



A Critical Study Of The Early Tales Of D.H. Lawrence

AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Though D.H. Lawrence had to fight against the protest of public for he revolted against the established social norms, he achieved great prominence in the 2nd part of twentieth century and at-present none hesitate to accept that he has carved a niche for himself in the global literacy horizon and that at present he has become the source of inspiration for most of the writers of tales and fictions.

Needless to say that Lawrence, a man of creative genius had woven intricate pattern out of his fictional writings and left an indelible mark in the literacy world. He was born in a mining village of Nottingham which remained for him “the country of the heart”. Since he was from miner’s family, he did not have a happy childhood. His father was a regular drunkard who never treated him with true fatherly affection. His parents lacked harmony in their relationship and this left an unremittingly dark scars on the soul of the children. Lawrence was attached to his mother very much who in spite of her all bitterness had diverted her passion towards her children and was very possessive about them. Thus he found himself lurking between Miriam and Clara to get love and affection. The present paper in an attempt to analyze some of his early tales critically. I have explained critically only six early tales of D.H. Lawrence. These tales were written between 1907 and 1914 and these tales are remarkable for Lawrence insight into social and psychological realism. These tales objectively dramatise the conflict between Eastwood and London.

Keywords : The Early Tales, Social Norms, Niche, Horizon, Creative, Indelible, Unremittingly, Scars, Harmony, Insight, Dramatize, Intricate.

The First Tale 'Prelude to Happy Christmas' was written in 1907 and was Lawrence's first appearance in print. It was a sentimental little story to a happy Christmas and was written on the offer of three pounds for the best Christmas Story.

This story, left unrevised and uncollected by Lawrence in his life time, gives the Lawrentian critics a chance to encounter the original version of Lawrence's earliest-stories. The story called by E.T. 'a sentimental little story' is, in fact, remarkable for Lawrence's insight into social and psychological realism.

This story deals with two families. Fred's father has lost the biggest-part of his hay along with his wife and three sons-Fred, Henry and Arthur – and is living in utter poverty. Twenty seven years before he was the owner of a farm. That time Nellie used to come to Fred's place. They loved each other. Nellie's father was a poor man. Gradually Nellie's father made money by cattle dealing when Nellie's father died she became the owner of the big farm. On the contrary Fred's family had been down on its luck and Fred had begun to think he had lost his young lady at the mill. The story ends with a happy note – "Turn once again, heal thou my pain, parted from thee my heart is sore." ¹ Nellie crosses the hurdle of money in order to restore her love. Interest in the story lies in portraying the poverty of Fred's family and exploring out the attitude of the lovers in a changed circumstance.

The mother's anxiety for her elder son is a supreme example of psychological realism: "No, perhaps not, but there is Fred as hasn't had above three pounds for the whole year's work." Lawrence, in this story unlike Sons and Lovers, is not concerned with presenting an ambitious mother and a realistic father. Neither his motive is to depict the sexual discord between wife and husband nor to dramatize the theme of Oedipus Complex. Lawrence has maintained an artistic detachment in his earliest of the stories. There is a complete harmony between wife and husband. Nellie is not a rival of Fred's mother as is Miriam to that of Paul's mother.

What is rendered is the problem of all mothers. Fred, being humiliated by the rich people at the mill, comes back to his place and is extremely perturbed. Like a typical Lawrentian hero he tramps down the yard and enters the barn where he recollects his past relation with Nellie.

The 2nd story "A Fragment of Stained Glass" reveals that Lawrence believes the story to be better constructed and more likely to win the prize. In the introductory chapter there is Poe's impact on early Lawrence which he soon discarded in favour of Maupassant's realism. Although, "A Fragment of stained glass" is a successful story, the necessity of the description above can't be justified. It is a negligible and more obviously immature. "A Fragment of stained glass" is a feeble juvenility, with its laborious but pointless indirect narration and its absurd attempt at historical evocation",² rightly said Prof. Hough. Prof. Hough has missed to mark that in formative years when Lawrence wrote these stories Poe was easily acknowledged as a master of the perfect tale. The young Lawrence is not averse to serving as an apprentice to that Jessi Chambers remembered the original version of "The White Stocking" submitted to the Nottinghamshire Guardian Christmas contest in 1907 as "an idealized picture of his mother as a young

girl going to a ball at the castle and drawing out a long white stocking in mistake for a pocket handkerchief.

“A Fragment of Stained Glass” is by measure less successful than “The White Stocking”. Its medievalism tends to be stagey and melodramatic and its effect seems laboured. “A Fragment of Stained Glass” with its self-conscious fifteenth century setting, its Browningsque Vicar and its awkward literary frame, no longer held much interest for Lawrence.

The Third Story “The White Stocking” which according to the Nottinghamshire Guardian “Lacked Finish” was subjected to revision for publication in the collection “The Prussian Officer and Other Stories” “The White Stocking” deals directly with the central issues of modern love and marriage. Lawrence evokes the life of the urban middle class with ease and assurance. The characterization especially of the heroine is subtle and unusual tripartite structure proves successful. The story-teller skillfully depicts the psychology of marriage – and the psychological complexity was one of the last elements to be grafted on the story is striking for its revelation of the turbulence beneath the surface of middle class marriage. One thing remarkable that goes to play an important role in making this story a good story is his marriage to Frieda in July 1914. The experience that he had with Frieda is remarkably significant in making of this domestic comedy with serious overtones about marriage.

Elsie Whiston girlish, flirtatious, attractive and rather careless, is married to a commercial traveller who is shaped by middle-class notions of work and morality. The first section of the story takes place on Valentine’s Day two years after Whiston’s marriage. The morning post brings along with the letter Valentine present packed in a cupboard box. Sam Adams, the florid, forty year old factory owner who had employed Elsie and Whiston before their marriage, has sent her earring, a handkerchief and a white stocking. When the husband enquires about the present, at first she declines to say the name of the man who has sent the Valentine but at last she confesses that it might be Sam Adams. She also admits that Sam Adams had sent another stocking the year before. They quarrel until Whiston, filled with rage and anxiety, leaves for work.

The second section is a cut – back to a Christian party at Sam Adam’s house two years earlier, Whiston is a wall flower, but Elsie is intoxicated by the marvellous dancing and male warmth of Adams. Whiston plays cards and grows more and more jealous. Before a final dance with Adams, Elsie reaches for her pocket handkerchief and to her utter surprise finds that she has brought a white stocking instead. Adams takes the stocking and instead gives her a handkerchief. When Whiston comes to know it, he asks her to return it to Adams. She defies him. Her behaviour provokes an angry quarrel between her and Whiston. Later on they get married.

In the third section the story is switched back to the present. The jealousy that has been aroused in Whiston with the arrival of the Valentine by the morning post, has been festering into his mind all day. When he comes back Elsie in her nonchalant irresponsible way goads him still further and confesses that

the valentine on the first anniversary of their marriage has brought an amethyst brooch. She in her turn goaded by her husband's anger puts the white stocking on as well as the amethyst brooch and the earnings and starts dancing. Whiston gives a good slap on her mouth. The story ends with the jewellery being returned to Sam Adams and the reconciliation between the wife and the husband.

"The White Stocking" has always been praised for its technical excellence and sense of life. F.R. Leavis writes, "In Lawrence's actual treatment there is lightness right enough, but it is lightness that registers a fullness of engagement in the writer. This is for him is without qualification human life".³ This human element is crystal clear everywhere in the story and this story truly can be an answer to the critic in The Time Literacy Supplement who, charged Lawrence of "Crudities" and made a contrast with the mature wisdom of Maupassant. It is surprising that the learned critic has missed to appreciate the technique of the story which is akin to that of Maupassant.

The fourth story "Goose Fair" which was published earlier than the story which brought Ford's Encomium. "It was written as early as the summer of 1908 and was first published in the English Review in February 1910 and finally it was collected in "The Prussian Officer", Lawrence and Louie Burrows worked together on this story. Lawrence on 30th June 1909 wrote Louie Burrows that he was pleased she was writing stories: "I can't do them myself. Send me them please, I will see if I can put a bit of surface on them and publish them for you. We shall collaborate; shall we?"⁵. Louie Burrows, probably, wrote the first draft of "Goose Fair", since in one of his letters to Louie Burrows Lawrence referred to this story as "your, my story, and when he sent Burrows the cheque, he received from the English Review, he described it as "the first fruit of your literary tree." The story that was written two years later than "The White Stocking" has a slight similarity of construction. Lawrence starting at a point midway in the story and creating suspense.

The story crystallizes around a dramatic situation. The central character in the story is Lois. She loves Will Selby who works in her father's factory. She loves him vehemently. One night the fire catches the factory. There she gets a very cool and indifferent treatment from her father who does not say anything about her lover. Her heart breaks when she comes to know that her father suspects Will to be the man behind the incident. She starts hating with Selby.

Although, the story achieves no effective climax and it is surprising how Lois who loves Willy is precipitated into hatred just because he is suspected by her father, to some extent it seems realistic. Since Lois is not only a beloved but also a daughter her anger is justified to some extent. Some of the moments in the story are very striking. When Lois comes to know about the fire in the night, she rushes towards the spot. She is anxious about her lover. In the crowd catching sight of her father, she hurries to him:

‘Oh, Dadda – is he safe? Is Will safe?’

‘safe, aye, why not? You have no business here.

Go home now, I can’t do with you here’

“Have you seen Will? She asked”

‘Go home – Sampson, just take Miss Lois home – now !’

“You don’t really know where he is-father?”⁶

Her anxiety for Will is genuine. The story teller could have created a genuine tension later on. But the story becomes sentimental. Lois is swept off by her parents suffering and without any proper justification starts hating her lover.

In the middle of the story where Lois is taking breakfast with her father, it seems as if the story – teller will build up the tension in the story. When the father suspects Will, Lois at once protests, “Father”, Broke in Lois, “Why do you talk like that?” why do you talk as if Will had done it? She ended Suddenly. “⁷ It was expected that when she will meet Will Selby she will ask him all about the incident and try to know how much truth the rumour bears. But when she meets him she says.” I believe everybody thinks you set the place on fire”, Unevenness of their kind is not exceptional among the earlier works of great masters and in this Lawrence is no exception.

The Fifth Story “Odour of Chrysanthemums” opens with a small locomotive engine changing its way along the rails. It was first published in English Review in June, 1911. H.T. Moore writes that the young Lawncene and his sisters often visited their three aunts who lived in Brinkley. One of those aunts, Aunt Polly was the widow of his Father’s brother James and remarries some years after James Lawrence had been killed in a mining accident. According to Moore, “Years later Lawrence used this aunt as the leading character in the story” Odour of Chaysanthemums.”⁸

The story has an austere simplicity and also shows the young writer experimenting with tradition at tragic form. The proud woman Eligabeth Bates, who is the central character is emotionally estranged from her collier husband. At the end of the day she waits with her two children for her husband to return from the pit. She is torn by the anxiety for the unusual delay and suspicion that he might have been detained in pub. Her anger changes into fear as he gets more and late In fact, the husband has been killed in a mine accident. The climax of the story- the bringing in of the collier’s body, the washing of corpse by the collier’s mother and his wife, are the most moving scenes in Lawerence’s fiction.

The opening of the story is remarkable for Lawerense’s descriptive genius : “The small locomotive engine no.4 came clanking stumbling down from station with seven full wagons. It appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed but the colt that is startled form among the gorse which still flickered indistinctly in the raw afternoon, out distanced it in a canter.

A woman walking up the railway line to Underwood held her basket aside and watched the foot plate of the engine advancing. The truck thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement, as she stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black wagons and the hedge : then they curved away towards the coppice where the withered oak leaves dropped noiselessly. While the birds pulling at the scarlet hips beside the track, made off into the dusk that had already crept into the spinney. In the open, the smoke from the engine sank and cleaved to the rough grass. The fields were dreary and forsaken and in the marshy strip that led to the whimsy, a reedy pit pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the Alders to roost in tarred fowl house. The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red scores licking its ashy side in the afternoon's stagnant light.

Really, the opening paragraph of the story is a brilliant, closely written descriptive set piece, carefully designed to establish the tone and mood of the story to put the reader immediately into the vortex of its imaginary world. Julian Moynahan aptly observes. "The principal of composition here is simple contrast, the whole suffused like the last stanza of Keats' "Ode to Autumn" in an atmosphere of diminishment and decline. We see colt against locomotive engine, Jolting wagons against flying birds, pit banks against pond, black headstock against the dying light of an autumnal afternoon sky; we hear the clanking, Jolting, spasmodic sounds of machinery against evening quiet, we sense a contract between and a natural setting, embodying a tension between the necessity of human survival which called the industrial system into existence and the instinct of all living things to maintain themselves freely in being are disturbed by one anomalous feature. 'F.R. Leavis writes. "The story shows Lawrence as the portrayer of the life he knew earlier that of the miner's home"

The sixth story "The Shades of Spring" was first published in the forum March 1913 under the title "The Soiled Rose." The protagonist John Addeley Syson like his predecessors has gone away to London. Recently married, he returns for a visit in the spring to the country of his past. He heads through the wood, taking the shortcut to the Willey water farm, the house of Hilda Miller ship, his abandoned sweetheart. The shortcut is not a public way and Syson's path is blocked by a handsome young gamekeeper Arthur Pilbeam. Pilbeam announces that he is courting Hilda and criticises Syson for continuing to correspond with her and to send her poetry book.

Unlike in "A Modern Lover," the road is not heavy with mud and is in not labour to move along. The countryside is still unchanged for Syson. He is moving mechanically. He is already married and has no fear facing his abandoned sweetheart. When he reaches the farmhouse womanly Hilda fascinates him. He feels himself constrained in her presence. He is uneasy before her. Although, Hilda has opted for the second best, a longing for the sweet past still exists. We see both tears and sunshine in her eyes- "their eyes met. He saw in the beautiful grey and black of her glance, tears and strange light, and at the back of all, calm acceptance of herself and triumph over him." ¹¹

Hilda takes him for a walk demonstrating how much her own she has made the countryside she and Syson had shared. Then she reveals that the keeper had become her lover on the night. Hilda is confident.

She had simply found what she was “ always looking for.” Moreover man does not matter so much for her. For Hilda it is herself that matters. Perhaps the story-teller wants to say that woman, the torch-bearer of civilization, is more obliged to strive after the ideal than man.

Hilda is free and far from disappointment. She loves the game-keeper. She blames Syson for always making her not be herself. They arrive at the keeper's hut, pheasant coops strewn before it, animal furs and carpenter's tool inside. The hut, in fact, is the first version of the hut where Mellere makes love to Constance Chatterely. They quarrel about their past. She disapproves of what he has become. Syson says that he has distinguished himself in order to make her happier. When the keeper enters into the hut Syson leaves the place stunned by Hilda's revelation Syson instead of going straight to the road lies down on a hillside surrounded by flowers and meditates. Syson realizes that his mistake was to violate Hilda's 'separate beings'. He feels what strangers they have been: “He was startled to see his young love, his nun, his Botticelli angel, so revealed. It was he who had been the fool. He and she were more separate than any two strangers could be. She only wanted to keep up a correspondence with him and he, of course. She only wanted it kept up so that he could write to her like Dante to some Beatrice who had never existed save in the man's own brain.”¹² The story reveals Hilda capable of discovering her physical fulfillment in Pilbeam. Even when she defers marriage with him, the postponement is not due to any fear or uncertainty but because the assurance exists in the memory of their achieved physical fulfillment. Hilda's earthiness and her sense of realism are her chief strength. Although Cyril has imagined her as a Botticelli angel and a nun, she stands vindicated in her physical fulfillment with the gamekeeper. Cyril in his correspondence might – have been a Dante to his Beatrice. The actual Beatrice in this case has stepped out of the vicious circle of the platonic love and her kissing the poison away from bee sting on Polbeam's arm is a symbol of declaration of sexual fulfillment. The objectivity which Lawrence has not been able to achieve in the portrait of Mariam as a violated nun is beautifully effaced through the discomfiture of Cyril Mersham and the assertion of Hilda's earthy womanliness. The difference between the man who suffers and the artist who creates has been clearly established in this story.

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