PUNE RESEARCH WORLD ISSN 2455-359X
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES VOL 2, ISSUE 4

SETTINGS AND SYMBOLISM IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS*

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ABSTRACT

Sons and Lovers (1913) was Lawrence's first important novel that established him among the finest young novelists of his generation. It also has been his most widely read work until quite recently. It figures in the best hundred novels of twentieth century. In this paper an attempt has been made by the researcher to highlight the different settings of the novel and its influence on the characters with regard to physical and psychological aspect of their personality. A light is also thrown on the different symbols used by the novelist and their significance in the development of the novel as well as the characters.

INTRODUCTION

The setting of *Sons and Lovers* is not limited to The Bottoms or Nottingham or Willey Farm or London. At first, however, the original of the Morels in the class of coal miners is established as a low, almost animal-like existence, full of brutality and mean squalor. The means of viewing the collier's lives as such is Gertrude Morel's perspective. She is from a higher class and is critical. She knows that the colliers' life is not the life she chooses for her children, even if her husband thinks otherwise. She also does something about it. Her sons expand her horizons beyond even her own background–to London, for example.

The pits where the coal mined are not the dominating features of the landscape, but they control the flow of work and money. The natural surroundings of the pits provide Paul with material for art. Corn grows around the fiery works. But the special place where nature's fecundity is allowed full rein is Willey Farm, mean to be contrasted with The Bottoms and the other coal regions in every respect. Here Mrs. Morel hopes Paul can gain strength since

his work seems to be hurting health. Where the dominant figure in the mining region is Walter Morel, the dominant figure in the idyllic landscape is Miriam Leivers.

A third setting of the novel is Nottingham, with Jordan's serving as the center of that are for Paul. Although like the pits in some superficial respects, Jordan's is a world populated mostly with women, and Paul's work is not the grimy business of coal. The world of work is in contrast with Willey Farm, which is its antidote and opposite, and with the coal region, whose only attraction for Paul is that his mother lives there.

The open fields, the countryside through which the trains run, the seaside and black pool round out Paul's world. The English landscape with its lush greenery and ancient landmarks is ideal for long walks from his earliest childhood Paul loves to enter the wild countryside, gathering blackberries or flowers for his mother. Yet his dream is one day to go abroad. The setting opens out even father for Paul after his mother's death since his mind thrusts out into the heavens as he seeks his mother's soul. Finally Paul reaches the knife-edge between life and death. In the end he is not afraid to cross the line, though he chooses not to.

The turn of the century setting with its old-style industrialism, its slow travel, its clear distinctions between rural, village and city life, its provinciality, its rigid class-orientation, and its few indications of the dawning of a new age is vastly different from ours, but the human elements involved have relevance today.

Symbols

A symbol is a powerful image, charged with meaning that is not easy to explain in words. In Sons and Lowers Lawrence has evolved a very personal set of symbols that enrich the themes explored. Further, Lawrence's symbols relate to one another, their resonances taking on a life of their own. One of the most characteristic symbols in Lawrence is the flower. Lawrence had a particular interest in flowers, and he uses the descriptively throughout his novels. Often a flower will take on the power of a symbol.

One example of a symbolic flower is the lily. Mrs. Morel smells lilies in her front garden at eh The Bottoms when Morel has locked her out of the house. In the moonlight she sees the flowers and instinctively buries her face in them so that their golden pollen covers her face. She seems drugged by them and for a moment escapes time and space. Traditionally associated with death, here the lily becomes the means of temporal deliverance. In her rom Mrs. Morel notices that the pollen is still on her face, and she is glad. Mrs. Morel's experience with the lilies is later amplified with the sunflowers she sees in her backyard on her return from Sheffield, where her illness became unbearable. The sunflowers are for her the symbol of life at home. They wither with the season, just as her life withers too. The sunflowers bring together in their name three major symbols in the novel–flowers, the sun

and fire (from the sun). Where the lilies promised escape from a sordid life, the sunflower represents decay towards death, itself an escape.

The problem with Lawrence's flowers is knowing where to stop with symbolic interpretation. He comes very close to making every flower a meaning-carrier. The crimson carnation that Paul crushes when he first makes love with Clara, the white chrysanthemum of Miriam's that cannot thrive in the morels garden, the flowers in the bowl that Paul gives Miriam after their last meal–all intersect with other images of vegetation o form a tapestry of living ideas. The hay that Paul and Miriam lie on; the pine grove where Paul and Miriam first make love; the beeches under which Paul and Clara make love; the ear of wheat to which Paul compares himself when considering his own insignificance in the universe after his mother's death–all of these are involved in the larger symbolism of the novel.

Heavenly bodies are also symbolic. Paul is associated with the sun from the time Mrs. Morel first decides on his name. There is a tavern called the Moon and Stars, which is a parody of the moon and stars that figure so heavily in Paul's night contemplations, especially his last contemplation that decides his life. Orion is Paul and Miriam's favorite constellation, and its being hidden by a cloud indicates not only trouble in their relationship but also trouble with Paul's heroism. The heavenly bodies, the cycles of day and night and of the seasons, and the weather, especially the occurrences of rain and snow, are all related, again in a symbolic fabric. The rain comes after love with Miriam, before love with Clara and during the burial of Mrs. Morel. Snow covers the ground where Pau lies wounded by his encounter with Baxter Dawes, to serve as a contrast to the females' association with rain.

Fire is symbolic too. The burning of Arabella, the fires all night at the pits, the swirl of fire that Paul imagines in his visionary insight into the meaning of life, the final allusion to fire in Paul's consideration of himself as a point of light or fire in the vast darkness– in all of these fire is associated with death or blackness, and wit life, its opposite. Paul reasons that when his mother's bedroom fire goes out, so will her life. There is an equation of fire with lie on the edge of death throughout the novel.

Landscape, vegetation, the heavens, the elements, even people are symbolic in Lawrence. But the symbols are not easy. It is difficult to define the artist through Paul, but Paul is a symbol of the artist, just s is his near-contemporary, Stephen Deadalus. Miriam is a symbol of spiritual womanhood; Clara is a symbol of sensual womanhood. But the characters escape these narrow boundaries, just as the more objective symbols grow by their association with other symbols in the book.

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