leads her to seeking solutions in the wrong places, which again brings her mental health further towards the brink. After this, the text explores the structure of the short story. It shows Susan using the parentheses that appear to polish and revise, like she does in her daily life under the rule of the feminine mystique and the masculine-point-of-view, the existing story instead of rewriting a new one for herself. The text then explains how the parentheses appearing in varying degree shows the “old” and “intelligent” Susan’s inability to rewrite her story, and therefore splitting herself into a different person who has no place in the “intelligent” society and must escape into the void of room nineteen. The following paragraph is taken from section 3, and demonstrates many of the previously mentioned ideas quite well;

“It is not even a year since the twins went to school, since *they were off my hands* (What on earth did I think I meant when I used that stupid phrase?), and yet I’m a different person. I’m simply not myself. I don’t understand it. Yet she had to understand it. For she knew that this structure – big white house, one which the mortgage still cost four hundred a year, a husband, so good and kind and insightful; four children, all doing so nicely; and the garden where she sat; and Mrs Parkes, the cleaning woman – all this depended on her, and yet she could not understand why, or even what it was she contributed to it. She said to Matthew in their bedroom: “I think there must be something wrong with me.” (Lessing 425).

This section is important to the story as it displays Susan struggling, it shows what she is struggling with, and also, arguably most importantly, it demonstrates why she is struggling, in a fairly subtle way.

In the beginning of the section, Susan states how her twins have not been to school for very long, and that it has not been long since; “[...] *they were off my hands*” (Lessing 425).

She then goes on to criticise herself for using this phrase, deeming herself ‘stupid’. These are interesting lines as they portray both Susan’s struggle, and how she is a product of society. As analysed earlier in this text, Susan is experiencing a gap between the ‘intelligent’ housewife Susan, and her internal woman. Who this internal woman is, is something Susan discovers later in the short story, but at this point there is an unfamiliar void inside her that she cannot name and therefore struggles with. In regards to Susan being a product of society, one can argue that a mother and a wife celebrating being away from her kids was not ‘intelligent’. Taking a broader look at the short story, we discover another interesting point in regards to these lines. This is not the first time the phrase; ‘[...] *they were off my hands*’, is used (Lessing). In fact, Susan is not even the first person to use it. Matthew, the ‘intelligent’ husband, is the first person to use the phrase and he uses it while consoling Susan about her soul being her children’s, and not her own (Lessing 419). He also uses it again, just after Susan, in disbelief about her wanting to be more alone (Lessing 425). The interesting part is that, unlike when Susan says it, both the times Matthew uses the phrase, there is no critiquing. It does not matter if it is way earlier in the story or at just the same time Susan uses the phrase, Matthew is not questioned. This continues with the previously established idea that Matthew is the representation for what is ‘intelligent’ and what he says, goes. The story exists in a masculine society and therefore he cannot be argued with.

The theme of Matthew being the rational one and this being a society of *The Feminine Mystique* is also proven at the end of the section when Susan tells him; ‘[...] there must be something wrong with me.’ (Lessing 425). Susan uses the word ‘wrong’. It is interesting to explore her reasoning for assuming that something is ‘wrong’ with her. Susan is experiencing feelings and thoughts she does not understand. This does not automatically mean that something is wrong with her. However, Susan being a woman in the previously mentioned society, she has to believe something is wrong with her. Her surroundings believe all women’s sole purpose and want in life is to stay at home with the children. When Susan then starts to despise this, she believes she is different to all other women, hence ‘wrong’. Susan also uses the word ‘must’ as if there is no inkling of uncertainty. There is definitely something wrong. And it is definitely with her. All this blame she puts on herself, she does however never mention, or seem to realise, that the first time she has these ‘wrong’ or ‘confusing’ feelings and thoughts, is after Matthew is unfaithful and Susan is somewhat forced to accept this. Matthew’s infidelity is portrayed as an inevitable incident and Susan’s

understanding is portrayed as an expected reaction. Well, this again comes back to Matthew deciding the status quo, and Susan being a victim of his decisions.

Continuing on with the society of *The Feminine Mystique*, but going back towards the start of the section, the lines; “[...] and yet I’m a different person. I’m simply not myself. I don’t understand it.” are important (Lessing 425). These again show Susan as a victim of her surroundings. As mentioned earlier, she believes there must be something wrong with her and having been brought up in mid-twentieth-century England, she has most likely never learned of anyone having the same problems as her, and therefore she cannot understand it. Susan considers her thoughts “irrational” and as stated, her solution is then to throw herself further into the intelligent; “Yet she had to understand it.” (Lessing 425). After this line Susan’s responsibilities, the house, the husband, the children, the garden, and the housekeeping, are all listed. Susan not understanding, but forcing herself to for the sake of her responsibilities, is, as stated earlier, what leads to her looking for the wrong solutions. The wrong solutions are throughout the story detrimental to her mental health, and leads to her seeking permanent solace in Room Nineteen.

Conclusion

Drawing on ideas from Rula Quawas, Lynn Sukenick, Betty Friedan, and Kevin Brown, and comparing the statements to sections of Doris Lessing’s “To Room Nineteen”, this paper has analysed how “intelligence” is one of the main reasons Susan ends her life in Room Nineteen. As both the beginning of the short story, and the beginning of this paper, starts with “intelligence”, they both also seem to end in a certain sense of “intelligence”. This paper’s section on “Structure and Revising” sees the “intelligent” Susan, who perfectly fits into her society, turning into the “new” Susan, who does not fit into her society. Susan’s final hours portray both the “old” Susan and the “new” Susan. The “old and intelligent” Susan is seen in her concern for Matthew. As she knows she is going to kill herself, she says; “[...] but she had to think about Matthew first.” (Lessing 446). She puts much effort into plotting what she wants him to believe after her death, wanting to leave him as happy as possible, not once thinking to explain why she actually commits suicide. The “new and unintelligent” Susan appears moments after this as she shows a certain carelessness about the people around her that has previously been uncharacteristic of Susan; “But she decided not to trouble about it, simply not to think about the living.” (Lessing 446). The “old” Susan has done nothing but “trouble it” and “think about” it, so Susan now choosing to act against this

shows her development. This paper has previously devoted several paragraphs to Susan's repeated critique of herself and in this final section of the short story we see the "old" Susan reappear as she critiques her own opinion on who should be the mother of her children; "[...] and what hypocrisy to sit here worrying about the children, when she was going to leave them [...]" (Lessing 446). This happens just before Susan makes the final arrangements to end her life by turning on the gas and laying down in the bed. These arrangements are made in a very calm and peaceful manner, even explaining her looking for a blanket as her feet grow cold; "She got up, found a blanket folded in the bottom of the chest of drawers, and carefully covered her legs with it." (Lessing 447). Removing this sentence would not affect the plot much, showing how it is not here to add to the plot, but to add to the character of the "new" Susan. This Susan cares for herself. This very detailed description of Susan's action, an action that seems insignificant seeing the bigger picture of the suicide, shows how Susan cares about her own thoughts and actions. The sentences following this describe Susan falling asleep and dying; "[...] listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river." (Lessing 447). Suicide is not portrayed as the desired outcome for Susan. There is a clear focus on the "new" Susan, but the continued existence of the "old" Susan shows that she cannot fully transform as a result of the restrictions in her surrounding society. There is a new woman, a new Susan, ready to emerge, but until the intelligent society changes, she is forced to stay inside, drifting in the dark.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Sections	First sentence	Last sentence	Page numbers
1	“THIS IS A STORY, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: the Rawlings’ marriage was grounded in intelligence.”	“In fact, even to say so, to think in such a way, was banal; they were ashamed to do it.”	413-416
2	“It was banal, too, when one night Matthew came home late and confessed he had been to a party, taken a girl home and slept with her.”	“The laugh comforted them; it saved them both, though from what, they did not know.”	416-419
3	“They were now both fortyish.”	“She would have to live knowing she was subject to a state of mind she could not own.”	419-426
4	“Nevertheless, as a result of this conversation with her husband, there was a new regime next holidays.”	“For he was now taking things as they came, from the surface of life withdrawn both as a husband and a father from the household.”	426-435
5	“One day Susan saw how Sophie and Mrs Parkes were talking and laughing in the kitchen, and she announced that she would be away until tea time.”	“For the five daytimes in the school week, she was altogether the mistress of the house.”	435-438
6	“One night in the bedroom, Matthew asked: ‘Susan, I don’t want to interfere – don’t think that, please – but are you sure you are well?’ “	“She turned her face into the dark of his flesh, and listened to the blood pounding through her ears saying: I am alone, I am alone, I am alone.”	438-443
7	“In the morning Susan lay in bed while he dressed.”	“She was quite content lying there, listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river.”	443-447