

Nature In The Structuring Of Human Experience In Lawrence's *Sons And Lovers*

Snigdha Subhramita

M.A. English Literature.

Department of English Literature

The English and Foreign Languages University

Hyderabad, India

Abstract

The emotional life of Lawrence's characters is much influenced by the active participation of Nature. In *Sons and Lovers* we find vivid pictures of individual objects of Nature such as the flowers, the birds, the beasts, the sky, the moon, the sun, the trees, the hedges, the creepers, the buds, the blossoms, the meadows, the grass, the thickets, the river and its flow. And all these pictures seem integral to the development of the plot as well as the characters. Nature shapes the human nature and the intimacy shared between character is only through nature and natural elements. The relation of vitality and exuberance to the natural world is manifested in symbolic scenes which the novel presents to us. Nature in a way insists the character to articulate their emotions and feelings in a certain way.

Keywords: Nature, pictures, intimacy, characters, vitality, exuberance, symbolic.

Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* starts with the description of the landscape at 'Hell Row', the running brook and the collier's houses. Lawrence gives the readers a cinematographic view of the tired donkeys moving in circles, corn fields, and the entire picture of the natural landscape of the village of Bestwood. The Natural environment shapes characters and the way they behave to situations. Nature shapes the human nature and the intimacy shared between character is only through nature and natural elements

This is particularly evident in the scene at the end of the first chapter where Mrs. Morel is thrown outside the house by her drunken husband. The moonlight, the garden, the flowers with their scents and structures seem to work magically on her very own soul. The commotion in her mind becomes a sharp contrast to the natural environment out of the door. The white lilies swaying in moonlight, scenting the air sooth her senses and calm her mind. She

herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time, the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon. (Lawrence 38)

Nature invigorates her. It plays a pivotal role in the alterations in her character. The mother, child and the moonlight are merged into one in the "mixing - pot". This image suggests the essence of the book, its central theme- the longing for identification, connecting and merging with the other. Paul's identity and self is broken and muddled with that of his mother even before his birth.

The white rose bush smells to her sweet and simple. She touches the petals of the roses and is reminded of “morning time” and “sunshine”. When Walter opens the door and she enters the house in that cold night, she smiles at her face in the mirror, “all smeared with the yellow dust of lilies” (Lawrence 41). Although she felt forlorn in the mysterious out-of-doors, and “the white ruffles of the roses” remind her of “the morning time and sunshine.” She is aware of her intense, impassioned nature. Nature reminds her of her own spirited, passionate self.

The Swing at Willey Farm represents the 'love-hate' relationship between Paul and Miriam. The swing moves to and fro, and, similarly, Paul's love for Miriam oscillates between two extremes. He loves her for one thing but hates her for another. In the rose bush scene, Lawrence beautifully uses natural background to comment upon his characters. As the rose bush ensnarling the hawthorn with briars, Miriam tries to possess Paul. The ironic reference to her as a rose and the comparison of roses to sun reveal her feminine and predatory qualities, which explains Paul's feeling anxious and imprisoned in the white, virgin scent and his resistance to her back-to-the-womb allure. The wood which Miriam turns into a church for herself, acts as a prison for Paul. Paul starts running as soon as he is out of the wood. What was veneration and reverence for Miriam, was anxiety for Paul.

In bosses of ivory and in large splashed stars the roses gleamed on the darkness of foliage and stems and grass. Paul and Miriam stood close together, silent, and watched. Point after point the steady roses shone out to them, seeming to kindle something in their souls. The dusk came like smoke around, and still did not put out the roses... ‘They seem as if they walk like butterflies, and shake themselves,’ he said. She looked at her roses. They were white, some incurved and holy, others expanded in an ecstasy. The tree was dark as a shadow. She lifted her hand impulsively to the flowers; she went forward and touched them in worship. (Lawrence 247)

The cherry blossom scene is a short symbolic scene which precedes the climactic revelation of the division between Paul and Miriam. The cherries that were hanging from the trees were described as “scarlet” and “crimson” drops. The cherries represent “fertility”, “merrymaking” as well as a “brilliant but short blooming” season. This also serves as an analogy for the relationship between Paul and Miriam. Their relationship matured and lived, but for an insignificantly, small period of their lives. Nature adds a Midas touch to their relationship too, making it more rich and grand an event, sending “thrilling motions” in Paul's veins making him more aware of his own needs. However, their relationship, like the cherry blossoms has a “short blooming season”.

Paul comes to realize that he should break off with Miriam with a procession of images. Paul exhilarated by the “dull purple” night sky and the “dusky gold” “half -moon”, walks out into the garden, where a “bed of pinks”, and then a row of lilies at the garden's edge emit powerful perfumes. The lilies are especially provocative: their scent made him drunk and they lean “as if they were calling”. Paul walks away from the garden to the field beyond where he is overcome, “like a shock” and then “with pink against his lips”, Paul tells his mother he will “break off” with Miriam.

Behind him the great flowers leaned as if they were calling. And then, like a shock, he caught another perfume, something raw and coarse. Hunting round, he found the purple iris, touched their fleshy throats and their dark, grasping hands. At any rate, he had found something. They stood stiff in the darkness. Their scent was brutal. The moon was melting down upon the crest of the hill. It was gone; all was dark. The corncrake called still. Breaking off a pink, he suddenly went indoors. 'Come, my boy,' said his mother. 'I'm sure it's time you went to bed.' He stood with the pink against his lips. 'I shall break off with Miriam, mother,' he answered calmly. (Lawrence 450)

Paul's resolve comes as a result of his presence in Nature, his decision is a response to Nature's stimuli as well as to his own vital being. Paul is not unaware of the associations between his feelings and the objects of Nature that he feels and notices. The purple of the sky and the purple of the irises that he sees are the two extremes of his psychic space. Paul chooses his course by instinct. He follows the scent from the garden, withdrawing into the recesses of the self.

Each character in the novel responds differently to flowers. It is significant of their characters. Clara does not agree to pick the flowers because she thinks they become like "corpses" but when they are picked. This describes her exuberance, vibrancy and sensuousness. Paul expresses his true feelings and desires for Clara with the help of flowers. The red petals, like the bleached cherry stones suggest the carnal nature of the relationship and its likely failure.

Unlike the younger Paul who was afraid of the wind, the older Paul loves the sea and its noise. Paul's lovemaking with Miriam is unsuccessful partially because he associates her with the confines of home. But Clara reminds him of the "open space sort", a free spirit, and most of their lovemaking takes place outdoors. The sight of the "orange moon" arouses the passion in Paul. His blood is concentrated like a flame in his chest. In spite of that Miriam is also moved, he fails to get across to her. Here, the orange moon arouses violent sexual passion in Paul as a force. In another event, Paul and Clara walk down the bank of the river Trent.

Halfway up the big colonnade of elms, where the Grove rose highest above the river, their forward movement faltered to an end. He led her across to the grass, under the trees at the edge of the path. The cliff of red earth sloped swiftly down, through trees and bushes, to the river that glimmered and was dark between the foliage. The far-below water-meadows were very green. He and she stood leaning against one another, silent, afraid, their bodies touching all along. There came a quick gurgle from the river below. (Lawrence 472)

The river, by its turbulent and impetuous flow and its tempestuous current triggers their passion as much as it becomes a symbol for it.

The tense atmosphere and the strained relationship in the family is intensified by the shrieking and crying of the ash tree, and the darkness as well as the roaring west wind in front of the house. So the tree shrieks and moans at night as if it were an externalization of the terror of the children or a prophecy of approaching doom. It was a demoniacal noise for the children but Mr. Morel liked it. He said, 'It is music. It sends me to sleep'. (Lawrence 100)

A certain creature which exercises a powerful hold on Lawrence's imagination is the red stallion which is described in the novel. Paul speculates, idly, on what it might have been to be a man on horseback, a knight. Clara immediately accuses him of preferring not to let women fight for themselves. The exchange, beginning flippantly, ends in tension and sarcasm, charged with the trans- personal hostility of male and female which Lawrence registers in his art.

Nature, moreover, has religious Christian implications in *Sons and Lovers*. After the birth of Paul, Mrs. Morel took the baby to the top of the hill. The meadows and the evening lights begin to influence her. she calls her son "my lamb", which is a term used to refer to Jesus Christ. The baby stares at her, "and at that very moment she felt, in some far inner place of her soul, that she and her husband were guilty" "And a wave of hot love went over her to the infant." Nature acts as the media through which people could get in touch with this salvation power. The setting sun is equally symbolically significant in the novel. Miriam identifies her situation with the beautiful sun which is going to set very soon. She decides that would call for Paul no more. Similarly, Paul's emotional turmoil towards the end of the novel is identified with the image of sun-set. In *Sons and Lovers* the relation between Man and Nature is direct and vital. Lawrence uses the nature in the novel as a salvation force against the industrial distortion of human nature. The characters experience moments of transcendence while alone in Nature. They bond deeply while in nature. Nature shapes human nature and the intimacy shared between character is only through nature and natural elements. The comparable relationship with nature metaphorically symbolizes and is intricately linked with the intense feelings and experiences of the characters.

References

Aldington, Richard. *Portrait of a Great Genius But...:The Life of D. H. Lawrence,1885-1930*. London: William Heinemann LTD, 1950.

Birring, Jagroop Singh. *The Holy Ghost: A Study of the Novels of D. H. Lawrence*. New Delhi: HARMAN PUBLISHING HOUSE, 1994.

D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers: A Casebook in Criticism. London: Oxford University Press, 2005. 142.

<https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/sons-and-lovers.pdf>

Naheed, Qamar. *D. H. Lawrence: Treatment of Nature in Early Novels*. New Delhi: A.P.H Publishing Corporation, 1998.