

ANTIFEMINISM IN AARON'S ROD

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ABSTRACT

The leadership motif, which occupied a quiescent space in the last few novels of Lawrence, finds its first active expression in Aaron's Rod. With this novel Lawrence's Antifeminism and misanthropy are confined with his delusional faith in his own position as a savior of mankind. And to strengthen this exaggerated notion he presents the story of Aaron Sisson, a minor who runs away from his wife and children in search of a more wholesome life and gets enlightened in the company of Rawdon Lilly, a born leader and the self-portrait of the novelist.

Aaron, a typical Lawrentian protagonist, faces the critical question of finding his real self. He has a small family comprising of a wife and three daughters. The very beginning of the novel shows him in a disturbed state of mind. He feels suffocated by his routine job and domesticity, which seem to deprive him of his self-possession, "To Aaron Sisson this was home, this was Christmas: the unspeakably familiar....The war was over, and everything just was the same. The acute familiarity of this house, which he had built for his marriage twelve years ago, the changeless pleasantness of it all, seemed unthinkable. It prevented his thinking".(10)

The antagonism inside him becomes too strong to be suppressed by any means as is obvious from the following passage:

A woman and whisky, these were usually a remedy-and music. But lately these had begun to fail him. No, there was something in him that would not give in neither- to the whisky, nor the woman, nor even the music. (20)

Meanwhile, we are introduced to a group of Bohemians-Bricknells- Whom Aaron meets in Beldover while roaming aimlessly on the Christmas Eve. There we see Alfred Bricknell, a partner in the colliery firm, thus, representing upper-middle bourgeois class, his son Jim Bricknell, his daughter Julia(who is described sitting like a witch), Jim's fiancée, Josephine, (whose tongue movement is said to suggest snake's flicker), and few other friends. The whole

set truly represents the modern dissolute civilization with its post-war lust for violence and hatred.

When Lilly's Norwegian wife Tanny goes to Norway to visit her parents, Lilly takes a room above Covent Garden market. One day he finds a staggering man falling down on the street, who, to his surprise, is Aaron. He takes the man to his room and finds him suffering from influenza. However, most surprisingly, the blame of his physical sickness is put upon Josephine to whom he 'gave in':

"I gave in to her-and afterward I cried, thinking of Lottie and the children. I felt my heart break, you know. And that's what did it. I should have been all right if I hadn't given in to her-"

"To whom? Said Lilly.

"Josephine. I felt, the minute I was loving her, I'd done myself. And I had. Everything came back on me. If I hadn't given in to her, I should ha' kept all right," (87)

Aaron's relation with Josephine is another instance of his inability to come in normal terms with any woman. And following a Lawrentian mode, he blames Josephine for this failure. Moreover, his exclamation that he suffered from his malady because of the heartbreak caused by the memory of his wife and children is nothing else but an excuse made by a weak nerved man. How manipulatively Lawrence relates Aaron's physical sickness to his mental disturbance caused by women.

The living together of Aaron and Lilly leads to the blossoming of another relationship, which parallels the blood-brotherhood that existed between Birkin and Gerald. We remember how Birkin, in *Women in Love*, had realized that a complete relationship with Ursula was not sufficient and that there was the need of 'eternal union' with a man. Lilly seems to have taken the thread from Birkin and, thus, wants to initiate a new story with Aaron. In fact, both the men are fed up of the martial tie and want to seek freedom in each other's company. Their discussion regarding marriage and children reflects their resentful attitude towards their family.

Both the men ardently want their women to be their passive slaves. And the slightest assertion on the part of females is, naturally, against their ideals. But we must not forget that all these complaints against women get more strength because they are made in an atmosphere made warm by the physical proximity of the two men, Lilly sensuously rubbing oil into Aaron's lower body.

The novelist, very cleverly, shifts the grievances against women to the general condition of mankind, which, according to him, is in a rotten state because people can't, "submit to a bit

of healthy individual authority”. (94) And such kind of authority goes, no doubt, with Lilly, Lawrence’s spokesperson, who proudly admits before Aaron that,

“There’s just a bit of something in me, I think, Which isn’t a man running into a pub for a drink.”(102)

This something makes him the only savior with who lays the hope of regeneration.

The discussion takes a new turn when a army officer, Herbertson, visits Lilly, and talks about his recent war experiences. After Herbertson’s departure Lilly and Aaron discuss the matter of war. While Aaron realizes the horrible reality of war, for Lilly war is only a lie which has happened no more than a dream happens. In a typical Lawrentian fashion, he denies the harsh cruelty of war and wants to get out of it.

One remarkable thing is that Lilly-Aaron relationship is greatly based upon Lawrence-Murry friendship, as is noted by Harry T. Moore, who feels that the similarity goes deeper than Lawrence’s nursing of Murry during his sickness. Lilly like Lawrence

Expects a great subservience from his friends. What he wants is not a friend but an obedient fellow. Many times, Lawrence had bitter quarrels with Murry for the latter did not agree with him on many issues. Similarly what Aaron says about Lilly is absolutely true.

However, before Aaron departs from Lilly he is made to realize his own value which is to be maintained through singleness of being. Lilly tells him that his flute is “Aaron’s rod”, which has got to blossom, and which would impel his male creativity. And when Aaron gets away from Lilly he feels that the latter has made a certain “call” upon his soul. Thus, he follows Lilly to Italy. But, before going to Italy he visits his wife and children, and the same old horror of being possessed surrounds him again:

The strange, liquid sound of her appeal seemed to him like the swaying of a serpent, which mesmerizes the fated, fluttering, helpless bird. She clasped her arms around him, she drew him to her, she half roused his passion. At the same time she coldly horrified and repelled him. He had not the faintest feeling, at the moment, of his own wrong. But she wanted to win his own wrong. But she wanted to win his own self-betrayal out of him. He could see himself as the fascinated victim, failing to this cajoling, awful woman, the wife of his bosom.(124)

And he escapes from her clutches, for, “he would keep the mastery of his own soul and conscience and actions.”(125)

Here begins Aaron's journey of singlehood, which would lead him to his final destination through several experiences. Before Aaron meets Lilly in Italy, he comes in contact with many other people, including Sir William Franks and his family who are the true representatives of post-war Florentine society. Sir William contemptuously tells Aaron about the power of 'providence', which, as Lilly has told, can never leave one in lurch and which is the only greatest source to be relied upon. Sir William believes in the power of money, whereas for Lilly 'providence' or the 'invisible will' is the only power.

Meanwhile, we see Aaron's faith in his own unyielding singleness and his contempt for possessive feminine principles becoming more rigid. An elaborate account of his married life is given through his stream of thoughts:

He realized, somehow, that at this terrible passive game of fixed tension she would beat him. Her fixed female soul, her wound-up female will would solidify into stone-whereas his must break. In him something must break. It was a cold and fatal deadlock, profitless. A life-automatism of fixed tension that suddenly, in him, did break. His will flew loose in recoil away from her. He left her, as inevitably as a broken spring flies out from its hold. (154)

He is not the one to worship woman or to give him away in love. For him, the consummation of love lies in the,

"arrival at a state of simple, pure self-possession."(157)-

Two eagles in mid-air, like, Whitman's

"Dalliance of eagles", coming to the intensification of love, but "all the time each lifted on its own wings". (158)

But Aaron's determination to maintain his isolated being is not strong enough to save him from another liaison-this time, with an American woman married to Italian marchese. She has been a singer but does not sing anymore due to some depression. Aaron's flute animates her dead soul and makes her sing again. The two get attracted towards each other, but soon Aaron realizes his mistake in a very ridiculous manner. When he returns home after visiting Marchessa his wallet gets robbed by a gang of soldiers, and he relates this episode with his relationship with the lady.

And in this way, the 'sentinel' of his soul informs him of his wrong-doing for which he had to pay 'twelve pounds sterling'. But this 'sentinel' inside him cannot stop him from continuing his meetings with Marchessa. In fact, what promotes his tie with the lady is his belief that he would be able to make her yield before his desires, "His manhood, or rather his maleness, rose powerfully in him, in a sort of mastery. He felt his own power; he felt

suddenly his own virile title to strength and reward. Suddenly and newly flushed with his own male super-power, he was going to have his reward. The woman was his reward". (235)

But, to his utter dismay, it happen vice-versa. His relation to Marchesa ends in his own victimization,

"She was absolutely gone in her own incantation. She was absolutely gone, like a priestess utterly involved in her own terrible rites. And he was part of the ritual only, God and victim in one."(248)

After such a disastrous experience Aaron realizes that Marchesa is not meant for him. And he feels that his relationship with Marchesa has met a failure because he is a married man who still loves his wife. But the reality is that one after another Aaron,s relationships meet tragic ends because he has an inherent disability to compromise-previously with Lottie and Josephine, and now with Marchesa. However, being a Lawrentian hero, he resorts to various excuses- he describes himself as a married man who still holds his wife dear in his heart, though in reality he has least concern with his abandoned wife.

It is not Aaron only who blames women for his own shortcomings. All the blame characters in the book arrive at the same conclusion. Moreover, women are also made the cause of general social disintegration, for they deny yielding before men's will. We see in chapter 17, "Nel Paradiso", a number of men including Lilly, Aaron and Marchese analyzing the issue of marriage. Marchese starts the discussion by condemning his wife for being assertive in sexual matters:

It used to be, that desire started in the man, and the woman answered. It used to be so for a long time in Italy. For this reason the woman were kept from the men. For this reason our catholic religion tried to keep the young girls in convents, and innocent, before marriage. So that with their minds they should not know, and should not start this terrible thing, this woman's desire over a man, beforehand. This desire which starts in a woman's head, when she knows, and which takes a man for her use, for her service. This is Eve. Ah, I hate eve. I hate her, when she knows, and when she wills. I hate her when she will make of me that which serves her desire. (223)

And all of Marchese's friends admit their experiences to be the same. Thus, what the novelist wants to convey is that the only way to save the society from further disintegration is to suppress the will of women. When he meets Lilly, the latter preaches him the 'words' of wisdom, according to which there are two urges in life-love and power.

Moreover, the whole mass of men must submit to the “*heroic soul in a greater man*”(269) and If Aaron does not yield he must die. When Aaron asks whom he shall submit to, Lilly-his face like a ‘Byzantine eikon’ at the moment-replies: “*Your soul will tell you*”. (270)

Thus, if we gather all the fragments the picture that appears before us is that of an egomaniac whose frustrated longing for power have given rise to his misconception that he may be a chosen savior for others. Moreover, his egomania gets merged with an extreme antifeminism, which demands a no-resistance submission from women, and which explores the possibilities of man-man relationship hidden under the mask of leader-follower association.

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