



ANTIFEMINISM IN *THE TRESPASSER*

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ABSTRACT

Lawrence's second novel The Trespasser is not entirely his own creation but a revision of some work by his friend Helen Corke. Yet it is a powerful exploration of the destructive nature of love so commonly seen in his novels. In this sense, it makes a further move in the direction discovered with his first novel; and strongly foreshadows his later works. In the present novel, also, he seems to be least reserved while giving vent to his bitter antifeminist ideas, and with similar enthusiasm he unveils his ever-cherished view once again that it is the woman who is to be held responsible for the downfall and destruction of man. Like his previous novel, The White Peacock, The Trespasser, also, explores the destructive nature of love, now the victim being Siegmund, a London musician, who, as a result of an unhappy marriage, develops an extra-marital relationship with his former pupil, Helena. A man of emotions and feelings, he has proved failure in practical life, and to get over this impasse he turns away from this mechanical despair, to spend a few days with Helena on the Isle of Wight.

INTRODUCTION

For the presentation of negative images of women in literature more than often two terms have been used — misogyny and antifeminism.

The prefix 'anti' in the term antifeminism makes it evident that the word 'antifeminism' came into parlance only after the term 'feminism' gained currency. Since the feminists were initially concerned with the issues of rights, the word 'antifeminism' too has been defined in the same vein:

AVDHESH YADAV

1Page



It is “[t]he conviction that women are not entitled to the same moral and legal rights as men, or to the same social status and opportunities. ‘All anti-feminist thinkers hold in common the thesis that there are innate and unalterable psychological differences between women and men, differences which make it in the interests of both sexes for women to play a subordinate, private role, destined for wife and motherhood. [It] . . . [i]nvolves the idea that women ought to sacrifice the development of their own personalities for the sake of men and children”. (A *Feminist Dictionary* 54).

The different types of antifeminist practices described in the definition have been ubiquitous throughout literature in the form of misogyny because “. . . [a]nti-feminism is its ideological defense; in the sex-based insult passion and ideology are united in an act of denigration and intimidation” (A *Feminist Dictionary* 275) . According to The Oxford English Dictionary an antifeminist is a person who “[is] opposed to women or to feminism; a person (usu. a man) who is hostile to sexual equality or to the advocacy of women’s rights” (524). Thus, antifeminism may be regarded as the ideological representation of the different tenets of misogyny

For the presentation of negative images of women in literature more than often two terms have been used — misogyny and antifeminism. Therefore, it would be quite obvious to deliberate on them first.

A Feminist Dictionary describes misogyny as “[w]oman-hating [that] [i]ncludes the belief that women are stupid, pretty, manipulative, Dishonest, silly, gossipy, irrational, incompetent, undependable, Narcissistic, castrating, dirty, over-emotional, unable to make altruistic Or moral judgments, over-sexed, under-sexed. . . . Such beliefs Culminate in attitudes that demean [their] bodies, [their] abilities, [their] characters, and [their] efforts, and imply that [they] must be Controlled, dominated, subdued, abused and used not only for male benefit but for [their] own” (275).

Katherine M. Rogers uses the term more widely:

“I include among the manifestations of misogyny in literature not only direct expressions of hatred, fear, or contempt of womanhood, but such indirect expressions as misogynistic speeches by dramatic characters who are definitely speaking for the author and condemnations of one woman or type of woman which spread, implicitly or explicitly, to the whole sex” (Preface xii-xiii).



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Lawrence's second novel *The Trespasser* is not entirely his own creation but a revision of some work by his friend Helen Corke. Yet it is a powerful exploration of the destructive nature of love so commonly seen in his novels. In this sense, it makes a further move in the direction discovered with his first novel; and strongly foreshadows his later works. In the present novel, also, he seems to be least reserved while giving vent to his bitter antifeminist ideas, and with similar enthusiasm he unveils his ever-cherished view once again that it is the woman who is to be held responsible for the downfall and destruction of man. Like his previous novel, *The White Peacock*, *The Trespasser*, also, explores the destructive nature of love, now the victim being Siegmund, a London musician, who, as a result of an unhappy marriage, develops an extra-marital relationship with his former pupil, Helena. A man of emotions and feelings, he has proved failure in practical life, and to get over this impasse he turns away from this mechanical despair, to spend a few days with Helena on the Isle of Wight.

But what he considers a new birth proves a gulf of death for him. As a typical Lawrentian hero, he is found to be incapable of establishing a normal association with his lady-love. To



him, it is 'an inconsistent virtue, cruel and ugly' whose kindness is full of cruelty. A strain is always discernible when they are together.

Even their moments of intense joy seem to be filled with 'a good deal of sorrow'. Helena's attempt of meeting Siegmund's passion with love, though energizing Siegmund's drooping spirit, completely crushes her soul, "It was a wonderful night to him-It restored in him the 'will to live'. But she felt it destroyed her. Her soul seemed blasted."(40)

This discord is reached to such extent that Helena's mere presence makes Siegmund feel insane and her thought makes him shudder, gradually this emotional deadlock grows bigger unless it assumes the giant-size, and the only alternative left open to Siegmund is death. He is wearied of everything in his life, and the idea of death soothes him most.

And he commits suicide. Thus, in this "frustrated idyll"⁵(as Graham Hough Calls it). Lawrence has presented a portrait of a man who, faced with a burning dilemma, cannot resolve the situation between himself and the two women. Moreover, the pattern behind this fatal story is too adeptly worked out to be obscure-an unfortunate man entrapped into a lethal trap made for him by two women.

A more careful exploration reveals that the novelist has twined the basic theme with the conflict between animalism and idealism in such a way that all women characters seem to be clothed in devil's attire. In fact, they are made an instrument for sucking the essence of vitality and life out of the nerves of men and in turn making them dead. They want to possess and captivate their men folks and try to mould them into new shapes. In this framework Lawrence has tried to juxtapose two modes of existence displayed in the characters of Siegmund and Helena or Siegmund and Beatrice. Whereas, Siegmund represents instinctual life, full of warmth and vitality, Beatrice and Helena stand for passive and inert idealism. Though Lawrence has located Siegmund in the urban and industrial England in contrast to the agrarian world to which George and Annable belonged he imparts him a ruinous fate similar to that of his predecessors. Though living in the urban England, Siegmund is a man of instincts and emotions who is forced to perform at comedy Theatre for monetary needs. His convent-educated wife reminds us of Lady Crystabel of The White Peacock, for she is made of the same refined material which went into the making of Crystabel. The connections with the material world do not suppress the primitive instincts of Siegmund. A curious reader can instantly sense Siegmund's urge for a plain, country life. When he watches with Helena the simple and active proceedings of the farmers, the difference in their attitude at once becomes obvious.



When We meet Siegmund for the first time in the novel he is shown in a hurry to break free from all the fetters into which he is put by Beatrice, his ‘sorrow’, and his children, his ‘shadows’,. After going away from them he anticipates rest and comfort in the arms of Helena, “He felt parched and starving. She had rest and love, like water and manna for him.”(10)

But the readers who have previously read any of the Lawrentian novels can easily deduce what the novelist has in store for his hero. Helena is compared to an enchantress, ‘a smiling with’, who lives in her own dream world and who clothes everything in fancy. Whoever enters her castle is deprived of strength and vitality. In this way she reminds us of Milton’s lustful magician Comus. Lawrence has put her in that class of dreaming women with whom passion exhausts itself at the mouth. The two orders of existence to which Siegmund and Helena belong are contrasted in the following lines:

He held her close. His dream was melted in his blood, and his blood ran bright for her. His dreams were the flowers of his blood. Hers were more detached and inhuman. For centuries a certain type of woman has been rejecting the ‘animal’ in humanity, till now her dreams are abstract, and full of fantasy, and her blood runs in bondage, and her kindness is full of cruelty.(21)

As it is evident, Lawrence sees vitality as a virtue accompanying brutality, whereas passivity is seen by him as a vice which goes along with refinement. Siegmund belongs to a vitalistic stream of life which attracts Helena only when it is covered by an aura of fancy and artificiality. Otherwise the brute in him always repels her, “The secret thud, thud of his heart, the very self of that animal in him she feared and hated, repulsed her, she struggled to escape.” (74).

Moreover, the reader is repeatedly made aware of Helena’s attempt at possessing the vital chords of Siegmund’s life and gradually unnerving those chords. When they are lying together at the shore, Helena’s ‘one long anguished kiss’ acts as a scathing slow poison, Which stealthily devours Siegmund’s vitality making him vulnerable to Helena’s charm, “He lay still on his back, gazing up at her, and she stood motionless at his side, looking down at him. He felt stunned, half conscious. Yet as he lay helplessly looking up at her some other consciousness inside him murmured: ‘Hawwa-Eve-Mother!’”(53)

And immediately after this we find Siegmund feeling detached from his beloved earth-an instance certifying that a sickness and a deathly feeling have been infused into him. A void is developed within him where death stealthily occupies its seat. He realizes his helpless situation and after diagnosing the cause of it reaches the conclusion.



However, Hampson, Siegmund's old musical friend, candidly expresses the idea that the basic cause of Siegmund's continuous physical and mental deterioration is the presence of women in his life. He articulately voices Lawrence's anti-feministic ideas, thus becoming a counterpart of Annable. He does a great deal in imparting coherence to what has been going incoherently in Siegmund's mind. Generalizing the situation, he blames the supersensitive women for suppressing and destroying the animal instinct in men thus pushing them to their doom.

Hampson helps Siegmund to realize his deplorable plight. While talking to him Siegmund feels that this man is expressing something which has been coaxing his mind for a long time. And it is Hampson who explains to him the mystery of this fatal game in which 'soulful ladies of romance' strategically replace animalism by over-refined idealism.

As if this ground is not sufficient for declaring Helena Responsible for Siegmund's destruction Lawrence creates another dramatic situation which pushes Siegmund one step ahead towards his ruin. Having proved a failure in his practical life he comes to Helena in search of emotional solace, which also includes his share of sexual pleasure. But, this time, he meets failures of worse kind-emotional and above all sexual. After receiving a rebuff from the practical world his self-esteem has already been hurt. Now, the only thing that restores his lost pride is his 'handsome, white maturity'. He is narcissistic in nature a trait which has been shared by George and Annable also. This self-admiration of Siegmund becomes apparent when we find him on the shore communing with him. This is also an instance of male-chauvinism.

Now, in a Lawrence novel, who else can assume the role of calamity more suitably than a woman? Thus, the task which is left unfinished by Helena is brought to completion by Beatrice. After escaping the clutches of Helena the next place Siegmund is 'hunted to, like a hare run down' is his home. The moments he spends away from both the ladies seem to him the most cherishable moments of his life when everything appears to him clad in miraculous happenings.

His joyful state of mind stands in conspicuous contrast with the preceding and succeeding mental depression he suffers from in the company of Helena and Beatrice respectively. Reaching home means to him 'the beginning of hell and the home does not prove a better place for him. Here one thing that demands attention is that Lawrence has not yet removed his finger from the key he pressed in his first novel- children sharing the hatred of the mother for the father. The bitterness and contempt which Siegmund's children have for him is apparent from the phrases they use for him-'boiled salmon', 'damned coward', 'rotten funkner',



and so-on. And every attempt made by them to please their mother and to prove their father an outcaste certifies that Beatrice's sovereignty is assured and indisputable in her own realm. Now, the idea of diving deep into the dark abyss of death entertains him most. Everything that comes to his mind-Helena, music, friends, Beatrice, Children-is spurned at once. When he meets Helena at the railway station the state of his mind is revealed to her at once and she is stirred by the thought of the imminent tragedy. But, the novelist has tainted her concern for Siegmund with the tinge of vamparish possessiveness. Helena is terrified she loves him and can't spend her life without him, but because Siegmund's death means to her the sudden failure of her spell.

It seems that the novelist is not fully satisfied with the way he has defamed women. That is why the way he has defamed women. That is why he has made Helena admit that 'no one had she touched without hurting' because she had a 'destructive force', .

However, the question that arises after Siegmund's death is that, is death the only possible alternative left to Siegmund after his wishes are thwarted? Are the things not exaggerated just because the novelist wants to convey his message that a sensitive man cannot hope to survive if he has an overbearing woman in his life. Though much has been done by the novelist to convince the readers that the evil influence of Beatrice and Helena is the root cause of Siegmund's suicide, one thing remains undeniable, and that Siegmund himself is no less responsible for his ruin. Throughout the novel, he is projected by the novelist as an exponent of life, vitality and blood-consciousness in contrast to death, idealism and reason which are deeply associated with woman. In this way he personifies Lawrence's ideals of true living.

As Lawrence's doctrine is widely based upon the principle of dualistic opposition, he repeatedly makes recourse to this dichotomy, and one of its form is the contrast between 'light' and 'darkness', the former being associated with the active male principle and the later with the passive female principle. In the present novel also, Siegmund, the 'happy priest of the sun', is always seen longing for bright sunshine, whereas what attracts Helena is 'the full black night' that obliterates every ray of light. To what extent Helena has been able to cast her deadly charm upon Siegmund is indicated by a contrast between two symbols of light and darkness. On the third day of his visit to the Isle of wight, Siegmund is seen standing between the two bays, which makes the lower portion of his body covered with shadowy darkness, and the upper half bright and glowing.

Another thing that is worth mentioning is the use of white colour as the symbol of death, disaster, cruelty and cold idealism. In this sense Lawrence breaks the age-old convention which has associated white colour with piety and purity. Throughout the novel, we find Helena wearing white coloured clothes. In fact, whenever Helena enters the scene her white



dress and strong white body are indispensably mentioned. When Siegmung first goes to meet Helena he expects her to be 'all in white', and his expectations prove true, for in the following meeting with Helena.

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