

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MIDDLE TALES OF D.H. LAWRENCE: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

D.H. Lawrence, the man of creative genius, was often misunderstood and commonly criticized during his life time. He had woven a neat and beautiful fabric out of numerous strands of novels, tales, poems, plays, travel and adventure books, literary, social and political essays. He left remarkable marks of his genius in each of these genres. There are multiple levels of meaning in Lawrence's tales and short novels – from literal surface meaning to the deeper emotional and psychic level of the subconscious. His tales and novellas, like his novels and poetry, are written in a better and more artistic way. Moralities showing the consequence of living with or without the light of his beliefs from the constituent theme of the study too.

It goes without saying that Lawrence has a grim opposition to the so called civilized world. In his opinion, this so called civilized world is rotten within and it is full of hypocrisy. He believes in the religion of blood and almost all of his tales present a psychological study of man and women relationship. Lawrence evokes the life of the urban middle with ease and assurance. The Lawrence world is not the Joyce world of spiritual love. If the turmoil exists between the couple Lawrence at once exposes it. In his tales we feel that men and women can find fulfilment through harmonious relationship with each other. The present paper is an attempt to analyze some of his tales critically.

Keywords: *Middle Tales, Subconscious, Men-women relationship, Harmonious.*

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“Lawrence was not Shakespeare, but he had genius, and his genius manifests itself in an acquisitiveness that is miraculous quickness of insight, apprehension and understandings.” (Leavis 199)

D.H. Lawrence left remarkable marks of his genius in each of his writings .D.H. Lawrence’s Middle Tales explore the issues which involve physical contact. This is contact both as recognition between Characters and as allegory suggesting the way in which relationship develops. These tales have been called modernist tales by a few critics, Lawrence’s friendship and quarrel with Jessie Chambers and Louie Burrows gave rise to a number of tales like “A Modern Lover” and “The Shads of Spring ” “England my England” which is also a story of Middle phase, provides a sharp etched portrait of Percy Lucas.

There are multiple levels of meaning in Lawrence’s tales and short novels – from literal surface meaning to the deeper emotional and psychic level of the subconscious. His tales and novellas, like his novels and poetry, are written in a better and more artistic way. Lawrence has a grim opposition to the so called civilized world. In his opinion, this so called civilized world is rotten within and it is full of hypocrisy. He believes in the religion of blood and almost all of his tales present a psychological study of man and women relationship. Lawrence evokes the life of the urban middle with ease and assurance. The Lawrence world is not the Joyce world of spiritual love. If the turmoil exists between the couple, Lawrence at once exposes it. In his tales we feel that men and women can find fulfilment through harmonious relationship with each other.

The important tales of this phase are *The Prussian officer, England, My England, A Sick Collier, Daughters of The Vicar, The Thorn in The Flesh, Shadow in the Rose Garden, The Blind Man, The Fox, Tickets Please, The Horse Dealer’s Daughter, Goose Fair, A Fragment of Stained Glass, The Second Best, The White Stockings*. All these tales and Novellas were written between 1914 and 1922.

Lawrence and Frieda came back to England during the summer of 1913 and in London, met John Middleton Murry and Catherine Mansfield. After

Earnest Weakley divorced Frieda, she and Lawrence returned to England in June 1914 and got married on 13 July at the Kensington Register office, Marloes Road, London. When Lawrence was on walking tour with S.S. Kotseliansky and other new friends, the war broke out, Lawrence and Frieda settled for the winter at Chesham, Buckinghamshire and in December Lawrence’s first volume of stories “The Prussian Officer” was published. During the first half of the year 1915 the Lawrences were living at Meynell Family’s colony in Sussex. His experience of Greatham provides Lawrence material for his beautiful tale”. England, My England”.

Lawrence’s stay in England before he left for Italy in Nov .1919 was the most dark period of his life the period of frequent medical examination for war service , the period of being suspected of spying , the period of being a victim of the influenza epidemic .

“The Prussian officer” deals with the theme of war and its violent effect on the psyche of characters. In *The Prussian Officer*’ the captain and orderly go through life and death struggle and one has to survive. The orderly watches every moment of the captain. He saw the thin, strong throat of the elder man moving up and down as he drank, the strong low working and the instinct which had been jerking at young man’s wrist suddenly jerked free. He jumped, feeling as if he were rent in two by a strong flame.”(Lawrence) He presses the captain’s head back and breaks his neck, the reference is of an animal that is watchful to catch prey in an unguarded moment. The activity is like an electric current felt in his honds, his eyes watch intently and the ears catch each sound which the captain makes, in this tale Lawrence used animal imagery to clear the situation.

The story “England My England” deals with the death of a culture. The old England is symbolized by an apparently unchanging landscape. “The sunlight blazed down upon the earth, There was a vividness of flame vegetation of fire seclusion amid the savage pace of the commons. Strange how the savage England lingers in patches: as here, amid these shaggy gorse commons, and marshy, snake infested places near the foot of the South Towns. The



spirit of the place is lingering on primeval, as when The Saxons came, so long ago. (Lawrence 106)

"Another of the Meynell girls at Greatham, Madeline was married to Perceval Drawled Lucas. The Lucas had three small daughters the eldest of whom Sylvia was partly crippled as a result of a severe and almost fatal accident of two years before in which Viola Meynell recalled in her biography of Alice Meynall, Sylvia had cut her leg on a Large Knife. When Lawrence came to Greatham, the child was still undergoing operations and it was uncertain whether she would be able to keep the damaged leg. A bit later Lawrence put Sylvia into a story about the community, in which her father, Percy Lucas would have given him weapons for satire,, for the new Percy Lucas as a loafer, dependent upon the bounty of Wilfred Meynell and learning for spiritual support upon Madeline: These things Lawrence put into the cruel portrait of Percy , as Egbert, parasitic dweller at Godfrey Marshall's family colony, at Crockham in his story England , My England."(More 282).

H.T More writes,

"Lawrence hearing from Catherine cars well of Percy Lucas's death, wrote I wish that story at the bottom of the sea, before it had ever been printed. But he added that it nevertheless seemed him that man must find a new expression, give a new value to life or his women will reject him, and he hurt die. Lawrence regretted that he had gone to live at Greatham and he hoped the story would not hurt Madeline Lucas, the widow." (Moore 285).

"In this story *England My England*, Egberts death was a necessity and so to F.R. Leavis it is not tragic. His death in the war in regard to which he has no sense of responsibility and in which he does not believe, is not tragic , but in its inevitability and depressing rightness, painful: with him dies what he stands for." (Leavis 209)

As regards "The Blind Man" it displays major Lawrencium themes. Lawrence saw all deeply significant contacts between human beings or ever between man and the living universe as spontaneous

forms of communions. This story is concerned with the struggle towards being. The major characters of the story are Maurice Pervin, who returns home blind in the war, his wife Isabel, a passionate women with intellectual taste and Bertie Reid, her cousin , an antithesis to Maurice, with whom Isabel sometimes enjoyed some intellectual rapport.

The story begins with Isabel waiting for her husband and Bertie Reid, who is coming after a pretty long time. She has invited Bertie with the consent of her husband who has been home for a year. But sometimes they feel the burden of boredom and they have invited Bertie for a change, but he proves no panacea for their problem. Bertie, in fact, is the prototype of Rico of "ST., Mawr." He is devoid of any physical connection with life. Maurice on the other hand is emotional and sensual. He gains vitality from his natural surroundings and enjoys the company of the horses, which are life giving symbols His blindness has resulted in a change of being and it has led him in turn to closer contact with primitive forces. But sometimes, he too feels a bit uneasy-"But at times the flow would be checked and thrown back. Then it would beat inside him like a tangled sea, and he was tortured in the shattered chaos of his own blood. He grew to dread his arrest, this throw-back, this chaos inside himself, when he seemed merely at the mercy of his own powerful and conflicting elements, how to get some measure of control or surety. This was the question. And when the question rose madding in him, he would clench his fists as if he would compete the whole universe to submit him, but it was in vain. He could not even compel himself" (Lawrence 168). It is a psychological fact that in a state of frustration the sexual urge increases and the story teller has captured it with utmost economy of expression Isabel confirms to Lawrence's convention of wife and husband relationship purpose- "And make her know she's got-to believe in you again, and in deep:.' you stand for." (Lawrence 171) .But a minute study clear it that all the three characters are incomplete and they strive to be perfect but they fail. There is a complete lack of harmony among them.

The next story I would like to analyze is *Tickets Please*. It was written in the winter 1918 and was first published in Strand, April 1919. The vivid



background of World War 1 sets the story squarely in the past, the careering tramcar of the “most dangerous tram – service in England roots it firmly in reality. In the opening paragraphs of the story Lawrence renders an accurate picture of the tram journey experience on the Nottingham-Reply line. The trams are driven by men unfit for active military service: Cripples and Hunch Back, who have the spirit of the devil in them and are conducted’ ‘fearless young hussies. The young tram inspector John Thomas flirts with these girls. One of these girls Annie gets into actual involvement with him. She starts taking interest in his personal life. She does not want merely a nocturnal presence and Thomas has no intention of becoming an all round individual to her. He, being a Don Juan of the surrounding, does not want to be possessed by a woman. Like other tales of D.H. Lawrence this tale also has open ending and with its possibility of Thomas and Annie coming together heralds a better relationship in future. In this light the cruel whipping of the inspector by the girls works as an act of catharsis in the process of ultimate reconciliations.

Lawrence in one of his letter to Cynthia Asquith writes, “The only permanent thing is consummation in love or hate. But the female sexual aggression in this story can’t be considered as consummation of hate. It is a perfect example of cruelty. The story lacks in poetic justice. The brutality becomes more perceptive if one goes between the lines. But we know that Lawrence always hated Don Juans and their flirtation. He always has been a spokesman of a healthy man and woman relationship. Laurence Lerner writers, “A few of the best of the tales concentrate on the moment” with little attention to the before and after, dealing perhaps with relations between several people: Tickets Please is a superb example of this.”(Lerner 408). ‘Tickets please’ is a burlesque of the fierce Maenads tearing the man into pieces.

“As regards “ You Touched Me,” the story adapted by Tennessee William for the stage, was written in the winter of 1919 and was published in Land and water , 29 April 1920” (Lawrence 307). The story is considered to be the early version of the Fox. It has something in common with the later tale, The

Fox. It too involves two maiden ladies and a male young interloper, but it is done on a more realistic level. The very setting of the story brings us in a decadent world, in some respect akin to Eliot’s “Gerontion”.

The Pottery House was closed and the great doors of the yard were permanently shut. However, it was ironical that the two sisters Matilda and Emmy fed much better in these dead surroundings. The two sisters are yet unmarried. They have been waiting for the offer of the men above common. They are very much money conscious. The class consciousness of the sisters has been brought out powerfully “Matilda and Emmie were already old maids in a thorough industrial district, it is not easy for the girls, who have expectations above the common, to find husbands. The ugly industrial town was full of men who were ready to marry, but they were all colliers or pottery-hands, mere workmen. The Rockley girls would have about ten thousand pounds each when their father died: ten thousand pounds worth of profitable house property. It was not to be sneezed at: they felt so themselves and refrained from sneezing away such a torture on any mere member of the proletariat. Consequently bank – clerks or non conformist clergymen or even school teacher have come forward. Matilda had begun to give up all idea of ever leaving the Pottery House” (Lawrence 170).

In this decayed house an old man is waiting for the rain. He has no son. Years ago, he, a prosperous manufacture of crockery, had adopted a charity boy, Hadrian, much younger than the sisters. The boy was trained to regard the man as his uncle and the daughters as his cousins. When the boy grows up, he sets out for Canada. He returns home to see his bed ridden uncle after a pretty long time. Now, he is a grown up man, the man about the place. His arrival disturbs the existing equilibrium. The discussion between the sisters in the kitchen regarding the newcomer is remarkable. Is not he altered? Said Matilda, sotto voce. Isn’t he, said Emmie. what a little man : But Matilda says oh he is not bad” Matilda’s inclination towards Hadrian is obvious , She dresses herself in order to impress him.



The father has been moved downstairs and Hadrian now occupies what used to be his room. By mistake as Matilda goes to his room to wish her father good night, touched Hadrian He is strongly moved by her touch. The soft straying tenderness of her hand on his face startled something out of his soul. He tells the old man that he would like to marry Matilda. The sisters react against his proposal. They think that he wants their father's money Ted Rockley threatens that if Matilda does not marry he will leave every thing to Hadrian. The girls threaten Hadrian and protest their father, but the dying man insists with malevolent satisfaction. The sisters stop talking to Hadrian. One day when Matilda goes back to pick gooseberries Hadrian who has been sensually awakened by Matilda's touch proposes her directly.

" You don't want me, then?" he said in his subtle, insinuating voice . I don't want to speak to you " she said averting her face. You put your hand on me, though, he said You shouldn't have done that , and Then I should never have thought of it. You shouldn't have touched me" (Lawrence 161).

Matilda says that that was a mistake and further says that she was old enough to be his mother but Hadrian says it does not matter to him. He proposed her to marry and go out to Canada. He forces that he wanted to marry She marries the indomitable dangerous charity boy. The story ends with the dying man murmuring "that is right " I appreciate R.E. Pritchard as he writes,

"You Touched Me also brushes the theme of unrealized incestuous desire, in the relationship between the youngman and the women who had brought him up, and the father for whom she intened the caress that woke up the young man forcing the girl into marriage and then to kiss him and her young husband, with whom he partially indentifies" Pritchard 129.

In toto we can say that the story is slow, reluctant awakening of love from hatred.

The last tale is a novella. Its first version was written in 1918 and was rewritten in 1919 and a new ending was added in the mid-Nov .1921, Like *You Touched Me*" The Fox concerns two young women living together, and the incursion of a young man into their lives. The two girls let the farm and retire to live in a railway carriage, the essential deadness of the relationship still remains with them. There is something lacking in their relationship and Lawrence brings it out with tremendous patience.

The most remarkable thing in the early part of the story is the humour aroused by the efforts of the girl to keep the farm going- a business which essentially requires masculine energy and skills. Julian Moynahan truly writes, "the two women are performing a travesty of farming, just as in their personal lives they are performing travesty of marriage" (Moynahan 197).

The fox is the triumph of the superb use of the fox symbolism Lawrence has successfully used the symbol of fox to reveal March's different stages of consciousness. F.R. Leavis truly writes- "The whole fox motive in all its development is remarkable. for its inevitability of truth and the economy and the precision of art" (Leavies 225). The fox appeared at the different stages of March's consciousness. On the night Henry arrives, the fox comes in March's dream. The analogies of March sexual dream of Fox are such that readers quite accept the serious sexual implications specially when she examines the dead Fox and to her hand his wonderful black glinted brush was full and frictional and wonderful.

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