

**POLITICIZING THE PERSONAL: DORIS LESSING'S
"TO ROOM NINETEEN" AND "HOW I FINALLY LOST MY HEART"
AS FICTIONAL VERSIONS OF SECOND WAVE FEMINISM'S SLOGAN**

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to show that although Doris Lessing rejects the relatively narrow categorisation of her writing as "feminist", the two short stories she wrote in 1963, "To Room Nineteen" and "How I Finally Lost My Heart", make the claims of second wave feminism visible. As they illustrate a wholistic attitude that sees human beings beyond labels, the stories' emphasis on the need to bridge the artificial gap between public and private realms supports the second wave feminism's slogan: "The personal is political!" The article argues that as social constructs that conceptualize different realms of everyday life, public and private spaces are understood as gendered, therefore a separation between them is part of a patriarchal political structure that imposes a restriction on women's personal lives. As a writer who problematizes artificial divides in social life, Doris Lessing clearly imbues her works with this consciousness that goes hand in hand with the central discussions of second wave feminism's consciousness raising groups.

Doris Lessing, second wave feminism, gender and space, private versus public space

Doris Lessing is a writer who is always at odds with divides such as East/West, black/white, sane/insane, mind/soul. Both her fictional and non-fictional writing feature Lessing as an exponent of wholeness" which would offer a healing attitude for individual lives and in society. Considering her whole *oeuvre*, one can see that the seeds of ideas explored in her novels that problematise fragmentation are already available in her stories like "To Room Nineteen" (1963) and "How I Finally Lost My Heart." (1963). Written in the heyday of second wave feminism, these two stories mark the movement's overriding spirit as they feature Lessing's wholistic attitude. While they become the fictional versions of second wave feminism's statement "The personal is political!", they also deny the

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patriarchal social organisation that separates the domestic and the social. Lessing asserts that “unless we consciously and actively choose that personal wholeness and recognition of our inherent oneness with others and with nature [...] we shall destroy all, or almost all, of the life on this planet” (qtd. in Bazin, 1999: 33). In this sense, her fiction is a variation on the theme that by clustering human existence around certain labels like male/female, black/white, master/servant, public/private, modern society imposes divisions that intensify depression, loneliness and inequality.

Hunter and McIntosh call Doris Lessing’s interest in fervent rejection of binaries as an “unwavering commitment to a spirituality in which the person, the globe, and the very universe are all pieces in a cosmic puzzle or connected nodes on a network” (1999: 109). The realisation that universe is a wholistic system in which individual and the universe continually interact gains its impetus from the criticism of the public/private divide Lessing explores both in her stories and *The Golden Notebook*. As Lessing signals in her preface to *The Golden Notebook*, keeping separate notebooks Anna Wulf falls prey to fragmentation which is one of the root causes of the writer’s block: “She keeps four, not one because, as she recognises, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness, of breakdown” (27). The novels’s omniscient narrator follows: “But in the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation--the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity” (28). Through this theme of unity, Lessing aims to enable the individual to relate meaningfully to others and to the world (Schlueter, 1973: 2). This theme of unity Lessing famously works in her seminal novel which was adopted by the feminists of her time is also achieved by an effective representation of the public/private divide in the two stories “To Room Nineteen” and “How I Finally Lost My Heart”. As the isolating effects of this dichotomy aggravate depression in the lives of the female protagonists, Lessing’s thematic emphasis on unity becomes more explicit.

This article aims to show that although Doris Lessing rejects the relatively narrow categorisation of her writing as “feminist”, the two short stories she wrote in 1963, “To Room Nineteen” and “How I Finally Lost My Heart”, make the claims of second wave feminism visible. As they illustrate a wholistic attitude that sees human beings

beyond labels, the stories' emphasis on the need to bridge the artificial gap between public and private realms supports second wave feminism's slogan: "The personal is political!" The article

argues that as social constructs that conceptualize different realms of everyday life, public and private spaces are understood as gendered, therefore a separation between them is part of a patriarchal political structure that imposes a restriction on women's personal lives. As a writer who problematizes artificial divides in social life, Doris Lessing clearly imbues her works with this consciousness that goes hand in hand with the central discussions of second wave feminism's consciousness raising groups.

"Smiling, Treasuring Anonymity"

"To Room Nineteen" reveals that it is thorough going beyond their limiting private realms that women can achieve fulfilling lives to assert their humanness instead of being confined into a domestic bliss. The story does this by showcasing Susan Rawling as a victim an isolating domestic life. Seyla Benhabib's argument in "Models of Public Space about the public/private divide in social life can be read as the very background to Susan's tragic downfall which culminates in her suicide. In this article, Benhabib contends that:

In the tradition of the Western political thought down to our days, the way in which the distinction between the public and the private spheres has been drawn has served to confine women, and typically female spheres of activity like housework, reproduction, nurturance, and care of the young, the sick, and the elderly, to the 'private' domain, and to keep them off the public agenda in the liberal state. (1998: 85)

Lessing's story heavily relies on the depression and the final breakdown of its central character Susan Rawlings. At the onset of the story, Susan is a woman in her late twenties, having a well-paid job and a "set" of friends.² She has a "talent for commercial drawing"

² This recalls the mental deterioration of Mary in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) who experiences a similar depression after moving into a farm house quitting her job in the town for marrying Tony Marston. There, even though as a woman Mary's

and a rich sense of humour (2302). Susan meets Matthew, a “subeditor on a large London newspaper”. They marry “amid general rejoicing” and with a dream of “buying a house and starting a family”. Matthew is a sophisticated husband, space-conscious enough to agree “wisely” on moving into a new house since “it might seem like a submission of personality on the part of the one whose flat it was not” (2302). Thus, both Susan and Matthew find it convenient to move into a new house to “start a family”. Soon they do start it as Susan becomes pregnant and gives up her job. In a summary narration that adds an ironic tone to the so-far very traditional account of the Rawlings’ “happy” marriage, the narrator states that: “[...] with their “four healthy children”, in their “large white gardened house” in Richmond” they are “happy” (2302).

Read against the sentence that opens the story, “This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: The Rawlings’ marriage was grounded in intelligence” (2301), the narrator’s description of the Edenic bliss gains an ironic dimension which reinforces the critical stance Lessing takes towards the lifestyle she describes in the story. Their married life which almost discards an exchange of emotions and revolves merely around a set of logical decisions to bring physical comfort is doomed to fail. The mind/soul divide dominating their thinking goes hand in hand with the public/private divide that imprisons Susan into a life of motherhood. As a natural result of this debilitating perspective, the fairy-tale bliss of the Rawlings does not last long since “They had everything they had wanted and had planned for”, yet these things cannot generate happiness (2302).

The background information about the blissful stage of the marriage is revealed in a single page punctuated by a “Yet” signalling the disquiet and “certain flatness” that Susan, now a housewife, starts to feel. That flatness is narrated in the remaining twenty-two pages of the story, which makes the inevitability of disproportion structurally visible too. The process of deterioration in their life starts with Susan’s determination to quit her job for the sake of children. The narrator’s ironic “they had everything they had wanted” reinforces the idea that in a life divided into categories as work and home, despair is unavoidable. Susan cuts all her ties with

isolation is more acute, both Tony and Mary suffer the consequences of a life centred upon a series of dichotomies such as nature/culture, black/white, private/public, rich/poor and so on.

the public world and work; bearing no sign of sociability, she becomes almost a prisoner in a big house. While she spends all her day inside doing practically nothing other than making life easier for the family, Matthew works outside to be at home only for dinner and a good night's sleep. Thus, the cleavage between work and home soon dominates the story as a threat to the peace of this "happy" middle class family. As Gardiner notes, "To Room Nineteen" cites the values of "market" and "home", of "sophisticated city and of pastoral retreat" and "often of men and women struggling with each other as characteristic of Lessing's narratives (1989: 85). Obviously, behind the tragedy of Susan Rawlings who cannot cope with an unrewarding life within the walls of "home" lies the public/private divide. In a vicious cycle, her domestic duties render Susan into a depressed wife who cannot reach Matthew, a husband who now enjoys a serious extra-marital relationship. Failing to get out of depression, Susan resolves to end her life.

The plot structure of this story validates the overriding argument of second wave feminism that women's individual experiences are inextricably connected with the larger social, cultural and historical context. "To Room Nineteen" represents the argument that the unfair division of labour in patriarchal middle-class family turns out to be a trap, and Lessing shows that in fact, it is the family ideal they follow that brings the downfall of their relationship: "Their life seemed to be like snake biting its tail. Matthew's job for the sake of Susan, children, house and garden [...] And Susan's practical intelligence for the sake of Matthew, the children, the house and the garden (2302). This life that rests upon the public/private divide fails to bring satisfaction. Susan starts questioning what "the centre of her life", her "reason for being" is. She believes that it must be her love for Matthew and Matthew's love for her, yet their love cannot reproduce in a climate of divisions. Thus, their relationship can be understood as emblematic of the modern urban bourgeoisie. As Hareven surveys in her article "The Home and The Family in Historical Perspective":

The concept of home as a private retreat first emerged in the lives of bourgeois families in eighteenth-century France and England, and in the United States among urban, middle-class families in the early part of the nineteenth century. Its

development was closely linked to the new ideals of domesticity and privacy that were associated with the characteristics of the modern family--family that was child-centred, private, and in which the roles of husband and wife were segregated into public and domestic spheres, respectively. (1991: 258)

Therefore, the segregation of the roles of Matthew and Susan, namely the public/private divide, leaves a single place for them to share the day totally lived apart. This single space is "the big married bedroom": "They lay beside each other talking and he told her about his day, and what he had done, and whom he had met; and she told him about her day (not as interesting, but that was not her fault)" (2303). Susan does not meet anyone except the "devil", the demon in the form of a man, which is merely the fabrication of her depressed mind. She gradually loses her sanity, and Matthew, completely unaware of how Susan feels, happens to be "like other husbands, with his real life in his work and the people he met there [...]" (2314). Apparently, it is only the nocturnal bodily closeness in the bedroom that keep Susan and Matthew as a "couple." Since their relationship's only source of liveliness is the limited time spent in the bedroom sleeping, it soon becomes vulnerable to the physical attraction that Matthew can easily find outside. They think:

They had avoided the pitfall so many of the friends had fallen into--of buying a house in the country for the sake of the children; so that the husband became a weekend husband, a weekend father, and the wife always careful not to ask what went on in the town flat which they called (in joke) a bachelor flat. (2303)

Their love, "the wellspring" cannot suffice to beat the divide between the two sets of lives lived separately.

Lacking a social environment that would support her as an individual, Susan loses her talent, her sense of humour, and her communication skills. She is now dependent on Matthew. As Watkins notes, "one of the most striking aspects of Lessing's story is the fact that her heroine has no friendships with other women" (28), and I'd change this as: She has no friends at all. To illustrate Susan's loneliness both as the result of and the reason for the decay in their relationship, the narrator gives a visual image of Susan as a lonely woman who looks at herself sitting in a big chair by the window in

the bedroom. The only people Susan is in contact with are those who offer service in return for money. Other than Mrs. Parkes, the daily help, and Sophie Traub, the au-pair, she has no one to talk to. As such, Susan is like the twentieth century counterpart of the *fin de siècle* "angel in the house" or "bird in a gilded cage." As Roberts notes in *Living in A Man-Made World*, "Physical separation of home from work restricts the horizons of those confined in it" (1991: 22) and restricts opportunities for social relations outside the home. Typically, Susan's best pastime is just helping Mrs. Parkes cook and clean, doing some sewing for children, and picking them up from school. To use Watkins' term, Susan's is a "middle-class predicament", namely an isolation caused by "enforced leisure" (2001: 27). Susan seems to have internalised the idea that with her cleaning lady, au-pair and big house, she must feel happy; failing to do so, she loses her wholeness and starts to feel more and more imprisoned in her own consciousness which fabricates a demon to "appear and claim her" (2307). She considers telling Matthew about the "enemy" she sees, the face of a man threatening her with a grin on his face, but gives up the idea at once for she rightfully assumes that Matthew would say "What enemy, Susan darling? [...] Perhaps you should see a doctor?" (2307). She realises that she is all alone living with a stranger and she feels totally frustrated: "She saw what she had been dreading: Incredulity. Disbelief. And fear. An incredulous blue stare from a stranger who was her husband, as close to her as her own breath" (2309).

The cleavage of work and home brings a more fatal blow to Susan, this time from the outside world: Matthew goes to a party, takes a girl home and sleeps with her. Employing "intelligence" as they often do, they resolve the "whole thing": Matthew "confesses", she "forgives", and they agree that this is "not important." Yet, there remains "something inassimilable about it" (2304), which is the knowledge that without a drastic change and re-ordering in their lives that would naturally cure the root cause, this would recur. It is evident that the public/private dichotomy feeds the mind and soul divide only to deteriorate Susan's victim status. Naturally, the intellectual "forget and forgive" response to the affair does not work on emotional level: "Strange, but they were both bad-tempered, annoyed" (2304). The acceptance of the affair as something unimportant, while it is a symptom of the decay in their blissful state,

serves as the point of no return in their tragedy which culminates in a more serious affair on the part of Matthew. The result is Susan feels “like a visitor”, “a prisoner” who has “nothing to do with” all that is happening in the house. Feeling already “out of it”, she does not know what it is she contributes to the big white house (2309).

Analysing the gendered nature of domestic space also reinforces the argument that what Susan experiences on a private level is conditioned by the politics of space. Susan wants to open a niche in this big house to induce in her both a sense of belonging and freedom. All she wants is to be free “from the pressure of time, from having to remember this or that” (2308). In pursuit of a place which environmental psychology designates as a place to “approach” rather than “avoid”, a place which is associated with “movement toward, exploration, friendliness, improved performance, and voiced preference or liking” (Mehrabian, 1976: 6), Susan first thinks of locking herself in the bathroom, then decides to use the “spare room” in the attic. Domestic realm is associated with femininity, but as the public/private divide bestows power upon men, women are reduced to a prisoner status even in this feminine-associated realm. Thus, ironically, despite the spaciousness of the house, it is either the bathroom or the attic Susan can think she has a right to use.³ Eventually, she turns the empty attic room into a “room of her own,” but it practically becomes the “Mother’s Room” (2308). Interestingly, the public/private dichotomy which is problematic itself also gives rise to an equally problematic understanding of privacy. Feeling “even more caged than in her bedroom”, Susan features a perfect “mad woman in the attic” with a cardboard sign on the room that reads: “PRIVATE! DO NOT DISTURB!” (2308).

To understand the gendered nature of space in the story, one should note the fact that house plans intensify hierarchies of class and gender. For instance, in the house plans of London in the 19th century, the servants’ rooms were distributed between the basement and the attic; they were separated so that guests and servants never see one another. Interestingly, female servants had to pass through the family’s staircase to reach their bedrooms, thus allowing the family to survey and control the movements. It was the location of ideology of the home which emphasized the gulf between the sexes

within the bourgeoisie (Roberts, 1991: 21). In Susan's case, in addition to suffering from the public/private divide, she can enjoy privacy only in the most marginal space in the household, or in the "anonymity" of "Room 19 of Fred's Hotel."

All the people in the story except Susan conceptualise privacy as a state of keeping something secret, of withdrawal rather than as a basic human need, which further marginalizes Susan. Her children find their mother's need for privacy as something bizarre. They "chase" her in some game pounding up the stairs and tiptoeing downstairs like *criminal conspirators* (2310, my emphasis). Therefore, the Mother's Room ceases to be a shelter for Susan and becomes another family room. Possessed by the "devil" "lurking in the garden" to "get into" her and "take her over", Susan now dreams of having a room "anonymous" where she can go sit by and hide when children are at school: She decides to rent a room in a hotel (2311). However, as a married woman, and a mother, she finds it difficult to accept this need and judges that what she wants is not normal:

She had to accept the fact that after all she was an irrational person and to live with it. Some people have to live with crippled arms, or stammers, or being deaf. She would have to live knowing she was subject to a state of mind she could not own. (2310)

Still feeling that the best way to defeat the "devil" haunting the house is to find a room outside to feel free, she takes action. This liberation from the bounds of the domestic realm through occupying an anonymous place, a hotel room, immediately works its healing effect on Susan. She simply sits in "Room 19" with no pressure of time, and soon this "very sordid hotel room" turns out to be a place "where she is happy" (2320). She feels "How very much she belongs" and intuits that "the room had been waiting for her to join it" (2316). In a sense, in this hotel room, Susan celebrates the meeting of the public and private until her secret hours of bliss are interrupted by Matthew who associates Susan's need for privacy with a possible secret affair she hides from public. Like his children who often act as "criminal conspirators" towards their mother, Matthew sends a detective to find out what Susan does in this room. As he learns that the visits are

regular, he rests assured that Susan is having an affair. The story shows that the public/private divide in the Rawlings' marriage leads not only to a complete lack of understanding but also to alienation. Even when Susan is lying with Matthew in their marital bed with her head lying on Matthew's shoulder, she hears "the blood pounding through her ears: I am alone. I am alone, I am alone" (2321). In this life of loneliness, ironically "Room 19", a public space, is the only setting she can find for privacy. But, confinement of the hotel room furthers the divide and as a solution, she can only think of suicide.

Clearly, in this story, Lessing writes the fictional version of the famous slogan of second wave feminism in the late 1960s, slightly ahead of its time: "The personal is political!" This slogan fought against the mind-set that associates the public with men and the private with women for this segregation perpetuates the power relationships (Whelehan, 1995: 13). Therefore, it encouraged women to show that "the public/private distinction maintained in all phallogocentric political discourses is founded on the ideology of male dominance, and contributes to maintenance of the equilibrium of such dominance" (65). With such a mindset, radical feminists of the 60s sought to "elevate" such issues like marriage, childcare, sexuality, health and work-which are considered as "personal aspects of women's lives" to matters of political concern (73). Therefore, Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" can be understood as the summa of these discussions about divisions in modern individual's everyday lives and their sad consequences. She suggests that an understanding of work and home/ public and private as separate realms generates inequality and insanity, and that to transform women's lives, the personal and political, public and private should be brought back together.

"Madam you're mad-shall I escort you to your home?"

Mezei and Briganti cite Doris Lessing among Anita Brookner, Margaret Drabble and Fay Weldon as writers showing "how the home [...] entraps and stifles women" (2002: 843) and who "deconstruct myths of domestic bliss" (844). If "To Room Nineteen" does deconstruct the myth of domestic bliss to show that that domestic space only breeds alienation from public life, "How I Finally Lost My Heart", a story that can be read in parallel terms with *The Golden Notebook* (Fallon et al., 2013: 247), reveals the false beliefs

that lead to the divide. As the title of the story suggests, Lessing shows how women lose their sanity when they follow the myths of domestic bliss engendered by romance and enchantment which only imprison them in a life of isolation and alienation from public life. Like "To Room Nineteen", "How I Finally Lost My Heart" describes how unbearable life becomes when a woman devotes all her time and energy to find the "Right Man" and secure a relationship.

This time rather than depicting the process of deterioration, Lessing focuses on the awakening of her protagonist to the limiting nature of her private life which reduces her to a female subject seeing men only in terms of sexual intimacy and marriage. Like Susan in "To Room Nineteen", the protagonist of "How I Finally Lost My Heart", whose nameless existence in the story reduces her to a common prototype, chooses to liberate herself from the suffocating bounds of the private realm and unite with the life outside. While the Susan finds solace in an anonymous room, the latter seeks her integrity in public space.

"How I Finally Lost My Heart" also pictures a reconciliation through which Lessing gives clues about the possible ways of achieving sanity. The storyline perfectly juxtaposes the crisis of two women who suffer from alienation in separate realms. A sense of reconciliation is achieved, when the two, who are complete strangers to each other, happen to interact in public. Therefore, it can be suggested that the story dissects the segments of a stultifying myth of domestic bliss and shows the ways to liberate women before they become victims of their much-protected private lives. In doing this, it also supports the idea that what seems to be a personal problem is in fact a direct result of a social life organised mainly around the patriarchal ideals of sex and marriage.

Rather than a married woman, this time Lessing places an unmarried, independent woman who, after many disappointing relationships, is awakened to the fact that she has been trying to live up to the expectations of the public world. The first-person narration of the love affairs she has had is filled with clichés from popular woman's magazines: She maintains that "*a serious* love is the most important business in life, or nearly so" (92, my emphasis). To find the "real one", she believes, "we have the right to taste, sip, and sample a thousand people on our way to the *real* one" (93). Clichés dominate her discourse when she reviews her relationships one by

one: “B and I *clicked*, we went off like a bomb,” (93) “B and I got on like house on fire” (93, my emphasis). And interestingly, as she catalogues her most recent date as a potential “C”, she comments on her own discourse and thinks about the expressions she chooses: “He might turn out to be *the one*”, “perhaps it will be *serious*” (94, my emphasis).

This awareness about the words she uses contributes to the critical evaluation of her attitude towards the love affairs she has. Her analysis of the language she uses to describe her experiences of romantic love adds the story a significant layer of discourse since the analysis comprises a juxtaposition of two different registers in language. While clichés are part of the public, her analysis employs a series of thoughts and emotions that are part of her private space. In other words, signifiers of two separate realms used in her process of thinking mark the separation between private and public experience of romantic love. The language itself that the story problematizes becomes a catalogue of the expectations encircling women. The heroine of the story suddenly realises that she is merely reproducing the female model publicized in magazines, namely a woman who, as a proof of her attraction, must always have a boyfriend. This realisation comes just before she prepares to go out with the potential “Right Man”, “C”; as a result, she decides to call this potential boyfriend and drop the date. With the epiphanic moment she experiences about the superfluosity of her affairs, she switches from a private to an authorial voice that foreshadows the liberating step she takes towards merging with the public life. Thus, with a need to share her insight she immediately addresses the reader: “At this moment, dear reader, I was forced simply to put down the telephone with an apology” (95).

This change of attitude, i.e. refusing to seek romance, starts a process of mature reflection; she admits that she has become a prisoner of this reductive experience of love: “My heart was in a state of inflation after having had lunch with A, tea with B, and then looking forward to C” (95). She intuits that in pursuit of the “Right Man”, she has denied the needs of her heart which Lessing portrays as a solid “unknown, largish, lightish object” her fingers stretch out “desperately to encompass” (95). This grotesque image of the young woman talking on the phone to C, *literally* with her heart in her hand intensifies the sense of alienation that pervades her. As the divide between what she feels and what she does gets bigger and bigger, she

fails to act and needs a pause for introspection. Therefore, after telling C "some idiotic lie about having flu" (96), she spends four days alone in her flat examining her heart through forty years "heartbeat by heartbeat" (96). She sees that the heart which has long lost contact with reality--that is fresh air--needs protection; to feel safer, she wraps a scarf around her hand and tin-foils the heart. This "examination" of the heart functions as a step she takes towards bridging the gap between her public self and her genuine feelings. "Heartbeat by heartbeat", she comes to terms with her *self* as she realises that she has forced herself to be in love, to be a girlfriend, a wife, to comply with the roles imposed by a patriarchal society when she was not in fact excited about these roles.

To reinforce the argument that transgression of the public/private divide leads to a therapeutic experience, the protagonist's deep retrospective thinking about her past love affairs encourages her to go beyond her small world and go outside. She first starts hearing "[t]he tap-tap-tapping [...] the sound of high heels on a pavement" and "the pigeons on her windowsill cooing" (97). Like Susan of "To Room Nineteen", she feels "happy and exhilarated" when she feels a sense of liberation from the claustrophobic divide between the private/public and becomes a part of the world outside. With these sounds that herald a life beyond her limited experience of the world, she realizes that life is not just about her domestic needs and relations with men. After this epiphanic moment, she confidently proclaims: "I had no problems in this world," and starts feeling relaxed. As a physical response to her sudden realisation, "the heart that stuck to [her] fingers [becomes] quite loose" (97). Unlike Susan, she chooses life and walks outside. As her "loose" heart also signifies, she releases herself from madness in a way described by R. D. Laing, one of the founders of the anti-psychiatry movement. Interestingly, in one of her interviews, Lessing expresses her respect for Laing by calling him "a key authority figure" who was active around the same time as second wave feminists (qtd. in Kaup, 1993: 129).

In his *Politics of Experience* (1967), Laing argues that madness can be overcome through a voluntary inner journey of self-discovery that the schizophrenic takes in order to integrate the divisions in his soul. He sees madness as a "natural healing process" to cure fragmentation of the soul, to eradicate false dualities and to put an end to polarisation of individual and society (105). Thus, following Laing's argument, it can be suggested that the protagonist achieves

sanity and this sanity drives her to merge with life outside, with the “crowds of people”, the public: “I understood that sitting and analyzing each movement or pulse or beat of my heart through forty years was a mistake” (97). Lessing portrays her recovered appetite for life as something contagious as if to suggest that a healthy person cannot help but communicate. She goes down the underground and gets into a train where she meets a woman talking on her own. While she thinks that people on the train classify this woman as mad, she does not use the word “mad”; with her new awareness about life and her need to connect with the world not just as a woman but a human being, she describes her as a woman “clearly alone in the crowded compartment” “looking inwards” (99). Understanding the woman’s need for love and care, she communicates with her and even offers her heart. She gently gives her tin-foiled heart to the mad woman, as she repeats the sentence-- evocation of a deep resentment and disillusionment-- “A gold cigarette case, well, that is a nice thing. [...] I am going to wait at home for you, but you gave her a gold case” (99).

This meeting of two women, a sufferer of the divide between her brain and her heart, and a victim of a divided consciousness “publicly accusing her husband or lover”, ends the story on a note of optimism: In an instinctive response to this unconditional love, the woman, “with a groan or a mutter of relieved and entirely theatrical grief” pours a motherly care and affection on the heroine’s heart:

[She] leaned forward, picked up the glittering heart, and clutched it in her arms, hugging it and rocking it back and forth, even laying her cheek against it, while staring over its top at her husband as if to say: Look what I’ve got, I don’t care about you and your cigarette case. I’ve got a silver heart. (101)

Among “the pleased congratulatory nods and similes” this act of caring and sharing leaves behind, the heroine walks “out on the platform, up the escalators, into the street, along to the park” (101). This is clearly an image of a liberated *flâneuse* “strolling in the crowd, observing but not observed”, freely “roaming the public spaces” (Massey, 1994: 243). This suggests that she finally becomes free from the burden of the heart, laden with the gendered expectations of the society, and starts to enjoy the right to be in public both as an independent woman and as an individual with a sense of responsibility for community. This public position she finally

achieves functions as a cure for her depression caused by a split between what one feels and what one reasons; she frees herself from this threat to her oneness and from the limits of false "privacy", of an isolating romance. She simultaneously liberates herself from the shunning effect of the blinds, curtains, walls; and now she faces the city and sees faces: In a sense, the *flaneuse* stops the hub-hub of her mind and released from, to use Hannah Arendt's term, the "shadowy interior of the household" (qtd. in Benhabib, 1998: 85), she feels herself one with the outside world. Thus, she exclaims:

No heart. No heart at all. What bliss. What freedom...
Hear that sound? That's laughter, yes.
That's me laughing, yes, that's me. (101)

I think this therapeutic laughter which recalls the carnivalesque spirit that Bakhtin celebrates is not only the product of a sense of community, but it also serves as the justification of what Lessing asserts in her preface to *The Golden Notebook*: "This theme of 'breakdown', that sometimes when people 'crack up', it is a way of healing, of the inner self's dismissing false dichotomies and divisions, [...]" (27). It is obvious that although she refused to be seen as a feminist writer in the idiom of second wave feminists, her stories not only heavily rely on women's claim to the public space but also showcase the organic link between their private and public experiences. As they find solace in sharing their intimate experiences with people surrounding their small worlds, the female protagonists of both stories imply that private experiences can change only when their intrinsic value to the whole can be acknowledged. Thus, these two oft-anthologized Lessing stories can be read as the embodiments of second wave feminism's motto: "The personal is political!" through which the literary space they create serves as consciousness raising group that contributes to the self-awareness of the reader.

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