

SONS AND LOVERS AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

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Introduction

If we consider D.H. Lawrence's works, it seems better for us to separate his early three novels from the others for these reasons; One reason is that, as is shown in *Sons and Lovers*, he was at this stage under the great influence of Lydia Lawrence, his mother, and his writing activities were, more or less, influenced by the bond with her. Another reason is that, as J.I.M. Stewart said, 'one complete and significant phase of Lawrence's life was closing when he finished *Sons and Lovers*'⁽¹⁾. The third is that, as Anthony West said, 'from *The Rainbow* onwards the novels are more concerned with the physical being of the characters than with where they go, what they do, and what happens to them'⁽²⁾.

In this essay, his early three novels are considered, with emphasis on the dominant mother-and-son relationship. The first two seem to be worthier of consideration as being instrumental in the interpretation of *Sons and Lovers*. The problem that must be solved first is what his pursuits are. Lawrence said, "I go to a woman to know myself, and knowing myself, to go further, to explore in to the unknown, which is the woman, venture in upon the coasts of the unknown, and open my discovery to all humanity."⁽³⁾ It is in search of something permanent, it seems, that he tries to have a perfect union with a woman.

As his thought was founded on the bond with his mother, the analysis of the relationship between Mrs. Morel and Paul is to be attempted. Then, as Miriam was the first woman whom Paul's interest was seriously aroused in, her character, the Paul-Miriam relationship, and the cause of their disharmony and discouragement are to be considered. During and after Paul's intercourse with Mrs. Morel and Miriam, Lawrence's attention was always attracted to the material world, which, in turn, brought forth his criticism on civilization.

Chapter I Something permanent

'The human race is urged inevitably into a deeper and deeper realization of life'⁽⁴⁾, said Siegmund. In fact, during all his literary career, Lawrence seems to ask himself what life is, how it should be going on, how a man and a woman can exist in harmony, and what is connecting them. His chief aim is to bring to the

human race a perfect, whole relationship between a man and a woman. This relationship will develop into his ideal state of mind where there is to be found a feeling of balance, a cool, clear atmosphere, the sense of happy wholeness. Rex Warner says to us as to what life meant to Lawrence as follows :

Life, in itself, was to him the most divine of things, and anything which interfered with life was consequently the devil. Christianity, which he had known in his childhood as a constricting convention, was therefore to be rejected.

(D. H. Lawrence, *The Rising Generation*, Vol. CVII, No. 6)

There are some suggestions he offered. First, one must have the real and vital part imperceptible to others. In other words, there must lie deep in one's soul a cold, relentless mystery of life, life which is wild, strong and strange at the source and is to breathe with the other's life when their meeting is perfect.

Secondly, a man and a woman may get real joy and satisfaction out of each other, each through the other, at first. He called it the 'baptism of fire or life in passion'⁽⁵⁾. But it is temporary, not permanent, and it never lasts. Siegmund and Helena in *The Trespasser*, George and Meg in *The White Peacock*, and even the Morels in *Sons and Lovers* had this passion once, if it only lasted for a short period of time. None of the pairs could keep the moment, though they wished to let it continue forever.

Thirdly, Lawrence believed that, if one wants a mate to go side by side with, there must be something great, something permanent to connect each other. This may be something like 'the great motherhood of woman'⁽⁶⁾. Judging from his statement that 'a man needs a mother all his life'⁽⁷⁾, what he seeks for is a great binding force with which a man and a woman can have the sense of the 'oneness and unity of their fates'⁽⁸⁾.

Chapter II The mother-and-son relationship

When the above-mentioned 'oneness and unity of fates' is considered, the best help to understand this conception is to analyze the relationship between Mrs. Morel and her second son Paul in *Sons and Lovers*. Needless to say, this is usually dealt with as a typical example of Oedipus complex, about which how much Lawrence himself knew at the time of his writing his early works is difficult to determine⁽⁹⁾.

George might well say that 'marriage is more of a duel than a duet. One party wins and takes the other captive, slave, servant'⁽¹⁰⁾. George and Meg's life in *The White Peacock* may safely be said to be the prototype of the Morels'. Poor Mr. Morel was always cast off, put away, quite alone, and neglected. He was quite an outsider in the family. Between the man and his wife, there was nothing but hatred and strife.

Mrs. Morel gave birth to Paul just when her own bitterness of disillusion was hardest to bear, and so Paul was destined to be born with 'the gift of sorrow' ⁽¹¹⁾, melting with his mother in anguish and misery.

I believe my mother hated my father before I was born. That was death in her veins for me before I was born. (*The White Peacock*, p. 33)

This sense of death which was handed down to Paul by his parents' discordant marital life is thought to have been a spur for him to approach his mother and to search for life. Frieda Lawrence said in her *Not I, But The Wind* to the effect that, in his works, there is always a tinge of death, and that a man's ephemeral life is, Lawrence perceived, a series of intense activities and life becomes real only when death is a part of it.

As for Mrs. Morel, she felt guilty from the beginning of his birth for having brought him into the world unloved. With all her force she devoted and sacrificed herself for him to compensate for what the couple had done. At first, pity seems to have been akin to her love for her son. Then, gradually he began to draw her innermost thoughts out of her, share her burden and trouble, and exert all possible efforts to make the world glow for her, until at last she could not do without him, for she clung and stuck to him, and her life was rooted and established in him.

When Lawrence's letters are examined, it may safely be said that this state of affairs was directly resulted from his real life with his parents. How perfectly and intimately Mrs. Morel and Paul were united or knitted together can easily be understood even in the writer's vocabulary: 'Almost she lived by him' ⁽¹²⁾, 'her son's heart waiting on her' ⁽¹³⁾, 'he was coming to share her burden' ⁽¹⁴⁾, 'she shared almost everything with him' ⁽¹⁵⁾, 'The two shared lives' ⁽¹⁶⁾, 'she felt her soul stood by him' ⁽¹⁷⁾, etc.

On the part of Paul, his life began with pity for her and hatred for his father. The hatred was chiefly due to the feeling that the father, the author of all the troubles in the family, could not make the mother enjoy her life's fulfillment. Paul's hatred toward Mr. Morel reached to such an extent as to torture himself for his own incapability of relieving her suffering. It is true that Mr. Morel was primarily responsible for Mrs. Morel and Paul's extraordinary intimacy. But, admitting that there remains, more or less, a spiritual and emotional navel string unbroken forever in a man's soul, it was for a key to a supreme, perfect and whole intimacy with others, it may be argued, that he sought in the mother-and-son relationship, though the intimacy that existed between Mrs. Morel and her son was carried to the extreme.

Paul was most deeply attached to his mother, who held him up and supported his life. Her influence upon him made him hard and foreign to others, with the result that he was forced to be held in the bondage of his mother. It is no exaggeration to say that his life cycle began with death and ended with death. Lawrence said as follows :

There was one place in the world that stood solid and did not melt into unreality: the place where his mother was. Everybody else could grow shadowy, almost non-existent to him, but she could not. It was as if the pivot and pole of his life, from which he could not escape, was his mother.

(*Sons and Lovers*, p. 273)

Chapter III A great strife

It is natural that a man in his adolescence should have a life apart from his mother. Life then is, more or less, connected with his sex desire for another woman. 'His mother knew how he was suffering for want of a woman' (18). 'She loved him first; he loved her first. And yet it was not enough' (19). To satisfy his new young life, he was instinctively compelled to feel for something new that would give him the will to live, the joy and warmth of life, in a woman different from his mother.

Such being the case, Paul was bitterly torn and confused, and unable to move forwards or backwards. He was now groaning under both his own young life seeking another woman and the great influence of his mother holding him. He felt pleased to sacrifice himself for her, because he was well aware that a man will never free himself completely from his mother's bondage and that, without taking her life into consideration, he will never be able to love another woman really and freely. His mind was troubled with the two incompatible concerns. There is a noteworthy remark about Lawrence himself by Harry T. Moore :

Lawrence's strong bond with his mother made it difficult at that time for him to create a permanent relationship with a woman. (*Intelligent Heart*, p. 81)

On the other hand, a mother seems to assert her right to retain his son within the realm of her love. She will never give up her son to such a woman as will carry him off, and take his new life, and absorb him. The word 'circle' is best fitted for explaining this situation :

It was like a circle which life turned back on itself, and got no farther. She bore him, loved him, kept him, and his love turned back into her, so that he could not be free to go forward with his own life, really love another woman.

(*Sons and Lovers*, p. 420)

The feeling that things were going in a circle made him mad. (*ibid.*, p. 427)

Chapter IV Paul's first trial

Paul's first trial outside his mother's sphere of love was how to find in another woman such strong ties as existed between him and his mother. Lawrence sent a

letter to Bertrand Russell commenting on 'the general attitude of English people towards women, saying: "When a man takes a woman, he is *merely* repeating a known reaction upon himself, not seeking a new reaction, a discovery."⁽²⁰⁾ Thus, Miriam is regarded as the most important woman next to Mrs. Morel for us to realize how earnestly and deliberately Lawrence sought for the 'oneness and unity of fates'. Moreover, Miriam was described so religiously and mystically that Lawrence's outlook on religion can be, if in part, understood through probing her attitude toward things in Nature, God, and Paul.

Mrs. Morel was, though her marital life was rather unhappy, satisfied with her family life and lived, for the most part, a small indoor existence, seldom stepping over the threshold. She was commonplace, rational and logical, because her whole doctrine for life was, as in most women, nothing but ease of body and mind.

Paul was driven, as if from the world of reality into that of unreality, to another woman, Miriam, who was so religious-minded that, whenever she came across everything that drew her attention, she never failed to find Deity in it and Paul was no exception. In so doing, she built her own spiritually immortal world, where she herself cherished a reverence for God and took a supreme pleasure in meeting with Him. Living within herself and with God, she did not need to be brought into contact with anyone. Paul's existence with her only added to her esteem for God. Paul, who was craving for the warmth and strength in life, was by and by roused to have sympathy for her, and, under these circumstances, their intimate intercourse started.

Her concept of self-sacrifice is worthy of consideration, because Paul wished to establish a firm and perfect union with a woman, body and soul, and strongly detested the thought of self-sacrifice. From her anthropomorphic point of view, nothing which made her spell-bound appealed to her soul without Paul's recognition and sympathy, and his admiration for it was indispensable to Miriam's enjoyment of God's blessing. It may be said that Paul acted as if he were a catalyzer. In this way, her too much attachment to things in Nature revealed her longing for them to love her, and her 'eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved'⁽²¹⁾ by the Deity. After all, she wished to sacrifice herself for things in Nature and lose herself in the rapture of self-sacrifice, the mystical rapture.

What she wished to have with Paul was not to exchange even an everyday affection or embodied passion, but to 'have a communion together'⁽²²⁾. She was eager to have a 'soul union or communion'⁽²³⁾ with him through the medium of things in Nature. Paul was once attracted to her belief in God within everything, and gained a fresh and keen insight into his life and things around him. But, fed up with her too much intimacy with things in Nature, Paul gradually came to ignore her. Lawrence wrote as follows :

Miriam followed, breathing the fragrance. To her, flowers appeared with such strength she felt she must make them part of herself. When she bent

and breathed a flower, it was as if she and the flower were loving each other. Paul hated her for it. There seemed a sort of exposure about the action, something too intimate. (Sons and Lovers, p. 214)

Chapter V Self-sacrifice

Their love was destined to be a failure, because Miriam wanted to have only a 'soul union' with him, and 'gave no living warmth' (24) to him. She thought that Paul had little connection with love, and that what mattered was between herself and God. Seeing that he must be treated as a thing in Nature, what she wished to draw from him was not his whole being but only his soul, through the medium of which she could achieve her 'soul communion'. 'She wanted the soul out of his body, and not him,' (25) As if he was something divine, His holy son, she was always prepared to sacrifice herself for him. There could be no human relations between them. She was proudly and willingly to be a sacrifice to this love, God's gift. Lawrence exemplified her self-sacrifice as follows :

She lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice : there was her body for him ; but the look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation, arrested him, and all his blood fell back.

(Sons and Lovers, pp. 353—354)

Paul was aware that he loved her, belonged to her and his soul wanted her, but, in spite of all his desires, he could not 'go beyond the Communion-rail' (26), because he was now under the spell of Miriam and was bound up with her hand and foot. They were united with each other as two souls. But Paul's supreme aim of having the warmth of life and will to live was staggering into the desperate thought that a man will never be able to have a perfect and permanent union with a woman. Under these circumstances, he was forced to have the alternative of 'putting aside himself and his desire' (27) or 'putting her aside' (28). Lawrence went so far as to say:

To him now, life seemed a shadow, day a white shadow; night, and death, and stillness, and inaction, this seemed like *being*. To be alive, to be urgent and insistent — that was *not-to-be*. (Sons and Lovers, p. 350)

This pessimistic state of the affair between them was chiefly derived from her anthropomorphism, and his incapability of loving her, body and soul, owing to the bond with his mother.

Chapter VI Criticism on civilization

Lawrence's desperate and fruitless efforts to search for something vital and warm in a woman and to have a perfect union with her resulted only in his

realization of the smallness or nothingness of his being. Generally speaking, when pending issues, material or spiritual, become impossible of immediate solution, the dissatisfaction of incapability of solving them is liable to be turned to a criticism on the status quo of human existence or a flight from it. Lawrence's nomadic disposition and his aspiration for an imaginary life are thought to be thus created:

Here, you can't live as you like – in any way or circumstance. You're like a bit out of those coloured marble mosaics in the hall, you have to fit in your own set, fit into your own pattern, because you're put there from the first. But you don't want to be like a fixed bit of a mosaic – you want to fuse into life, and melt and mix with the rest of folk, to have some things burned out of you. (*The White Peacock*, pp. 72–73)

Judging from his frequent references in his works to longing for going abroad, Lawrence seems to have entertained a slight expectation in foreign land of breathing free air of life and getting free of any bondages he was held in. In fact, when he was suffocated by anguish, he must have felt as Cyril did: 'The hills of Nethermere had been my walls, and the sky of Nethermere my roof overhead.'⁽²⁸⁾

Lawrence said that 'the human soul needs actual beauty even more than bread'⁽²⁹⁾. This remark was a reflection of his antagonistic attitude toward the surging industrialism. He anticipated that men would be prisoners of industrialism, with its impersonality and with its force to drive all human energy into new bondage, a competition for greater acquisition. It is no exaggeration to say that, on the whole, he also wrote in his early works about the industrial disaster and the terrible corruption of humanity. He wrote to Edward Garnett as follows:

I loathe the idea of England, and its enervation and misty miserable modernness. I don't want to go back to town and civilization. I want to rough it and scramble free, free. I don't want to be tied down.

(*The Collected Letters of D. H. L.*, p. 135)

It is not altogether without reason that he incorporated short descriptions of Annable and Hampson into his works. Anthony West said that Annable 'plays a leading part in Lawrence's imagination'⁽³⁰⁾. Annable is surely the ancestor of Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and, though the writer never lived such a life as Annable or Mellors', Annable's way of life and outlook on civilization are safely said to be a manifestation of Lawrence's severe criticism on the present state of our civilization. Annable's hatred against civilization is described as 'the painted fungus of rotteness'⁽³¹⁾.

It seems that a man must be faithful to his real nature, true to himself. Betrayal to his 'animal instinct'⁽³²⁾ is against the human nature. In fact, civilized men may be said to be bound, hand and foot, by the visible and invisible fetters. Breaking these fetters of the modern civilization and freedom from any bondages are realized through the recovery of our primeval respect for our own nature.

He suggests to us that we should not be subject to the present regulated system we have built up, and that we should endeavour to safeguard our independence and establish our supremacy over the civilized world.

Conclusion

What Lawrence had in mind at the early stage of his literary career was the ideal relationship between a man and a woman, in other words, the enjoyment of the happy sense of oneness or the sense of wholeness. The very thing he expected to draw from this relationship was not mere sensuality but something permanent or vital that will give the warmth of life and will to live to each other.

Born and bred in a mining district, he was keenly aware of the then surging industrialism with its gravely evil influence penetrating humanity. The social conditions in those days and the disharmony of his parents' marital life helped him on the way to the search for the strong and permanent ties between a man and a woman.

It was in the mother-and-son relationship that he first found out the perfect union with its warmth and strength of life. It is true that his approach to his mother was, to some extent, due to his hatred toward his father and the incessant strife between his parents, but the intimacy with his mother or rather their happy sense of oneness was the very beginning and basis of his search for the true human relationship. Was it possible, then, for a man to have a perfect union with a woman, with the exception of his mother? The answer was in the negative. The consideration of his writings at this stage reveals the impossibility of having the sense of the 'oneness and unity of their fates'. The three pairs (The Morels, George and Meg, Siegmund and Helena) are the very examples of the disharmony or severance of the man-and-woman relationship.

Notes

- (1) *Eight Modern Writers*, P. 492
- (2) *D. H. Lawrence*, P. 117
- (3) *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, P. 318
- (4) *The Trespasser*, P. 137
- (5) *Sons and Lovers*, P. 386, 431, 439
- (6) *The Trespasser*, P. 74
- (7) *ibid.*, P. 159
- (8) *ibid.*, P. 108, 153
- (9) *The Intelligent Heart*, P. 176
- (10) *The White Peacock*, P. 335
- (11) *ibid.*, P. 78

- (12) *Sons and Lovers*, P. 73
- (13) *ibid.*, P. 108
- (14) *ibid.*, P. 108
- (15) *ibid.*, P. 111
- (16) *ibid.*, P. 144
- (17) *ibid.*, P. 273
- (18) *Sons and Lovers*, P. 342
- (19) *ibid.*, P. 273
- (20) *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, P. 319
- (21) *Sons and Lovers*, P. 268
- (22) *ibid.*, P. 197
- (23) *ibid.*, P. 339
- (24) *ibid.*, P. 357
- (25) *ibid.*, P. 239
- (26) *ibid.*, P. 207
- (27) *ibid.*, P. 354
- (28) *The White Peacock*, P. 290
- (29) *The Collected Essays*, P. 120
- (30) *D. H. Lawrence*, P. 109
- (31) *The White Peacock*, P. 162
- (32) *ibid.*, P. 162

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