D.H. LAWRENCE AND FEMINISM

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Abstract: *Even though D.H. Lawrence was considered a misogynist by his fervent critics, an analysis of his works discloses that the ones centered on male characters are also considered some of his diluted, whereas the most successful are the ones focusing on strong female characters trying to find their path in life. The present paper concentrates on his repeated concept of "impersonality" and the way in which it evolves into a vision of a world beyond gender.*

Keywords: *misogyny, impersonality, gender, feminism.*

The period following World War I was intensely labeled as a period of consolidation of the freedoms that women had gained during the war and the beginning of an era of great feminist activity due to the radical changes it surfaced in women's lives as a result to their access to the labour market for the first time in large numbers. It also represented the beginning of a new, anti-feminist movement that condemned the militant feminism of the suffrage movement. D.H. Lawrence's development was also influenced by the suffragist and the "dreaming woman" since many of the ladies from his entourage were more or less involved in this. Although he admired their drive he believed that they were concentrating on the wrong reforms (such as the vote for women) and were not aiming at the real important change (individual/spiritual liberation and ascension). His disappointment resided in the fact that women had tried to enter and become part of the masculine world of industry and technology instead of emphasizing "the feminization of experience, the necessity for men to take women, and the feminine side of their own natures, seriously." (Simpson, 1982: 94)

In an endevour to clarify masculine values in the "perverted femininity of will and idealism" that the post-war period was in his opinion, Lawrence tried to center his novels from the 1920s on the theme of male comradeship and this is more than evident in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* where he maintains his pre-war views of feminine feeling and tenderness: "By a neat reversal these values are now 'masculine,' leaving his women characters the choice of either identifying with the new 'feminine' values of cerebration, will, technology and so on, or of becoming disciples of the new masculinism" (Simpson, 1982: 138). According to Carl Jung, the collective unconscious in the unconscious of the male is manifested as a *feminine* inner personality – the anima, the totality of the unconscious feminine psychological qualities a male possesses, standing at the base of creative ability:

> Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint or "archetype" of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman-in short, an inherited system of psychic

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> adaptation. Even if no women existed, it would still be possible, at any given time, to deduce from this unconscious image exactly how a woman would have to be constituted psychically. The same is true of the woman: she too has her inborn image of man. (Jung, 2014: 198)

In a letter to his friend, Gordon Campell, Lawrence tried to express the way in which he experienced his contribution as a writer referring to an "unnameable me" that could be translated as the unconscious, the personal and the collective, the realm of feelings and emotions inside the human soul that an artist must capture into in the act of creation:

> You see it really means something – I *wish* I could express myself – this feeling that one is not only a little individual living a little individual life, but that one is in oneself the whole of mankind, and ones fate is the fate of the whole of mankind. Not me – the little, vain, personal D. H. Lawrence – but that unnameable me which is not vain nor personal, but strong, and glad, and ultimately sure, but so blind, so groping, so tongue-tied, so staggering. You see I *know* that if I could write the finest lyrical poetry or prose that ever was written, if I could be put in the pinnacle of immortality, I wouldn't. I would rather struggle clumsily to put into art the new Great Law of God and Mankind – not the empirical discovery of the individual – but the utterance of the great racial or human consciousness, a little of which is in me. (Lawrence, 2002: 302)

However the author's diligence on gendered bodies inevitably becomes a fixation on gendered hierarchy. For Lawrence, men are the ones that dominate and women the ones that are being dominated. One of his stories, "The Border Line" (published in *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories*, 1928) represents a proper example of the way in which Lawrence's view of women is situated in his essentialization of gender. The story, set right after the ending of World War I, is a dull allegory that centers around the life of Katherine Farquhar, a German woman married to a dominant Scotsman who died at the front, who manages to move past this traumatic event and remarries. Whereas Alan, the dead husband, is described in terms that emphasize his rigid masculinity and deny his emotions ("He was one of the hard, clever Scotsmen, with a philosophic tendency, but without sentimentality. His contempt of Nietzsche, whom she adored, was intolerable. Alan just asserted himself like a pillar of rock, and expected the tides of the modern world to recede around him." Lawrence, 1928:103) Philip, the new husband, is soft and weak and shows feminine characteristics (He was a little black Highlander, of the insidious sort, clever, and *knowing.* This look of knowing in his dark eyes, and the feeling of secrecy that went with his dark little body, made him interesting to women. Another thing he could do was to give off a great sense of warmth and offering, like a dog when it loves you. He seemed to be able to do this at will." Lawrence, 1928:104). The purpose of these antithetic images of the two men in Katherine's life is to make her finally realize the extent of her loss and the fallacy of ever questioning her first husband's authority and power.

One approach to Lawrence's works is to read them against themselves – as a critique of the gender essentialism he appears to adopt. Lawrence's aim is to create a great change to the concept of feminization, since he encourages women to take action, to discover their universe and enlarge their purpose in life. Lawrence's female characters have prominent identities and refuse to be ordinary people. Ursula Brangwen

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the protagonist of *The Rainbow* (1915) wants to get an education, ventures into the world of men to reveal her individuality, to free herself spiritually, refusing to comply with the social norms, familial restrictions and her mother's traditional way of life. The theme of duality helps the reader understand the female characters in relation with the opposite sex: "Men and women are roughly, the embedment of Love and Law: they are two complementary parts. According to him, 'what we want is always the perfect union of the two,' which is 'the Law of the Holy spirit, the Law of Consummate Marriage'" (Hoare and Peterson, 1989: 70). Lawrence thinks that the conflict between the two sexes is positive concuring in this case with a better understanding between Ursula and Rupert Birkin. In that sense *The Rainbow* exhibits various models of women from the 20th century and presents their part in the world of men. Through his writings Lawrence tried to maintain his sometimes considered misogynist ideas about women's position but at the same time never abandoned the thought of their spiritual rebirth.

S*ons and Lovers* (1913) is most of the times regarded as Lawrence's autobiographical, "Oedipal" novel, in which he sketches his youth, expanding on his relationship with his parents and especially on the disputable bond with his mother. Lawrence had later hesitations about the depiction of his parents in the novel, mostly that of his father. H.M. Daleski believes that the author "penetrated to the truth which the son subsequently thought he had not seen, for the impression which Mr. and Mrs. Morel in fact make is not notably different from that which Lawrence had of his father and mother in later life." (Daleski, 1965: 43)

The first feeling of the novel is that the father is quite a violent person who enjoys drinking more than spending time with his children and who mistreats the sensitive mother who sacrificed herself for the sake of her sons. Yet, by the end of the story the reader's compassion has been transferred towards the male character and away from the female one, through a tacit communication that unveils Mrs. Morel's manipulative behaviour:

> This element – which does not seem deliberate enough, perhaps even conscious enough, to be confidently called a technique – is an important and typically Lawrentian trait which allows the reader to glimpse a deeper stratum of emotions, all the more intense for not being explicitly articulated. It is the counterpoint of a distinct, dissenting voice, offering different points of view that enrich the novel but cannot provide the characters, possibly even the author, with any relief. Lawrence's later misgivings make this abundantly clear. (Haritatou, 2012: 3)

This technique of duality based on the conflict between the mind and the body is not strictly limited to the author's treatment of his parents, but extends to all the major characters in the novel. Paul Morel is a complex person that understands and observes his flaws in others through the psychological process called by Jung a "projection," but instead of calming him, it tends to aggravate his mental state. The main female characters are also portrayed through the practice of projection of male personages on them, revealing their unique features: great insight, acute instincts and connection with nature but also in an almost mystical relation to each other. Mrs. Morel's first depiction in relation to her mysterious side is when she is locked outside the house and in the quietness of the garden she goes through something similar to a process of disintegration of the self: "Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of

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sickness, and her consciousness in the child, 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, 2015: 34). The episode appears to have brought her the peace she so long expected and which lasts long after the moment had passed: "As she unfastened her brooch at the mirror, she smiled faintly to see her face all smeared with the yellow dust of lilies. She brushed it off, and at last lay down. For some time her mind continued snapping and jetting sparks, but she was asleep before her husband awoke from the first sleep of his drunkenness." (Lawrence, 2015: 36)

Another incident, seen through the eyes of young Paul this time, places Mrs. Morel in the middle of a mystical transformation during a visit to Lincoln Cathedral and appears like a being from another world, strange and captivating as an angel. The process of mythicization of the mother is achieved on the one hand through her portrayal as the embodiment of ultimate maternal love and on the other through the insertion of otherworldly incidents that elevate her at a supreme level. However the son rebels against the castrating emotional burden she has oppressed him with:

> He looked at his mother. Her blue eyes were watching the cathedral quietly. She seemed again to be beyond him. Something in the eternal repose of the uplifted cathedral, blue and noble against the sky, was reflected in her, something of the fatality. What was, *was.* With all his young will he could not alter it. He saw her face, the skin still fresh and pink and downy, but crow's-feet near her eyes, her eyelids steady, sinking a little, her mouth always closed with disillusion; and there was on her the same eternal look, as if she knew fate at last. He beat against it with all the strength of his soul. (Lawrence, 2015: 280)

The original technique of female description has made some critics accuse Lawrence's narratives of being stereotypically misogynistic. Contrariwise, his female characters prove that women have essence as well and can exist as individuals:

> Lawrence seeks to discover the particular feminine essence, the female core in human existence. This might be seen as an essentialist view, but if it is, it resembles Irigaray's in its affirmation of a female essence accessible to women as individuals. Lawrence believes in femaleness as a universal principle and insists that it lies within the woman's instinctive wisdom to discover and preserve it as the most valuable gift of nature. This essentialism (unfashionable though it now is) has a wholly positive meaning, as it "informs his female characters' parodies of the male characters' ideological statements. (Siegel, 1991: 14)

Often classed as a realist and mainly concerned with the nature of the relationships that can occur between men and women, Lawrence's most popular novels like *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are set in an industrial environment that explores the possibilities of a modern life in which the protagonists evolve both psychologically and socially. The focus on undiscovered sexuality, on physical intimacy is rooted in the need to restore the union between the two sexes, and to find an equilibrium between the body and the mind: "Now we see the trend of our civilization, in terms of human feeing and human relation. It is, and there is no denying it, towards a greater and greater abstraction from the physical, towards a

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further and further physical separateness between men and women, and between individual and individual… It only remains for some men and women, individuals, to try to get back their bodies and preserve the flow of warmth, affection and physical unison" (Lawrence, 1973). But for Lawrence the alliance between the two opposites, man and woman, which is mandatory in the process of self-discovery, is difficult to be accomplished by the man who in his turn has to distance himself from all conventions and abandon himself to the female.

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