

SUSAN RAWLING AND HER PREDICTABLE END: AN ANALYSIS OF A SELF-SACRIFICED WOMAN IN DORIS LESSING'S *TO ROOM NINETEEN*

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RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta Susan Rawling, um protótipo da mulher auto sacrificada, cuja resistência passiva para verbalizar suas dores e frustrações a levam a uma conformidade mórbida que termina em loucura. Pretendemos traçar um perfil literário e psicológico desta personagem através de uma revisão bibliográfica fundamentada em alguns dos mais importantes teóricos que se dedicam a estudar este trabalho de Lessing em particular, a saber: Wang & Wen (2012), Quawas (2007), Whittaker (1988), Sá Júnior (2003) e Zhao (2012) junto com alguns dos mais reconhecidos teóricos que se centram nesta área, psicologicamente falando: Buber (1979), Dantas & Tobler (2003), Torralba (2007), Dalmolin & Vasconcelos (2008), Fadiman & Frager (1994), Lyra *et al.* (2009) e Antônio (2006). Ainda com relação à metodologia, para o completo entendimento do contexto deste conto em particular, primeiramente expomos alguns detalhes acerca da vida de Lessing que refletem diretamente em seu estilo de escrita. Depois analisamos Susan Rawling literariamente e psicologicamente. Como resultado, inferimos que sua morte poderia ter sido evitada se ela tivesse tido a força necessária para afrontar e vencer seus problemas emocionais mais dolorosos. Concluimos que, diferentemente de outras personagens femininas de Lessing, Susan Rawling representa a mulher auto sacrificada, que prefere desistir de seus sonhos, seus planos e de sua vida ao invés de enfrentar a realidade. Este trabalho pretende contribuir para com o estudo de gênero através de uma perspectiva diacrônica e crítica com relação ao papel da mulher auto sacrificada (um tema que vimos tratando academicamente há algum tempo), na efervescência da segunda onda do feminismo.

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Palavras chave: Incompreensão. Perda de Privacidade. Individualismo, Perturbação Mental.

ABSTRACT

This article presents Susan Rawling, a prototype of the self-sacrificed *woman*, whose passive resistance to verbalize her sorrows and frustrations leads her to a morbid conformity and ends up in a mental breakdown. We aim to outline a literary and psychological profile of this character through a bibliographical revision based on some of the most important scholars who study this particular work of Lessing's, such as Wang & Wen (2012), Quawas (2007), Whittaker (1988), Sá Júnior (2003) and Zhao (2012) along with some of the most recognized scholars on this theme, psychologically speaking: Buber, Dantas & Tobler (2003), Torralba (2007), Dalmolin & Vasconcelos (2008), Fadiman & Frager (1994), Lyra *et al* (2009) and Antônio (2006). Yet concerning methodology, for the full understanding of the context of this particular short story, we firstly expose some details about Lessing's life which directly reflect on her writing style. Then we analyze Susan Rawling literally and psychologically. As a result, we infer that her death must have been avoided if she had had the necessary strength to face and overcome her most painful emotional problems. We conclude that, differently from other female characters of Lessing's, Susan Rawling represents the *self-sacrificing* woman, who prefers to give up her dreams, her plans and her life than to face reality. This paper intends to contribute to the study of genre from a diachronic and critical perspective towards the role of the self-sacrificed woman (a theme that we have been academically treating lately), in the effervescence of the second wave of feminism.

Key words: Misunderstanding, Loss of Privacy, Individualism, Mental Disturbance

SOME WORDS ABOUT DORIS LESSING

In a few words, Doris Lessing was born in Persia in 1919, of British parents. Doris and Harry, her younger brother, grew up on an isolated farm in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the whole family lived there for twenty-five years. Spending her childhood on a farm in Africa influenced her character and her literature career afterwards. Lessing got married twice: firstly, in 1939, with a civil servant called Frank Wisdom and secondly, in 1945, with a half-Jewish German refugee called Gottfried Lessing. Both marriages ended in divorce.

Her novels deal with colonialism, relationship among men and women, politics, the nature of art, madness, dreams and the purposes of education, according to Whittaker (1988: 1, 3-4). Besides, Lessing also usually involves self-discovery together with the disintegration of the self in her work. We could say that "Lessing draws extensively on women's inner, private experiences and on their departure from the unsatisfactory reality of life in an alienated and alienating society" (Quawas, 2007, p. 108). This way, *To Room Nineteen* is a good example of these themes of hers

Was Susan Rawling, her protagonist in this short story, really insane? Did she have a chance to be different? Could she have avoided her tragic death? Why does such a perfect woman with such a perfect life kill herself? What really happened inside her mind?

These are some of the questions whose answers will be analyzed in this article. Then we will outline Susan Rawling's profile as a typical example of the selfless Western modern woman whose life can be extremely different from their initial plans; lastly, we will examine her psychologically, in search of the responses for the gaps in her life's trajectory that ended in suicide.

ANALYZING SUSAN RAWLING, THE SELF-SACRIFICING WOMAN IN *TO ROOM NINETEEN*

To Room Nineteen was written in 1958 and it was first published in 1963, in *A Man and Two Women*, a collection of Lessing's short stories that helped cement her reputation as a great writer. Surprisingly enough, its publication coincided with Betty Friedan's releasing of her masterpiece, *The Feminine Mystique* in the same year.

In this short story specifically, Susan, the protagonist and *self-sacrificed* woman herself, represents the modern Western woman who needs to be recognized as a competent and diligent professional, a loving wife and a caring mother (most of the times, a single parent who has to handle with raising her children alone). Without a doubt, it is a gigantic challenge to succeed in all of these roles to the same degree at the same time, especially if we consider that this story was written just before the outbreak of the second wave of feminism in the United States, in the early years of 1960. Susan Rawling tried to cope with all of these challenging female social roles, but she was not quite successful.

At the beginning of the plot, everything seems to be perfect. Susan Rawling's perfect boyfriend has a perfect well-paid job and so does she. They get married at the age of 28, begin to live their perfect newly-wed life in their perfect house in Richmond, a suburb of London, and finally have four perfect children. "The atmosphere established is the one of total conformity to the rules and regulations, which run a patriarchal society" (SÁ JÚNIOR, 2003, p. 4). Their perfection becomes a model for the people they know. Their well-structured reality begins to change when they decide that she should quit her job and stay closer to the kids in the first years of their

infancy. Being a full-time mother and wife ultimately collapses her. As the children grow up, she begins feeling that she is missing something, that her life has become senseless; she has that anguishing sensation that she is losing her time by devoting herself only to others, forgetting about her own life and old dreams: “As time goes by, Susan begins to feel confined to her home in Richmond, burdened by intense feelings of hurt, anger and jealousy” (QUAWAS, 2007, p. 114). Apart from that, Matthew, her good-looking husband, begins to have some love affairs and her disappointment leads her to question the importance of fidelity in marriage, since she has been loyal to him but he proved to be not so committed to her.

She feels like having some more time only for herself desperately. This ethic of individualism and development of privacy is a necessity closely related to the capitalistic economic system to which she belongs (SÁ JÚNIOR, 2003). Even having a servant to help her around the house and counting on a nanny for taking care of the children, Susan is always upset for the familiar institution nullifies her as a human being, a modern woman who lives in the capitalized world, which demands women to work outside the home. Everything seems to keep on being perfect but deep inside she feels powerless longs for some time alone in a quiet place, so that she can stay away from everything and everybody, in order to enjoy her own company, like when she was a single and childless woman.

Trying to keep away from her children during daytime, she frequently locks herself in a spare bedroom upstairs but not for too long, since kids often demand her presence and she feels guilty for not attending them as she is expected to as a mother. To make matters worse, she begins having hallucinations. She often feels and sees someone nearby, a demon that sits by her side on the garden bench and appears to her in the mirror. At the moment she begins to share her time with a demon that nobody else can see but her, she gets aware that she is really and inevitably going mad. What began as a subtle sense of emptiness was turning fast into a deep feeling of losing control over her feelings. According to Sá Júnior (2003: 4):

Emptiness is the most important word to qualify or distinguish Susan’s life. [...] Only her thoughts would make company to her. And these same thoughts were the ones which haunted her and brought her enemy to life. A creature created by her figments of imagination. Such figments contributed to the intense moments of absences experienced by her. She seemed to be away from her cruel and nude reality by the time she was wondering alone in her garden, just watching the river flowing like her empty life. Self-imprisoned. Caged. Confined. These were the themes which haunted her fragile and

impotent being till the moment she dares to spend hours away from home, only by herself, to try to find an answer to all those conflicting questions haunting her mind. The fantasies highly contributed to those moments in which affection was missing. Affection not in relation to her family but to herself (SÁ JÚNIOR, 2003, p. 4).

The terrible certainty that someone is spying on her, that this dreadful creature reads her mind and knows about her unspoken deepest thoughts makes her even more introverted and conscious of her coming breakdown. To this extent,

[...] Susan is intellectually and emotionally aware of her crisis and feels depressed. She begins to look on her mothering skills and her years of household management as a form of dementia rather than a virtue and becomes increasingly aware of something in herself that has remained unfulfilled (QUAWAS, 2007, p. 116-117).

She cannot bear this situation any longer. Susan has not been prepared for that. She had been a successful publicist, an independent woman. Now she depends on Matthew economically and all her previous independence is just a pale remembrance of the past. She knows that she is condemned to forget that excellent professional she was once. Soon she recognizes that becoming an unemployed mother is not what really fulfills her lifetime ambitions, but at the same time, children should not be blamed. She had decided on getting married, having babies and quitting her job. Society expected her to do so, not her husband, who was expected to be the breadwinner. This is a sacrifice Eastern and Western women are used to make in our patriarchal world: to step over their personal and professional dreams in order to embrace their duties when marriage and children come. Despite her long-lost pre-marital freedom, Susan agreed on changing such liberty for love, for playing the social roles women have been imposed to.

She recognizes that being at home all the time makes her an annoying person. While Matthew has daily contact with other people, her world is reduced to the universe of their home, their marriage and their children. Little by little, as resentment grows, unable to find some peace of mind at home, in their comfortable and gardened house, she looks for solitude and rents herself a very quiet place in a hotel room, in a neighboring city.

There she can get into her inner world, hiding herself from reality and manage to get some relaxation, and according to Zhao (2012: 1652), there she can embark “on a journey of self-discovery”, although the feeling of emptiness does not seem to leave her at all, no matter where she is. Unlike the spare room in their house, which represents a limited space for her to experience her subjectivity, the room nineteen acts as a buffer, a temporary sanctuary against her multiple frustrations (Quawas, 2007). Just like Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing believes that a woman, especially at middle-age like Susan, must find a room of her own and spend some time there discovering who she really is. Buildings and rooms have a special meaning for Doris Lessing, who thinks that a room can work as a refuge for freedom as well as a prison. In this sense,

In response to the traditional social dictates of Woman, Susan turns away from the social prescriptions for her or from her egoic identity and embarks on a journey toward self-discovery, for the first time leaving her family and marriage – her identity – behind. She begins to ask Woolf’s questions: “Who am I?” and “How can I tell the truth about myself, my body?” In her internal quest for authentic selfhood, she finds a gap between the dominant cultural ideology or her social role as Woman and her own lived experience as a woman (QUAWAS, 2007, p. 113).

She has been unemployed for twelve years, since she had the first of their four kids; so she has to ask Matthew for money every week, without explaining him the reason for leaving home so frequently. In the end, he begins thinking that she has a lover and she does not deny that, so he succumbs to an important extra-marital affair himself. She expected him to do that for he is a very attractive man. The children have a beautiful, sweet and young baby-sitter, their maid is very efficient. Having perfect servants at home who can take care of everything and everyone perfectly well makes Susan feel even more misplaced within her own family. She is not that necessary anymore; besides, children are growing up and she is getting older, much too much older to work as a successful publicist again. She feels she has no place in this world; her life is meaningless, useless; she has become a distant mother, an uninteresting wife, and an incompetent housewife. Susan needs to expose all her sorrow and inner desperation to Matthew, but she knows he will not understand that, he will not believe her and worse than that, he might consider she is going mad.

What should she tell him? She is unable to articulate her subjectivity and she is completely aware that Matthew's rational world will not consider her "irrational" feelings and "odd" behavior. Would Matthew believe her excuse of being alone in a hotel room only because she could not find a space for herself to think about her immediate future plans and enjoy her own company in their spacious and gardened house, among their lovely children? No. She was afraid of being completely misunderstood. That would be really unfair.

She does not want to be a nuisance to her family, but she cannot help feeling that she does not belong to that family any longer. There is nothing else she can do; there is no place for Susan Rawlings among her beloved family members any more. Definitely, in her mind, there is no other solution for her meaningless life but to disappear. After her death the house would be in the maid's hands, the children would have a young and beautiful substitute for their mother and Matthew would get married to charming his lover as soon as he became a widower. He would think her suicide would have been related to her lover anyhow. Everything and everyone would be alright. So, one day, Susan goes to the room nineteen for the last time. After spending the whole afternoon there, very calmly, she blocks the door and the window with towels and lets the heating gas take her out of her suffering. According to Quawas (2007: 111):

Rather than continue to live in a radically alienated position, she chooses the only healing she can find through death. She chooses death over compromise with the crushing image of the ideal Woman, the monolithic scripted self which patriarchy has called upon women to produce and create. She remains true to herself, which she discovers and creates through her introspection, the "real" authentic self that has been in "cold storage" during her married life.

In the end, the room nineteen in Fred's Hotel becomes a dead end for Susan. It represents the ambiguity of a welcoming place and, at the same time, a place where she realizes that living means nothing but suffering.

ANALYZING SUSAN RAWLING PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Sá Júnior (2003, p. 1, 4) reproduces what Doris Lessing said and wrote once, in 1972: "I have spent nearly thirty years in close contact with mental illness: first through people who were 'mad' in various ways, and with whom I had very close

contact ... I have always been close to crazy people”. Such proximity to insanity was one of the sources of inspiration she used for writing *To Room Nineteen*.

The question is: wouldn't it be more logical if Susan had searched some psychological help instead of committing suicide? How is it possible that such an intelligent woman could have been so short-sighted and resistant to look for some help? How could she just give up everything she had been given? Although these seem very easy questions to answer, someone's reaction to them really depends on how mentally affected that person is. We realize that Susan was in need of some urgent aid but, unfortunately, she was not able to overcome her frights and ask for someone's aid.

According to Sá Júnior (2003: 2), in *To Room Nineteen*, “[...] what can be observed is a clear case of double conscience together with moments of absences”.

Dantas & Tobler (2003) and Torralba (2007) assure that through psychic suffering, the subject, even being and/ or feeling vulnerable, may find a possibility to humanize himself. In accordance with them, Dalmolin & Vasconcelos (2008, p. 42) affirm that “[...] o sofrimento psíquico está sempre acompanhado da possibilidade de produções subjetivas que podem constituir recursos para o enfrentamento das adversidades oriundas do processo de adoecimento”. All in all, the subject, in this case, has two options: he can either look for some help to leave his comfort zone and try new experiences or to stagnate due to his helplessness and personal failure in this process. When he aims to succeed, Fadiman & Frager (1994) asseverate that he tends to overcome even more challenging and toilsome obstacles more easily.

On the contrary, if his experience is painful, he tends to give up trying and his self-esteem may be deeply affected. This might also eventually result in an irreversible feeling of complete hopelessness, according to Torralba (2007). Dantas & Tobler (2003, p. 21) say that “O sofrimento deixa entrever o vazio que nos atinge e que buscamos desesperadamente evitar. O sofrimento é o enfrentamento inexorável da verdade. Por isso, o sofrimento designa uma tensão interna que demanda uma resolução”.

A person who is facing some kind of psychic suffering normally presents some characteristics in common such as indefinite emptiness, helplessness, anxiety, apathy, social isolation, sadness, blame, unsatisfying interpersonal relationships, sorrowing and he may consider life is completely meaningless, according to Lyra *et al* (2009). More than anything, Torralba (2007) states that among all the bad emotions

before mentioned, sadness is considered the most heartrending, which means that a sad person needs much extra effort to overcome this difficulty.

Ultimately, the sad subject may have a tendency to become even more apathetic, affectively blunt, completely indifferent to his reality and unable to make the simplest decisions. All these can easily lead the person to look for some ways to end up with his suffering by committing suicide. Antônio (2006, p. 95) says that “[...] o sofrimento subjetivo se manifesta sob forma de sintomas narcísicos e depressivos, em indivíduos que cada vez mais [...] têm dificuldades para articular numa narrativa as próprias histórias, vivências e dores”.

We may consider Susan should have avoided such a terrible end if she had spoken her mind, if she had talked to a person who could have understood her and helped her out. Susan really wanted to talk about her sadness and fears to Matthew; she intended to openly express herself, but she was not able to do so because she knew she would be misunderstood after all. All her efforts would become worthless. Failing to express or articulate what she feels, she begins to retreat gradually – at first from her husband and her family, and then from her real life entirely. For those who are facing conflicts like Susan’s, it is not easy to admit being sick to the extent of requiring external aid. Even if she had had some help then, we cannot take it for granted that it would have been enough to keep the idea of committing suicide away from her thoughts. “Throughout the centuries, madness has been represented as feminine, a female malady. [...] Susan Rawlings is the one who impersonates an unconscious feminist protest” (SÁ JÚNIOR, 2003, p. 3).

For the fully understanding of what may have happened inside her tormented mind, we must closely consider those times immediately before the second wave of feminism (which first began in the United States in the early years of the 1960’s), those years between World War I and World War II and those ones just after this last warlike event. American women, specifically speaking, together with women from some European countries those times, who had conquered many civil rights before World War I, were forced to retrocede and forget about their dreams and ideals, quit jobs and come back home as wives and mothers when World War II ended. They were more useful inside than outside their homes; they were needed to repopulate their countries and this trend spread. Soon they were supposed to accept this new condition, praise the obedient girls and disapprove those ones who rebelled against it. This short story was published in the early 1960s, as a reaction to the devastation of a post-war

society where it was thought that women should find contentment in a traditional marriage and family structure.

Those women wanted to be useful to the new social condition they were facing; they wanted to follow the new rules, but deep inside there was this feeling, which was a mixture of incompleteness, anger, frustration and lack of assertiveness that they could or should not express in words because they did not know how to describe it. Betty Friedan (a feminist American writer) did understand them because she was one these women who had the same problem of verbalizing which should be kept inside their minds despite their cultural background. She understood it to the extent that she finally “baptized” such an anguishing feeling as “the problem that has no name” in her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and together with other idealistic intellectuals first began the second wave of feminism in the United States, a social phenomenon which has helped to change Western women’s History ever since.

In *To Room Nineteen*, Susan represents these women in search of a lost identity. Lessing traces Susan’s trajectory based on “reason” that ends in an extreme self-sacrifice, a woman that nullifies herself on behalf of others, just like the majority of Eastern and Western women despite their qualifications, in patriarchal societies worldwide: “A mulher segura e independente deixa-se anular para doar-se de modo exclusivo à família, assumindo o arraigado papel feminino do sacrifício” (Moraes, 2009: 10-11). According to Zhao (2012: 1652), Susan was an intelligent woman who based her marriage on intelligence. Unfortunately, such intelligence was not enough to save her from a sad death.

At first, Susan had been a successful publicist before getting married and having children. Then she chose to stop working outside the home and had to deal with a new reality which was being built gradually. In the meantime, she had to give up her financial autonomy and, at last, the feeling of belonging to her family and to herself became affected by her low self-esteem. In the beginning, Susan really considered she had much importance to her husband, their four children and their garden house. At the moment she noticed the children did not depend on her so much anymore, she began to question her old inner values and this confusing and frustrating moment brought her much suffering; she soon began questioning the importance of her existence in such a frustrating context. Since she had spent the last twelve years taking care of others but herself, she really did not know what to do with her own life in that moment, when she reassured she was not that necessary anymore.

Then she began developing a process of self-nullification, full of anguish and sadness. According to Buzzi (1999), anguish is the most hopeless feeling: “Na angústia, o ser que somos se revela naquilo que ele é em sua originalidade: nada, pura possibilidade. [...] A angústia não deixa ninguém se enganar, porque recorda o espantoso nada que somos”. (BUZZI, 1999, p.170). Together with this painful perception, Susan started to develop a process of neglecting her subjectivity and her discourse as well. Ceccarelli (2005, p.75) highlights that overlooking one’s own vital energy (which is also called passion) can lead to emotional sicknesses: “[...] O acometido pela paixão, o paciente, o passivo, o portador de sofrimento psíquico, é aquele que padece de algo cuja origem ele desconhece e que o leva a reagir, na maioria das vezes, de forma imprevista”.

Therefore, passion is noticed by the subject as a psychic suffering, which is considered an inherent phenomenon of the human condition. It is universal, untransferable, singular and, according to Lyra *et al.* (2009), multifaceted and a not specific malaise. In other words, it is not necessarily somewhat pathological. Pathology, when it exists, usually occurs more intensively and with more prevalence and depending on some factors, it can end up in a psychological ailment.

For Fadiman & Frager (1991), Susan, by “swallowing” her frustrations, could not be able to distinguish between what she really felt and what others expect her to feel. In this sense, introjection can mean a dangerous potential for the disintegration of the self. Chvatal *et al.* (2009) state that defense mechanisms are strategies used by the *ego* in its search for balance, but they become pathological when they are considered as the only survival strategy with which the subject is able to face the menacing phenomenon.

Passing through such a stressing situation triggered a process in Susan’s mind that ended in hallucinations of mystical contents. The presence of a demon nearby and the persecution frenzy were clear signs that she often disconnected herself from real world and entered a world of her own to avoid more suffering. These contents are typical of a psychotic diagnosis. When the subject’s emotions cannot be expressed, they normally generate conflicting feelings that can be canalized into aggressiveness towards oneself or towards others, besides some other kinds of sublimation. According to Buber (1979), we have a natural tendency to actualize our individual potentialities by interacting with people around. In this sense, Buber understands that the healthy relationship is based on the “I-Thou” dynamics. To put it another way, if we are

disconnected from social interaction, there is a great possibility of losing ourselves in useless searches. When the interpersonal relationships fail due to the subject's inability to interact properly and become the "I-IT" type, some pathology may be involved.

Being part of an excluding context generates much pain and a feeling of not belonging to that background. Silva *et al.* (2004), affirm that the subject who is under a psychic suffering of any kind, tends to segregate himself because he is sure about being different from others and this certainty affects his relationship with people in one way or another. Susan had to neglect her professional dreams in order to devote herself completely to her husband and their children. Even longing for her own liberty of thought, Susan is not able to establish a dialogical relationship with her closest family members; instead, she focuses her internal world and all her psychic suffering in the room nineteen. There she can truly face her own disgraceful life as it really is; there she can experiment loneliness and try to look for the Susan she was once. Lessa (2003) assumes that this close contact we have with our own soul in some moments of despair and existential crisis is not bad in the least. Conversely, it can mean the cure. In Susan's case, unfortunately, it was not.

Lessing further descriptions of Susan's life, which "had become a desert", present the symbolic bareness of her spiritual aridity, hopelessness and death. Along with this device, the author uses some others to insert the reader into the psychological realism of her narrative. For instance, the omniscient first-person narrator firstly provides a considerable ironic distance from the characters. As the story progresses, however, the reader is plunged slowly into the morbid world of Susan's psyche. By describing the house, the garden, the river, the demon, and Susan's reflection in the mirror, Lessing actually foreshadows Susan's suicide.

This way, their perfect house is white, suggesting insipidity above all and their big garden is green, which represents life that contrasts with the dark brown river running by it. The room nineteen in Fred's Hotel has thin green curtains, a three-quarter bed covered with a cheap green satin bedspread, and a green wicker armchair. At the moment of her death, Susan lies on this green bedspread, which symbolizes life and drifts "off into the dark river", meaning death and obscurity. Wilfred L. Guerin's *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, defines the color white in a negative aspect (which represents death and terror, as if Susan is aware that her life is "mortgaged"); green gardens represent innocence or unspoiled beauty while brown

alludes to death and decay and rivers often remark death and rebirth, the flowing of time into eternity, and transitional phases of life.

The demon that Susan first imagines in the garden is a visual manifestation of her mental state, so she obviously fears him because he is an embodiment of all that threatens her. Lessing makes the relationship between Susan and her demon clear when the protagonist stares into her mirror and sees the reflection first of a madwoman and then of a demon. Susan, then concludes that she and the demon are one.

A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature also details Susan's life with Matthew "as a snake biting its tail". The snake is mostly considered an ancient symbol of the eternal cycle of life, showing Lessing's constant foreshadowing of Susan's death. Interestingly, the Rawlingses had planned their marriage "intelligently", a word which appears fifteen times in the text and this "coincidence" is not in vain. Unfortunately, such shaping could not resist destiny and its unpredictable ways. Susan could never have foreseen her frustration and failure as a wife and mother. She may have thought she would be quite successful as she was once as a creative publicist.

"According to Marxist feminism, the tragedy began with her renouncement of material or economic independence. Marriage for her became a turning point from equality to subordination (WANG & WEN, 2012: 67).

By designing this character, who struggles against her own fate and eventually collapses, Doris Lessing intends to call the reader's attention to the silent battle women face on their way to emancipation without knowing their inner power properly.

CONCLUSIONS

For everybody it was clear that Susan Rawling was happy due to her perfect life with her perfect husband, surrounded by their four perfect children, in their perfect house. Besides, the Rawlingses usually had a superior attitude toward other couples who allowed clichéd problems to disrupt their familiar harmony. Despite all these indicators of happiness, Susan is a sad woman, tormented by the idea of enjoying her own company, obsessed by the urgency of becoming who she first had been before getting married and having children. All she needs is her own space in her own life. This is a common feeling that has been shared by thousands of millions of women worldwide, especially between the World War I and World War II and just after this last

war, when women got frustrated by not being able to develop all their potentialities to the full due to the social and political environment they were forced to belong to.

At the time the story, Susan is in her mid forties. So we have a woman who is middle aged, who lives in the middle of London, around the middle of the twentieth century, at the edge of the emergence of the second wave of feminism which began in the United States and soon spread to European countries and others afterwards. Susan's breakdown can be explained as the result of the clash between her personality and the orderliness of the *Victorian Angel* she represents apart from the conflict between her private wishes and the public expectations that were placed on her. Despite her hallucinations and reserved behavior, she ultimately proves to be more depressed than clinically insane.

In brief, Susan Rawling became a victim of her own unspoken words. Sometimes, forced by the circumstances, we are not able to speak our minds and the only possible solution we find is forgetting about assertiveness and nullifying our demands. Susan belonged to a historical moment when women were supposed to postpone their professional dreams due to their duties as wives and mothers. This would not be a problem if we lived in a completely changed context nowadays. Unfortunately, this is still a hard piece of reality everywhere: women might have fewer emotional problems if they were able to express themselves accordingly. Maybe someday...

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