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Escaping the Space of Home in Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen"

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I. Introduction

From the kernel of the home, Susan, the protagonist of Doris Lessing's 1962 short story "To Room Nineteen," escapes to a room in an attic, to a small and quiet hotel in Victoria, to Wales, and finally to an invisibly anonymous cheap hotel called Fred's Hotel. Through each of these attempts to distance herself from her family and the home that she and her husband Matthew have established, readers are confronted with a Susan who is becoming increasingly unstable. The space of home is draining her of physical and emotional energy and sanity with the passing of each day until the story ends tragically when she commits suicide in the dingy room at Fred's Hotel. The seeming cause of Susan's drive to end her life is that she realizes that her relationship with Matthew will never be the same after they have both confessed to having love affairs—Susan, untruthfully, as she has no lover—and agreeing to meet on a double date, to which Susan has no one to take and which makes her exhausted even at the thought of taking a lover. However, the real cause of her death is not that she has come to an irresolvable problem in her marriage but that she is no longer compatible with the space of her home and the altered partnership between her and her husband and that she is continually forced into that space of home.

In critiquing the fact that women are confined to the space of a home embodying patriarchal ideology and order, Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" reveals that they are forced to adopt only a limited number of cultural identities that society has idealized for the female sex: in this cultural climate, they are restricted to performing the gender roles, rather than creating other identities beyond gender. This story can therefore be considered a social allegory suggesting one way in which a woman who occupies the ideological space of home—the realm constructed by male desires—inevitably fails in

her attempt to discover her true self and to obtain a sense of freedom. This article argues that patriarchal forces are what constantly tie the story's heroine to the space of home and frustrate her various attempts to escape it. To show how the narrative unfolds the violent impacts of home upon the woman, despite her struggle to escape the physical boundaries of her home, this article first examines the story's representation of the home as a constructed space by considering critical thoughts on space and ideology. Here, Henri Lefebvre's theory on space serves best as it analyzes the detailed aspects of the concept of space in itself and how it was socially produced. The idea that space was socially produced functions as a key idea that allows readers to understand how patriarchy invades into these constructed spaces, forming a completely new kind of space and altering the relationship people have within that space. This gives the basis from which to analyze why Susan is unable to leave her home to obtain a space of her own. Second, it examines each of Susan's failed endeavors to escape from the space of home, distorted by the ideological forces of patriarchy. Each attempt shows how the space of home, with the ideology of patriarchy embedded in it, frustrates the heroine's efforts to free herself.

II. Home as a Constructed Space

To begin with, what is a home? Theorist of place and mobility Tim Cresswell says that a home is "an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a center of meaning and a field of care" (24). The home is usually located in a house. This house would be a meaningless architectural structure if it were not inhabited by someone who calls it a home. Only then does this house become a home. And once this house becomes a home, the person or people who live in it will feel a sense of attachment as a place to return to at the end of the day, and a place to start the day, and thus provides a sense of rootedness. So due to the meaning-making of this space, it becomes a meaningful place called home.

Before analyzing the failing of the space of home, we must examine how the home functions as a space and how it becomes a social space so that we can finally look into Susan's attempts to escape from the space of home. Lefebvre explains that because space precedes what fills that space, the fact that space is produced is hard to grasp (15). In addition, people also have difficulty accepting that space has a reality of its own, just as the abstract concepts of

commodity, money, and capital (26). In other words, while people assume that space merely exists and is only filled by agents of social activity, space exists in a more complex condition than is easily conceived. If all that is said above is true and that space has a sense of agency and exists before what fills it comes along, then space must have been produced in advance. In this context, Lefebvre contends that "(social) space is a (social) product" (27, parenthesis original). If social space has indeed been produced—not naturally existing—then social space must have been convincing a reality of its own in order to maintain its existence to conceal that it had been constructed. Lefebvre explains that social space creates two illusions to convince us its seemingly natural existence. The first illusion is the illusion of transparency, an illusion making space appear "luminous" and making the actors in it think that they are acting on free will while they are actually acting according to design as everything is lit up and transparent (27–29). The second illusion is one that Lefebvre calls the illusion of reality. This illusion uses the myth of naturalness to make the actors within the space think that everything that goes on in that space is natural (29–30).

These two illusions—of transparency and reality—are created in the home that appears in "To Room Nineteen." Having created their home with her husband, Susan believes that they are in control of everything that goes on in this space, as equals. When we take a closer look at the text, we see that as a stay-at-home mom and the household manager, Susan is doing all the work and is commandeering how things get done. As a result, Susan and readers are under the impression that she is rather in charge of their home. However, once we see how offended Susan is at having heard her husband having "many serious talks" with the children about how they should give their mother some private time for herself (Lessing¹ 366), readers get a sense of who is really in charge of what goes on in the house. We understand that the power of managing the home is only an illusion to trick the actor within that space into thinking that she is acting on her own free will while patriarchy has it all designed that no woman will be the actual person in charge. This is the way in which the "illusion of transparency" functions in this text.

Regarding the illusion of reality, we see how Susan voluntarily gives up her career to become a full-time mother to her children. With the option of returning to her job as a fully realizable possibility, Susan does not see that she

1. Henceforth, I will omit the author's last name in the parenthetical citation when I have quoted from my primary source, Lessing's "To Room Nineteen."

has been tied down to the home by her family—although of course, neither her husband nor her children had any malevolent intention of doing so—and by the forces of patriarchy. Her decision of becoming a stay-at-home mom seemed a choice of free will, but once we take patriarchy and its role exerted over the home into account, we can conclude that the result of Susan becoming a stay-at-home mom is all by design. The space of home had only created an illusion of reality, making everything ‘natural’ seem natural.

In addition to the double illusion necessary to maintain the constructed social space, Lefebvre explains in length the logical necessity of the conceptual spatial triad consisting of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. Spatial practice is the perceived space that represents the close association between daily reality, or the daily routines, and urban reality, which Lefebvre explains as the routes and networks that link the places designated for specific purposes, such as work, private life, and leisure (38). Representations of space are conceptualized space, in the realm of the conceived. They tend toward a system of “verbal signs” (Lefebvre 39). Examples of representations of space are maps, plans, models, and designs (Anderson). Representational spaces are the spaces that are “directly *lived*” through images and symbols that are associated with it (Lefebvre 39, emphasis original). This space tends toward a somewhat coherent system of non-verbal symbols and signs. It covers the physical space and creates a whole new space laden with imagination and imbued with meaning (39). An example of a representational space would be Paris streets of 1968 full of the protesters’ banners (Anderson). The physical space in this example is the actual Paris streets. These streets are given more meaning through the banners of the protesters, making these streets into symbols of liberation against capitalist and consumerist cultures. It is a logical necessity that all three of these spaces need to match up, although whether they constitute a coherent whole is another matter (40). In the following section, this article examines the way in which this spatial triad is demonstrated and how each of these spaces fails in the context of the story.

III. Failings of the Space of Home and Susan’s Failed Attempts to Escape the Home

At first, when Susan and Matthew got married, the home had been a coherent whole of a space. The narrator tells the readers of Susan and Matthew’s

marriage beginning with the housing choices that they make as a modern, egalitarian couple. Readers are told that despite the fact that both Susan and Matthew had pleasant flats, they felt that moving into one or the other of these two flats would seem like "a submission of personality on the part of the one whose flat it was not," and they therefore got a new flat (353). They lived there and had fun until Susan was pregnant with their first child. They bought a house in Richmond and lived a happy life in which the family grew to number six. Until then, their home was as both Susan and Matthew had conceived it and perceived it, both matching up with their lived experience of the home. In other words, the spatial triad had come to constitute a coherent whole. The space that Susan and Matthew occupy corresponds with the space described by Lefebvre as a coherent space in that it comes about when a consensus or a code is established. It is as though their mutual agreement to create a family seems to have functioned as a consensus, and their marriage vows had been a code keeping this home intact because Matthew's affair with Myra Jenkins seems to have been a turning point in their marriage. Although the narrator seems to suggest that the problem was not the affair and that the problem had been there even before the affair, the length to which the affair is discussed and the way the affair is mentioned again toward the end of the story suggest otherwise. Perhaps a certain ennui had been forming in their marriage "grounded in intelligence" (352), but only after the affair does the home begin to disintegrate, at least for Susan. The space of home that belongs to Susan and Matthew can no longer hold itself together as each of the spaces of the triad begin to fail.

When she had first moved into the big gardened house, she was happy because it was "everything [she] had wanted and planned for" (353). In the early years of the marriage, Susan had been so fully consumed in her role as mother to her children and wife to her husband that the problem was only felt as some kind of "flatness" (353) or a banality (356). However, once she finally puts all her children in school, she is able to have some time for herself, and this extra time forces her to see the problem that had been growing in their marriage. Parallel to this development in the problem, the status of the home continues to deteriorate. Her home has come to signify a fragile building that would crumble if she or her husband were to make one wrong move. They were "looking after it, treating it like a small boat full of helpless people in a very stormy sea" (355) until one day, with a prevailing sense of emptiness overwhelming her, Susan "found herself reluctant to enter her big and beautiful

home because it was as if something was waiting for her there that she did not wish to confront” (359). At this point, Susan begins to fully acknowledge that there is something about the home that is stifling. However, at this point, she is unwilling to confront it, so “[s]he kept herself occupied every day” (360) as a means of evading the problem.

She no longer feels at home in her house, and she soon finds that the garden, where she had been finding refuge in the past is no longer a viable sanctuary, but a place where her restlessness and anxiety take the form of a demon personified as a young man. Susan may not be aware but she no longer feels at home in this space because the representational space, the lived space, has begun to fail her expectation of what a home is supposed to be—a space of assurance and peace of mind. Her lived experience of the home neither matches up with her conceived idea of the home nor the way her home is perceived by others including Matthew.

The lived experience of the home is different for women and men. Feminists are likely to view home in a manner very different from the way male thinkers have thought of home. While many feminists see the home as a site of conflict, of sacrifice, and of labor for women, men such as David Seamon tend to view it as “an intimate place of rest where a person can withdraw from the hustle of the world outside and have some degree of control over what happens within a limited space” (Cresswell 21). In an extreme case, the home from the male perspective has been written of as a space where:

[A] [w]oman’s task is to preserve the sphere of the intermingling of mind and body, to which the Man of Reason will repair for solace, warmth and relaxation. If he is to exercise the most exalted form of Reason, he must leave soft emotions and sensuousness behind; woman will keep them intact for him. (Lloyd qtd. in Massey 10–11)

Doreen Massey, among other feminists, provides a critical view of this male notion of home. In direct response to this quote, Massey says, “In fact, of course, such a view of place does not encapsulate the lives of real women, even in the cultural milieu to which it refers” (11). From a feminist perspective, the home is rather a more oppressive space of labor than a space of relaxation and warmth. Gillian Rose claims that such ideas have its basis in masculinist notion of home and place:

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Although it was often noted that home need not necessarily be a family house, images of the domestic recur in their work as universal, even biological, experiences. Tuan remarked that 'human identification with the familiar, nurturing place has a biological basis'. This enthusiasm for home and for what is associated with the domestic, in the context of the erasure of women from humanistic studies, suggests to me that humanistic geographers are working with a masculinist notion of home/place. (53)

Rose further argues that most women would not agree that the home is "conflict-free, caring, nurturing and almost mystically venerated by the humanists" (56). Such differing interpretations between men and women show how the space of home can be experienced in "multiple," "shifting," and "unbound" ways (Massey 7).

In this context, "[t]he construction of 'home' as a woman's place has, moreover, carried through into those views of place itself as a source of stability, reliability and authenticity," "reverberate[d] with nostalgia for something lost," and coded as "female" (Massey 180). This sense of being coded in terms of gender begets the problem of limiting female subjectivity to the domestic sphere. As shown in Genevieve Lloyd's quote, the home is coded as a place of relaxation for the man of reason, in the background of which women are working to keep it as men's emotional haven. As the space of home is coded in this manner, it hardly matters whether it captures women's lives accurately or not. Such a code makes this idea of the home an ideal that traps women in a frame that does not fit them. In this way, the representation of space breaks down because a contradiction arises in the conception of the space of home.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a 'feminine mystique' infiltrated the minds of women in the United States. This mystique is a domestic ideal of the woman as wife and mother that had become very appealing and attractive to women. The 'feminine mystique' lured women to give up their careers and/or education to become a full-time housewife who is "healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, [and] her home" (Friedan 18). This, they came to believe, was what "true feminine fulfillment" was (18). After the Second World War, which ended with the explosion of atomic bombs and followed by domestic economic instability, both men and women recovering from the aftermath of the war were in need of the comforts of the home (182). So many women were now going out only to do chores such as to buy groceries,

to pick up their children, or to stand by their husbands at social engagements (17). Betty Friedan's explanation is that in order to lure women back home in order to make this comforting fantasy a reality, they had to be brainwashed against the feminist ideas of women's emancipation and advancement into the labor force that the previous generation of women had achieved. The solution was the creation of a feminine mystique that deemed the domestic housewife as the ideal woman, and Friedan calls it the "mistaken choice" when one-by-one women returned to the home to fulfill these ideals (204). Then, one day, women were "lay[ing] beside [their] husband at night — [they were] afraid to ask even of [themselves] the silent question — 'Is this all?'" (15). This sense of emptiness and the feeling that there may be more to life to be had soon became a prevalent amongst housewives. It was just that such thoughts were believed to be "unfeminine" and made these women feel ashamed of such feelings. Friedan called this problem that many women had "the problem that has no name" (19). Countless women were suffering from this problem to which even doctors and psychiatrists failed to articulate the underlying reasons behind those symptoms.

In the U.K., similar ideals were returning women back to the home and were resulting in women's exhaustion. Elizabeth Wilson explains that in reviving from the remains of the war, the women who had maintained the home fronts were now the housewives who had to make ends meet with the distributed rations, and the spirit of the housewives came to symbolize the national spirit (*Only Halfway* 16). Because managing the home became as important as managing the economy, a new ideal of the domestic woman had come about. However, housewives were becoming increasingly tired from managing the economy and the home during and after the war (19–20). For a time, people believed that the socialist ideas would bring social welfare to the domestic sphere and compensate the "tired housewife" (19) for the domestic labor, but with the lagging economy, the welfare state never got around to "support and legitimate the homemaking role of women" (40). In an attempt to assuage the complaints of women being forced into the home, women were presented with the "image of the 'dual role'" of being a laborer and a housewife in which women had now become fortunate enough to *choose* whether they wanted to work or not but domestic chores being "'biological' destiny" (40). As in the U.S., similar myths were luring women back to the home in the U.K.

Susan in "To Room Nineteen," a "tired housewife," has the same nameless problem that women actually suffered in the 1950–60s. It all begins when

the woman "who once had other dreams gave them up and threw themselves *joyously* into life as housewives" (Friedan 27, emphasis mine). The point here is that women do it joyously. They volunteer to give up their careers to become full-time housewives. Susan also did the same when she was pregnant with her first child. She gave up her work and became a full-time housewife. It is said that "childhood is short; and she did not regret the hard work. [...] [S]he was often tired; but she regretted nothing" (358). Then after years of laboring as a mother and manager of the house, women start hearing a dissatisfied voice that is less painful for them to try to suppress (Friedan 25). Susan also senses this strange "voice" when "something happened which neither of them [Susan nor Matthew] had foreseen" (359). She "found herself reluctant to enter her big and beautiful home because it was as if something was waiting for her there that she did not wish to confront" (359). In her effort to ignore this voice, in the form of a "tension, like a panic" she keeps herself busy with household chores (360). In addition, we see that Susan gets uncontrollably impatient with her children (361). This impatience is another symptom of "the problem that has no name" (Friedan 19). Friedan quotes a housewife in *Feminine Mystique* of this precise trouble in dealing with children: "a tired feeling...I get so angry with the children it scares me" (20). This is not an exhaustive list of how strangely often Susan resembles the women with the nameless problem.

For Susan, the problem is definitely with being tied to the home and the duties that are thereby entailed. The choice of words used by the narrator shows how trapped she feels: "life had become a desert" (357); "[r]esentment [...] was poisoning her" (363); she felt as though she were serving a "prison sentence" (364); "she felt even more *caged* here" (366, emphasis mine); she felt as though she were caught in a "cage of loving limbs" (366). Just like the women who had volunteered to fully devote themselves to housewifery, Susan is left feeling empty and unfulfilled despite her busy life as a wife to her husband Matthew and a mother to her four children.

These women always had the choice of confiding their conditions with their husbands. However, discussing the symptoms of this nameless problem led to quarrels that ended with the husbands' victory on the grounds that the wives were "being silly" (Massey 186). So rather than trying to find a solution in the home to feel fulfilled, "[m]any women had have to *leave* home precisely in order to forge their own version of their identities" (Massey 11, emphasis original). Susan, who had been questioning whether there is an "essential Susan" (359) or not, also feels that she needs to get away from her family. Thus

starts Susan's journey to escape the space of home.

1. Susan's Escape to Mother's Room

Susan's first attempt at escaping from the space of home is her retiring to the spare room at the top of the house, while leaving the space of home downstairs. Although Susan is quite satisfied on obtaining this separate space for herself, her satisfaction in and of this place does not last long. First, she finds her husband and her children having many "serious conversations." When she overhears one between Matthew and her first child, Harry, she feels an irritation to her surprise (366). This irritation derives from the feelings that her privacy is being granted by the men of the family. She says:

Surely she could have a room somewhere in that big house and retire into it without such a fuss being made? Without it being so solemnly discussed? Why couldn't she simply have announced: 'I'm going to fit out the little top room for myself, and when I'm in it I'm not to be disturbed for anything short of fire?' (366)

Susan is irritated by the fact that she was not the agent in the process of securing a space of privacy for herself, and she recognizes this when she overhears her husband talking to her son about it without her knowing. Although Matthew was being considerate of Susan's needs by relieving her of the responsibility of talking to her children so that they understand that she needs time for herself, by talking to the children behind her back, he violated the partnership that they were supposed to maintain as parents to their children and the companionship of marriage.

Then, one day, while Susan was in Mother's Room, as it had come to be called, she saw the children and their friends talking about her and her room. A little while later, the children ran up the stairs and quickly remembered that they were not to disturb Susan. Presumably, Harry, the oldest and most likely the leader, says, "Hush! Shhhhhh! Quiet, you'll disturb her" (366). Harry's naïve but overly exaggerated consideration for Susan's privacy shows a rather condescending attitude toward his mother. Harry's authoritative attitude can be explained in psychoanalytical terms. The boy, as he grows up, needs to construct his self in opposition to his mother in order to gain independence from the nurturer or caretaker (Hartsock 296). In this process he "sets a hostile

and combative dualism at the heart of [...] the masculinist world view by means of which [boys] understand their lives" (Hartsock 296). Thus, Harry determines where the other children can play loudly or not, at the same time deciding for others, including his mother, up to what point she is allowed her privacy. His sense of condescension can also be explained in a similar manner. Postmodern gender theorist Jane Flax argues that in order for a boy to become a man, "[t]he son can also devalue his mother and his relationship with her in order to make these aspects of himself [unity with the mother] less powerful within his own psyche" (246). In setting himself apart from his mother, Harry constructs himself as a man, identifying with his father who supports his mother's privacy. That her young children are pulled into this "fuss" (366) becomes a source of irritation for Susan, thereby causing the free time to be not that free of the family after all.

This reveals that despite Susan's position as the mother, the household manager, her stance is almost like that of the Victorian angel of the house. In the same line of thought, Matthew, the father, acts as the patriarch, and the son plays the role of the heir who is to inherit the status of the patriarch. A certain hierarchy based on patriarchy is undeniably at play in this story. Susan has to be granted what she wishes to obtain by the patriarchs of the family. This is revealing of the space of home because it shows that those who produce the space are not always the ones who manage it (Lefebvre 48). Despite the fact that Susan had taken part in the production of this space that has become the home of all six of the family, Susan does not get to be the one in charge. Rather, Matthew and the children come to manage the house because patriarchal forces, appropriating this space and assigning it to the patriarchs, invade the space of home that Susan and Matthew have created.

As a result of not having been able to act as the agent in obtaining this space for herself and of having had her children pulled into this "fuss," Susan does not get the liberation that she hoped she would be able to find. On the contrary, she feels even more "caged there than in her bedroom" (366). She even feels "the devils of exasperation [...] danc[ing] in her blood" when she hears Mrs. Parkes explain how a family can feel overburdening to a woman. Furthermore, when her twins hug her, she feels that they are "making a human cage of loving limbs." This paradoxical meaning in the description of her twins shows her divided feeling toward her family. Soon, Susan's space of privacy is infiltrated by the space of home when she takes sewing up to her room. Her private room is no longer a separate space; elements of the space of home seep

into this room. The children and Mrs. Parkes went in and out of the room and it had, in the end, “become another family room” (367). The sewing can be seen as the symbol of family life and the image of the serene mother/wife. In this sense, the fact that Susan brought the icons of family life of the home into her private space can be read as the extension of the space of home into Mother’s Room. If she had not brought the sewing up to her room, perhaps the children might have adjusted to not going up toward the attic room and Mrs. Parkes would also have learned not to bother her while she was up in her room. But the fact that she played a part in allowing the space of home to creep into her private room served as tacit agreement for the extension of the space of home.

2. Susan’s Escape to Miss Townsend’s Hotel

After Susan’s failed attempt at escaping from the space of home and securing a space for herself, the demon in the garden began to get stronger and was beginning to have a stronger effect on Susan. She was so intimidated by this hallucination that at one point, she believes that this demon “wants *to get into me and to take me over*” (368, emphasis original). She seems as if she is on the verge of having a mental breakdown, believing that a hallucinated being will take over her.

Perhaps because she understands that she needs to get out of the house in order to get away from the home despite her lack of full understanding, Susan continues to dream of having a room or a place where she could sit and no one would know her whereabouts. She desires to rent a room in the city, but she could not yet think up a rationale for requesting that much money from her husband. Thinking this over, she concludes that she cannot proceed with this plan without her husband’s consent, so she gives it up; but not entirely. Without further thought, she puts into action her more affordable act of escape one day, when everything is in order. She takes a train to Victoria and goes to a small, quiet hotel.

Her choice of the city is meaningful in that the city is a symbol of disorder and a place where disorderliness is not a vice, nor a virtue, just a neutral characteristic. This disorderliness veils the formerly male claiming of sites which were named after the dweller or the conqueror. It is in this “disordered city” that women take a central place (Wilson, *The Sphinx* 138). In response to this idea, Massey says:

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Within this context women present a threat, and in two ways. First there is the fact that in the metropolis we are freer, in spite of all the also-attendant dangers, to escape the rigidity of patriarchal social controls which can be so powerful in a smaller community. Second, and following from this, 'women have fared especially badly in western visions of the metropolis because they have seemed to present disorder. There is fear of the city as a realm of uncontrolled and chaotic sexual license, and the rigid control of women in cities has been felt necessary to avert this danger.' (258)

This is the reason why her next attempt at escape, the escape into the city is full of potential and at the same time resultant of the failure that Susan encounters. The city has a duplicitous character in that it is free from the male dominant patriarchy and, at the same time, still somehow within the reach of male domination in the sense that women are rigidly controlled.

Thus, in this context, Susan finds the hotel quite satisfactory at first. She is content that the room that she was led to was "ordinary and anonymous" (368). It was just what Susan needed. This ordinariness must have been a break from the almost perfect life that she was living. The effort needed in maintaining that perfection must have been a strain on her because the first thing she realizes when she sees she is alone is that "she could feel pressures lifting off her" (369). In addition, the anonymity that the room provided was also a break from the pressures of her life. As the perfect couple with the perfect house and perfect set of children, they would have been the envy of the neighborhood and their friends. And because they were, they must have been a famous couple. This would have prevented them from behaving out of context. For instance, we are told that Susan *understood* Matthew when he first confessed of his affair with Myra Jenkins (356). Her intellect aided her in making the 'rational' decision in "mov[ing] forward into a different phase of their marriage" (357). Thus, the fact that the room offered ordinariness and anonymity was a great source of satisfaction for Susan. Furthermore, she was alone. There was no one pulling at her for her help and she did not have to worry about the tasks that Mrs. Parkes had to carry out or what her husband would be needing. She was definitely free from the space of home here.

However, this blissful moment of satisfaction does not last long. It is soon interrupted by Miss Townsend. Here, Susan reckons Miss Townsend as the embodiment of patriarchy, especially in Susan's mind. Although the narrator

confirms that Miss Townsend is a “lonely woman of fifty, running this hotel with all the rectitude expected of her” (369), Susan does not know enough about her to know whether Miss Townsend wanted to marry or what kind of household she was brought up in, but in her mind, Miss Townsend is someone who would emit a “gleam of hysteria in [her] eyes that comes from loneliness” and be jealous of how Susan has “everything in the world [Miss Townsend has] ever longed for” (369). So instead of telling Miss Townsend the truth of how she wants to be alone, she tells her of her life. Undeniably, Townsend’s considerate intentions of keeping Susan company could well have led to a communal womanhood; the fact that it did not and the fact that Miss Townsend’s considerations were met by Susan’s internal frustrations shows that when patriarchal forces come into play, even the female community is disrupted. So, this second attempt at escaping the home also ends in failure.

Although this second attempt was not a complete failure in itself in that she did get out of the place of home and did escape the space of home, the realm of patriarchy in the form of social controls penetrates her special space. First of all, when she checked into the hotel, she wrote her real name and address in the register. Giving her real name gave away her identity and social standing. This first step became an impediment in her freedom. In the midst of anonymity and disorder of the city, she is identified and situated. This gives her the pressure to live up to the ideals that the patriarchal system expects her to live up to because she cannot risk dishonoring the family name by deviating from the patriarchal ideals. Thus, she is unable to wander far away from the truth when she tells Miss Townsend a “fantastic story about her illness” (369). Secondly, the expectations of Miss Townsend and Susan’s mental image of this woman pressures her to stay close to the ideal image of the domestic woman. In other words, even if she may have escaped the physical house where she lives with her family, the space of home has extended beyond the boundaries of the house to reach her at Miss Townsend’s hotel in the form of a patriarchal force that compels her to fulfill the expectations of patriarchy.

In this attempted escape from the home, Susan comes face to face with an internal contradiction within the space of home. Although Susan may not have fully grasped the point, the fact that she is frustrated by her desire to free herself from the home but is unable to do so plainly depicts this contradiction. Now, we see how even the conception of the home—the representation of space—that she and Matthew had, was clashing with the patriarchal ideal of the home. This clash portends a disintegration of the space of home because, as

Lefebvre has shown, the relationship between the objects and the people will break up in this representational space due to an internal lack of consistency (41). This is precisely what is happening here. Susan is losing herself in this extended space of home because the space of home is neither the home that she had conceived of nor the traditionally conceived patriarchal home.

In this manner, the second attempt at escaping the home also ends in failure, but it does not fully discourage her. Rather, although she "paid her bill and left the hotel, defeated" (369). Susan is encouraged to attempt this anew. The narrator remarks, "She [is] determined to arrange her life, no matter what it cost, so that she could have that solitude more often. An absolute solitude, where no one knew her or cared about her" (370).

3. Susan's Escape to Wales

Susan definitely enjoyed her very short time of solitude at Miss Townsend's hotel, but now that she was back home, she was overcome with the problem with no name. Just as the housewives with the nameless problem were overcome with the feeling that there was something wrong with them if there was something wrong with their lives (Friedan 19), Susan also starts to feel that there was something wrong with her for wanting so badly to go back to Miss Townsend's hotel:

Susan Rawlings prowled and muttered through her house, hating Mrs Parkes, hating poor Miss Townsend, dreaming of her hour of solitude in the dingy respectability of Miss Townsend's hotel bedroom, and she knew quite well she was mad. Yes, she was mad. (371)

Susan still does not understand that the representation of space has broken down and that this disintegration of the representation of space is the reason that she does not feel at home in her house. However, she certainly understands now that she needs to put a physical distance between herself and her family in order for her to be able to escape the space of home. But because she is still bound by the expectations of patriarchy to be a dutiful wife who discusses things with and obtains permission from her husband, her third escape is nothing radical.

Susan takes a respectable, appropriate way out of the home—a holiday. When Susan had first complained of not feeling well, trying to acquire a room

of her own at the top of the house, Matthew had suggested a holiday. But at that point, she was uninterested in going away. She wanted her own space there, in the house. She had not understood that, although the space of home is not necessarily limited to the house, the space of home certainly fills up the physical house. However, now, circumstances have changed. She had tried having a room in the house and found that it did not work out, and she had tried getting a room for herself in the city, but that did not work out either. She therefore decides to leave the region and put a distance between her home and herself. She thinks that literal distance might help her get away from the home, thus, the holiday in Wales, in the “remotest place she knew of” (371).

However, by volunteering the responsibility of calling once in the morning and once in the evening and allowing for her housekeeper to call once at noon if necessary, she keeps herself tied to the home. Despite the fact that she went to the remotest place she knew of, she could not get away from the space of home. This time, it is because she allowed the spatial practice of the space of home to stretch over the distance and merge with her space in Wales:

Every morning the children telephoned her before they went off to school, to encourage and support her, just as they had over Mother’s Room. Every evening she telephoned them, spoke to each child in turn, and then to Matthew. Mrs Parkes, given permission to telephone for instructions or advice, did so every day at lunchtime. (371)

The telephone is functioning as the network that Lefebvre discusses as linking up specific places allocated for work, private life, and leisure (38). In other words, the place of leisure and privacy—Wales—has become connected with the space of home through the network of phone calls. Furthermore, Massey claims that space is not a static thing that can be pinpointed to any where or any thing, any time and that such a conceptualization of spaces implies the “lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” (3). This means that different spaces can coexist and overlap and that a space can be interpreted in different ways by different people. So while Wales is a space of privacy and rest for Susan, when she interacts with her family through the phone, it can overlap the space of home. Note that just in this specific case, the space of home has not only overlapped but overshadowed Susan’s space of privacy.

I say that the space of home has also overshadowed Susan’s space of privacy as well as having overlapped it because we clearly see her suffering the same way

she had been suffering back home just the same if not more intensely in Wales. She could not spend more than four, five hours without being interrupted by her life back home. Susan felt as though the telephone wire was a "leash" "holding her to her duty" (371). Even the great scenery was ruined by this infiltration of the home—her "unfreedom." The stress that comes from home-keeping veils the scenery in the form of the devil. During her stay in Wales:

She would stand gazing at a hillside brilliant with ferns and bracken, jeweled with running water, and see nothing but her devil, who lifted inhuman eyes at her from where he leaned negligently on a rock, switching at his ugly yellow boots with a leafy twig. (371)

This devil is the devil, the enemy that she had been seeing in her garden back home. It is always associated with feelings like emptiness (362), restlessness (362), impatience (367), rage (367), and other such feelings of negativity. The fact that this devil has followed her all the way to Wales indicates that the space of home has also followed her to Wales and that she could not be free at all. Her space thus does not coexist with the space of home in an overlapping manner, but it is overshadowed by the space of home.

This particular escape manifests the way in which the home can be a space that is not limited to geographical boundaries. Home, as a space, is "one reaching beyond the boundaries of residence to include that wider sense of belonging" (May 748). So as long as Susan maintains this sense of belonging by keeping in touch with her family while in her own private space, then this private space will never truly be private. It will be a space infiltrated by the space of the home; her space will be an adulterated space as long as this tie is not severed. So this time, the main reason Susan failed to escape the home was because she still believed that geographical distance alone could bring her success in this escape from the space of home. In order to truly escape the space of home, she would need to make a greater effort.

4. Susan's Escape to Fred's Hotel

Through trial and error, Susan subconsciously comprehends that physical distance alone is not going to give her the desired freedom that she is in search of. So, finally, Susan takes the extra step to sever these ties with her family while she is away in her own space. She seems to have realized on her vacation

in Wales that geographic distance alone is not what she needs in order to enjoy solitude as she did for that brief moment while she was at Miss Townsend's hotel. She seems to have understood that where she goes does not matter much. What matters is escaping the space of the home and severing any ties that might link her back to that space. So, when she gets back from Wales, she tells her husband that she wants an au pair girl. This au pair is not simply a person to look after the children while she is away. When Sophie, the au pair, asks Susan whether she wanted someone to "play mistress of the house sometimes," Susan answers in the affirmative (374). So now, the children were off her hands and so was Mrs. Parkes. At one point, Susan even thinks that Sophie is a better match for Matthew than is his mistress. So with the whole household in Sophie's hands, Susan sets out to find herself a room of her own.

The noteworthy thing is that she no longer asks anything of her husband as she had when she wanted to have the spare room at the top of the house for herself. This time, she is the active agent in the process of acquiring what she needs. In attempting to escape the home, she has improved in maintaining her subjectivity and actively distancing herself from her family. So when Matthew pleads with her to think of the children, his appeal "*almost* reached her" (373, emphasis original). She is able to break free from the duties that she is bound to and is able to think of herself and her need to have solitary moments in which to be solely herself. One of the sources of the problem with no name that women in the U.S. and Susan are experiencing is that they have no time to be themselves. One housewife said, "The problem is always being the children's mommy, or the minister's wife and never being myself" (Friedan 28). This seems to be precisely what Susan is experiencing. She thinks, "[T]here have been times I thought that nothing existed of me except the roles that went with being Mrs Matthew Rawlings" (376). And this is precisely the reason why she gives the alias Mrs. Jones to the hotelkeeper at Fred's Hotel. This act of giving a false name is an act of agency in that she is not pressured by social expectations.

Going by the name of Mrs. Jones, Susan is literally separating herself from her husband by not using his surname. This act also separates her from her children, the children of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Rawlings. In the same context, she has distanced herself from her employers because Mrs. Jones did not employ Mrs. Parkes or Sophie. Thus, giving her false name to Fred, she confidently evades giving him her address further distancing herself from her home. Fred's hotel gives her satisfaction in that it is not curious about her

personal information: "You pay, and I ask no question" (375). This means that she does not have to worry about people approaching to talk to her and trying to hear her story.

So, overall, her escape to Fred's hotel was successful. No one bothers her while she is there. She is in no way connected back to her home. She is allowed to put her thoughts of her home and her family aside and just be the "essential Susan." She was finally alone and nobody knew where she was. In this manner, getting a room at Fred's hotel was a personal success, but it was also a win-win situation for the family. Because Susan was able to rest and be herself while she is at Fred's hotel, she is also able to return to the home as the mother that the children need, the wife that Matthew needs her to be, and the employer that Mrs. Parkes and Sophie need her to be. "All these things she did cheerfully, willingly" (376).

However, the tragedy is that even her escape to Fred's Hotel does not end in a complete success. Here, too, Susan is met with bitter failure. After about a year since Susan started going to Fred's Hotel, Susan finds out that Matthew had had someone find her out. The fact that Matthew knows where she goes ruined the whole affair. One of the crucial parts of her success in escaping from the home was that no one knew where she was. Now, this item is breached. So, there is no reason for her to go back to that room. Again, the space of home has found a way to smuggle through into Susan's space. The greatest tragedy thus perhaps lies in the fact that Susan decides to end her life not because her marriage is not working out—her marriage has had problems for a long while now—but because none of the spaces is able to shelter her from the space of home violated by the forces of patriarchy.

IV. Conclusion

In the process of obtaining a space of her own, Susan becomes a stronger woman who regains her sense of agency. While she begins by asking for things from her husband, she progressively starts to demand things of her husband and notifying him with her decisions. Although the process of regaining subjectivity goes along the same line as the development of her loss of mental control, this loss of sanity should be interpreted as having a subversive power of breaking free from patriarchal conventions. This mental illness is what enabled Susan to get a firmer grasp on her life, and she was able to exert a sense of agency

with this mental illness. If people can liberate themselves from the traditional frame of mind that locks them into thinking that all mental illnesses are bad, then this mental illness can be seen as a subversive power rather than an illness.

Furthermore, if readers can free their minds from the bias that marriage is all that matters to women, then they will be able to see that Susan's death is not just about her failed marriage. Although her suicide seems prompted by Matthew's request that he and his mistress meet Susan and her lover for lunch some day, what drives Susan to death are the fact that the traditional patriarchal force at that time eliminated the option of divorce and the fact that the distorted relationship Matthew asks to have with his wife are actually both infiltrating the original space of home that they have created.

When new social relationships are formed, as one has between Susan and Matthew, a new space needs to accompany it (Lefebvre 59); however, the fact that a new space was not produced when Matthew had the affair and Susan and Matthew tried to maintain their home as it was before the affair indicates that the old home was no longer compatible. While Susan and Matthew maintaining their old, incompatible home was a tragedy, the ultimate tragedy is that even the space of home that had been persistently penetrating Susan's space was also subject to infiltration. The fact that this basis to her problems was also vulnerable to external impact shows how the concept of space is organic and must evolve with the agents within the space. So on her final trip to Fred's Hotel, Susan is not accompanied by the demon that had been driving her away from the house and eternally chaining her to the space of home. The demon had been left behind in the space of home, not because Susan had freed herself from it but because she now understood that she was forever chained to her home. This is why she believes that she must end her life in order to obtain true freedom. Wherever she escapes to, other spaces will exist and those other spaces will also be liable for penetration.

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Abstract

Doris Lessing's 1962 short story "To Room Nineteen," depicts the life of an increasingly unstable protagonist, Susan, in her home. In critiquing the fact that women are confined to the space of a home embodying patriarchal ideology and order, this story reveals that they are forced to adopt only a limited number of cultural identities that society has idealized for the female sex: in this cultural climate, they are restricted to performing the gender roles, rather than creating other identities beyond gender. This story can therefore be considered a social allegory suggesting one way in which a woman who occupies the ideological space of home—the realm constructed by male desires—inevitably fails in her attempt to discover her true self and to obtain a sense of freedom. This article argues that patriarchal forces are what constantly tie the story's heroine to the space of home and frustrate her various attempts to escape it. To show how the narrative unfolds the violent impacts of home upon the woman, despite her struggle to escape the physical boundaries of her home, this article first examines the story's presentation of the home as a constructed space by considering critical thoughts on space and ideology, then examines each of Susan's attempts to escape from the space of home. Each attempt shows how the space of home, with the ideology of patriarchy embedded in it, frustrates the heroine's efforts to free herself.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen," Henri Lefebvre, production of space, patriarchy

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