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MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN D.H.LAWRENCE'S *WOMEN IN LOVE*

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Abstract:

D.H. Lawrence deals with various themes in his novels. Most of these themes recur in every book of his, but the most recurrent one is the man-woman relationship. This male-female relationship is considered the pivot of his philosophy which everything else is based on or arranged around. He is deeply concerned with theorizing and dramatizing his vision of this relationship all his life in all his novels and almost all his writings. Thus, we always see his characters weave complicated relationships and are entangled in baffling situations. In addition to this most dominant theme, there are also several other themes which recur in his novels; such as the respect of individuality and the otherness , sex , class distinctions , love and hate , life and death , and the conflict between passion and will , beween instinct and mind , and between the natural world and the industrial world. Lawrence, in his novels, attacked savagely the hypocrisies and false values of civilization, the desecration of the countryside, the artificialities of intellectual modes and the cynicism of the business world.

Keywords: *Man-Woman Relationship, Love, Marriage, etc.*

D.H. Lawrence states:

> The great relation, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary. And the relation between man and woman will change forever, and will forever be the new central clue to human life. It is the relation itself which is the quick and the central clue to life, not the man nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship, as a contingency (Lydia, 77).

The theme of the man-woman relationship was and still is one of the most popular themes that occupied the novelists of all ages. Yet what distinguishes it in the hands of Lawrence from the others is his treatment of this issue in a new distinctive way that gave it a new life. He deals with this kind of relationship more deeply and frankly than any other novelist of his time. That is why he was ahead of

his time and why he was attacked and was charged with obscenity. His novels, as a result, were banned in his life time for being shockingly sexual and offensive of the community. He is concerned with establishing a new relationship between man and woman that depends on respect of the other's individuality. This newness and novelty of Lawrence caused his severe criticism. Lawrence justifies his views and says:

> A new relation, a new relatedness hurts somewhat in the attaining; and will always hurt. So life will always hurt. Because real voluptuousness lies in re-acting old relationships, and at the best, getting an alcoholic sort of pleasure out of it, slightly depraving (Hazel, 59).

Lawrence says:

> This is, however, the third thing, which is neither sacrifice nor fight to death: when each seeks only the true relatedness to the other. Each must be true to himself, herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself (Hazel, 62).

Lawrence deplores and criticizes the possessiveness in man-woman relationship. The desire for possessiveness is generally found in woman, though it may also be found in men. Lawrence believes that the civilized woman is a great threat to man. She tries to bully and dominate him depriving him of his individuality and masculinity. He sees man as the victim in the process of creation and destruction and recreation, as man is the instrument of creation , but he is to be devitalized when he has served his immediate end. He denounces the possessive woman as she robs man of his instinctive life:

> In Lawrence's view the conflict between man and woman arises from the civilized woman's having become the desperate antagonist of man , drawing from him his greatest possession-his manhood , his masculinity-and feminizing him and bringing him under the control of her will (Lall,43).

This theme of male-female relationship is the central theme discussed in his great novel *Women in Love*, with special reference to marriage. Lawrence told Jessie Chambers that:

> The usual plan is to take two couples and develop their relationship. Most of George Eliot's are on that plan. Anyhow I do not want a plot. I should be bored with it. I shall try two couples for a start (Huxley, 221).

The basic idea of the novel is the man-woman relationship between four young people-Ursula Brangwen and her sister Gudrun Brangwen, and Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich. Ursula and Birkin are capable of achieving a healthy relationship, while Gudrun and Gerald are doomed to failure. The novel is mainly occupied with working out of Lawrence's favorite formula of two couples. Birkin-Ursula relationship is represented as the contrast of Gerald-Gudrun relationship; the former is generally regarded as positive, while the latter is treated as negative, the former is an example of the sure success while the latter is the complete failure. The two stories offer a contrast of attitudes-hope against despair, and struggle against surrender. In addition to these two pairs of relations, there are other subsidiary relations such as the Birkin-Hermione, Gerald-Minette, and Gudrun-Loerke relationships. Moreover, there is a man-man relationship that is Birkin-Gerald, which is also dealt with in the novel.

Gerald says that between me and a woman, the social question does not enter. It is my own affair". But the social question does enter, and Gerald's relations with women are, in fact, conditioned by his mechanistic solution of that question. Women serve as safety valves against the perfection of the machine he has created. They provide him with his most satisfactory relief from the frightening sense of his own nullity. His unacknowledged desire to engage in the reductive process represented by

the African wood-carving is the disintegrative counterpart of that ‘mystery of ice-destructive knowledge’ which he completes in the mines. It is no accident that Gudrun sees him emerging from the mud like the water-plants which she is sketching. Moreover, Gerald seeks to satisfy in women that passion for destruction which underlies his administration of the mines. For instance, he seizes on a woman like Minette as a victim and takes pleasure in the feeling that he will be able to ‘destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge’.

The connection between Gerald's attitude as a man in the man's world, and as a lover is conveyed to us not only explicitly and by direct statement but also indirectly by symbolic means. The latter technique is at work in the three animal scenes, pertaining to the mare, the wild cattle, and the rabbit. The scene with the mare symbolically represents Gerald's desire to dominate over Gudrun, and to bend her to his will. Gudrun's reaction to Gerald's treatment of the mare throws much light on the development of her relationship with him. His savagery he arouses in her is acutely desirable to her inner consciousness. The result is that she is prepared to offer herself to him as a victim but not only as a victim.

The violence which is hidden in Gudrun comes to the surface when she, after dancing voluptuously in front of the wild bullocks, becomes aggressive and drives them away. Here she matches her will against that of the bullocks, and tests her power. Her victory over bullocks releases her desire for violence against Gerald, and she suddenly strikes him on the face with the back of her hand. He does not feel angry with her but tells her that he loves her. In the scene with the rabbit, Gerald and Gudrun are ‘implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries’. They both receive bruises and wounds. ‘This is their bond of pledge’, says a critic, to that future violent ripping at each other's souls which ends in Gerald's death.

Lawrence's direct treatment of the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun adds to this indirect or symbolic treatment. The description of the sexual intercourse in the chapter ‘Death and Love’ considerably expands the meaning of their implication with each other. It exposes the conflicts of desires which confound their relationship. Firstly, there is the conflict between Gudrun's desire for victimization and for dominance. In this particular chapter she submits in ‘an ecstasy of subjection’ to Gerald's need of her. He has stolen into her house in the middle of the night, and she feels powerless to oppose his purpose. But she soon resents the burden of his beauty which can ‘compel her and subjugate her’. It is only a matter of time before she forms the deep resolve to combat him, hardening herself with strength in the knowledge that ‘one of them must triumph over the other’. Secondly, the description of the sexual intercourse here shows that Gerald's will to dominate Gudrun conflicts with a child-like tendency to be utterly dependent on her. He clings to her ‘like a child at the breast.’ Worshipping her as the ‘mother and substance of all life’, he looks upon her as a Magna Mater figure. It is true that he is under considerable strain (as a result of his father's death) when he goes to her on this occasion, but his dependence on her life or by giving up his own that he can ultimately free himself. This dependence is obviously the result of his inability to achieve a self of his own. It is because he does not believe in his own single self that he is forced to seek reinforcement from her. The failure of self-vitiates his love for Gudrun.

The third conflict is between Gudrun's desire for mindless submission to Gerald and the compulsive necessity she feels for knowledge. Although she responds to his treatment of the mare with a numbed mind, she reaches up, when she kisses him under the bridge, ‘like Eve reaching to the apples on the tree of knowledge’, and she wants to touch him till she has "strained him into her knowledge". She feels that ‘if she could have the precious knowledge of him, she would be filled, and nothing could deprive her of this’. That it is forbidden fruit she reaches for is subsequently initiated by her being ‘destroyed into perfect consciousness’ while Gerald lies asleep beside her. She is also ‘destroyed’, of course, because it is into her that he pours "all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death" as he seizes at life in her. But she too is used to destructiveness. She is ‘driven up against his perfect sleeping motion like a knife white-hot on a grind-stone’. The ultimate paradox of their relationship is that life for the one means death for the other. Their mutually hostile purpose inevitably carries them towards catastrophe.

When Gudrun eventually denies Gerald, she tells him that their relationship has been a failure, he can think only of the "perfect voluptuous finality" of killing her. The attack, when it comes, is the culminating act of violence in the novel. The destructiveness which leads to the attack on Gudrun cannot be separated from that which underlies Gerald's work in the mines. Gudrun's struggling, as he

tightens his grip on her throat, is viewed by him as "her reciprocal lustful passion in his embrace". But Gerald's destructive demon is inherently self-destructive. In revulsion of contempt and disgust he releases Gudrun before he has strangled her, and wanders off to die in the cul de sac of snow.

Birkin-Ursula Relationship:

In a discussion with Ursula, Birkin emphasizes the corruption and deadness of the Sodom-world that he sees where people are mere growths on a dead tree. What he prefers is 'grass and hares and adders, and the unseen hosts, actual angels that go about freely when a dirty humanity doesn't interrupt them – and good pure-tissued demons: very nice.' However, Ursula insists that man and the present state of affairs will not disappear, and points out the inadequacy of his vision. The debate concludes with the image of Birkin's natural daisies and Ursula's romantic paper-boat dancing on the water.

The exposition of Birkin's theories continues in the next two chapters. He uses the analogy of the horses to suggest that women have two wills, one for independence and one for submission – 'the last, perhaps highest, love-impulse: resign your will to the higher being.Where the higher being is less than divine, this impulse seems suspect, even perhaps masochistic. Certainly it is not surprising that, after having seen Gerald on his mare, Ursula disagrees vigorously. Birkin then tries to dismiss the merely human and conscious emotion of love in favour of the pre-conscious forces, and a non-merging confrontation of their ultimate selves to achieve polarized relationship - a pure balance of two beings as the stars balance each other". Ursula firmly interprets his rather apprehensive denial of love as merely an indirect and pretentious avowal of love. Frustrated by her lack of response, Birkin again attempts allegory, interpreting the cat Mino's cuffing of its mate as an illustration of the stability brought about by male dominance. (he here slides from the stability of equilibrium to that of domination.) Ursula naturally shouts him down, and he retreats to his earlier image of 'two single equal stars balanced in conjunction'. Birkin makes a last attack on some can't talk of Ursula's about love, before she wins the battle, forcing him to submit to love, to her, and her "strange golden-lighted eyes, very tender, but with a curious devilish look lurking underneath". A yellow light in the eyes is frequently associated in Lawrence with self-assertive voluptuous sensuality. For Birkin, beyond such sensuous love there is male superiority, or at least equality, but within it there is insecurity, and the fear of a tendency to submit to the Magna Mater.

In speaking of the two rivers of existence, the silver river of life and the black river of dissolution and corruption, Birkin insists that the latter is 'our real reality'; 'it is the process of creative destruction. Aphrodite, the goddess of a purely erotic, sexual-religious symbols, and natural products of decay, like the marsh-flowers. Ursula says that he only wants to know death, but this is only a half-truth, as Birkin (as well as Lawrence himself) asserts that decay and death are part of the human condition, and need to be accepted for full existence. So, if the silver river may be interpreted as the seminal flow, and the dark river as the excremental, it means that Ursula and the conventional idealists accepted only normal sexuality while Birkin demands the acceptance of the entire bodily process, particularly perhaps the excremental, wherein lies the 'real reality.'. Where the silver river is conventional morality, Birkin insists that what is conventionally regarded as morally corrupt is equally, and even pre-eminently, part of man's nature, not to be suppressed, but accepted, if that nature is to be fulfilled.

The next episode, of the lanterns lit for Ursula and Gudrun, is ominously allegorical. Ursula receives a blue lantern showing a flight of storks, presenting the element of air, and then a lantern of flamy ruddiness, where the element of fire seems to unite water and air: she is capable of resolving opposing elements. The blue light makes Birkin's face look 'demoniacal'. Ursula, dim and veiled, looms over him, like some priestess or goddess: both are charged with supernatural quality.

The drowning accident in the same chapter 'Water-Party' produces a re-birth only in Birkin. Observing that it was the girl who pulled the young man to his death, and fascinated by the 'crushing boom' of the inhuman dark waters, he yearns for death, or a love like death, from which the individual may be re-born. Ursula, however, still insists on the individualistic 'hard flame of passionate desire', keeping him in the world of ordinary sexuality and life, though this is not what he really wants.

After their exciting though ultimately frustrating passion, comes the reaction. Ursula experiences exhaustion, a weariness of life. Birkin revolts against her demand for love, 'the horrible privacy of domestic and connubial satisfaction', where male individuality is smothered by feminine

possessiveness: 'he wanted sex to revert to the level of other appetites, to be regarded as a functional process, not as a fulfillment". He wants a further conjunction, where men have being a women have being, two pure beings each constituting the freedom of the other, “balancing each other like two poles of one force, like two angels, or two demons”. Then he sees himself suddenly confronted with another problem – the problem of love and eternal conjunction between two men. This leads to his suggestion to Gerald of a blood-brotherhood (which may be regarded as an equivalent of sexual union). Gerald declines the relationship.

The chapter ‘Moony’ begins with Ursula in a state of withdrawal from life. She feels the moon with its white and "deathly" smile of sterile isolation watching her, and she attempts to escape, turning to the shadowy pond, when she sees Birkin stoning the moon's reflection. He is speaking to himself, and refers to the moon as Cybele. Some commentators have interpreted this as an attack of woman. In addition to the attack on woman, however, this is also an attack on the moon-principle of self-contained, sterile isolation and self-consciousness, qualities that Lawrence regards as feminine, and which Birkin is fighting in himself. Throwing dead husks of flowers (representing his own lifelessness) on the water, he says, ‘You can't go away. There is no way. You only withdraw upon yourself.The account of the stoning of the moon's image reveals it as an act of creative violence. This is an act which destroys a perfect silliness to create the vitality of the active interchange between light and dark, male and female that produces momentary peace.

After this, Ursula and Birkin attempt reconciliation, but her ‘frightened apprehensive self-insistence’ prevents it from being more than a truce. Birkin reacts by turning again to the ‘purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge’ embodied in Holliday’s West-African statuette. Birkin contemplates two modes of being: the north-European 'white' process, as seen in Gerald, of 'ice-destructive knowledge', where the sensual being is sublimate; and the African process of submersion in dark sensuality, that destroys 'humanity' as he has known it. Separation and merging, sublimation and indulgence, seem equally unacceptable, so that Birkin hopes irrationally for a paradisal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union…proud, individual singleness'. In this spirit he goes to propose to Ursula and is promptly rejected. The rejection is partly due to her father's bullying that drives her back to the moon spirit, 'radiant' in 'perfect hostility'. This is followed by an inverted relationship on Ursula's part with Gudrun, achieving an almost obscene intimacy. When she turns back to Birkin, she transfers this feeling to him: 'she was not at all sure that it was this mutual unison in separateness that she wanted. She wanted unspeakable intimacies. She wanted to have him, utterly, final to have him as her own, oh, so unspeakably, in intimacy'. So the spirit of withdrawal from other life, in which she began the chapter, has only modulated to the desire for devouring possession of other life; the dark under-world remains unrecognized.

A perverse, reductive form of this appears in Birkin's consequent wrestling-match with Gerald that is like a sexual encounter. It is dissolution of being in violence, ‘experience all in one sort, mystically’, sensual like the ‘African’ knowledge in corruption that Birkin had feared. This is the 'ecstasy of reduction' of Birkin's letter to Holiday, here 'fulfilled', and so enabling transcendence; having been through this experience, Birkin can now return to Ursula, this time successfully.

After reacting against Birkin, Ursula joins with Hermione in criticizing him, until she realizes how wrong they are, and what Birkin is really after: ‘He wanted a woman to take something from him, to give herself up so much that she could take the last realities, the last facts, the last physical facts, physical and un-bearable'. This is still somewhat vaguely expressed. The root and fountain here is the excremental flow of the black river the 'quick of death', where death and life are the same. The 'demon exults in acceptance of the organic, living body of darkness, that promises fuller life. To 'take' implies not only recognition, but also a sexual possession.

Ursula makes one last violent denunciation of his ‘perversity’, particularly as associated with Hermione, where sensuality was solely perverse. Having purged the sensual body of that unnaturalness, she is ready to accept him, to pluck the jewel of individual being from the muddy flux. By accepting the extremes of experience, especially that usually denied, the greatest ‘access of being’ is attained.

With the full acceptance of the body and of desire, they have achieved liberty, and a new commitment to each other. They consider marrying and settling down, and even get as a far as buying a chair, before deciding that a fixed home is an undue restraint. They hand over the chair to another

young couple at the market, whose appearance suggests very strongly that they are parodies of Frieda and Lawrence. The woman is the detested Magna Mater, dominating the man. He, on the other hand, 'was a still, mindless creature, hardly a man at all, a creature…She had got his manhood, but Lord, what did he care! He had strange furtive pride and slinking singleness'. The last words here may be contrasted with Birkin's about 'proud, individual singleness'. This is the marriage that Birkin hates, where the sensual male is subordinated into perverse resentment by the pressure of the woman and society. But Birkin's marriage will be different – so long as he can run away abroad, out of society.

Hermione-Birkin Relationship:

Hermione lives for and through the mind, and she makes a parade of the delights of knowledge: 'To me', she says, 'the pleasure of knowing is so great, so wonderful-nothing has meant so much to me in all life, as certain knowledge'. But she also asserts that 'the mind is death' and that 'it destroys all our spontaneity, all our instincts'. This means that she is an equivocator. What lies behind her equivocation is a perverted lust, as Birkin violently tells her: 'You want to clutch things and have them in your power….And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to know'. In other words, Hermione stands for indulgence in what Lawrence elsewhere calls a 'sensational gratification within the mind', and the opening description of her makes us realize what she exactly is.

There is something 'macabre' about Hermione's appearance, and people are repelled by her even though they are impressed, because she moves as though she tacitly disowns her body: hence her slow reluctance and her strange unwilling motion as she drifts forward with a peculiar fixity of the hips. Her face is long, and it is balanced by the heavy weight of her hair and by the enormous hat she wears. She is a prey to a process of 'disintegration and dissolution' which is the reverse of that represented by the African statue but which is as deadly in its effects. Some suggestion of the deadlines is implied by the 'mass of thoughts' which 'coil' in the darkness within her; it is directly illustrated by the nature of her relationship with Birkin.

Hermione's 'deficiency of being' is shown by the 'terrible void' within her, and it is to Birkin that she turns to fill the void, 'to close up this deficiency'. Believing that she herself is the central touchstone of truth, she thinks that she needs only Birkin and his high knowledge in conjunction with her to be complete. But he, who is trying to leave her after having been her lover for several years, relentlessly forces her to become aware of the bottomless pit of her insufficiency. Eventually she succumbs to her inadequacy.

Hermione has an obsession 'to know all'. When she compels Birkin to explain what knowledge he gets from copying a Chinese drawing of geese, he forces her 'to admit to herself an awareness of unknown modes of being', and to recognize that 'the reality of life is something she can have no command over and cannot take into her possession'. As a result, she feels herself for the moment nothing but the play of chaotic forces that the 'mental consciousness' had excluded, but her collapse is described in terms which suggest something larger than a personal failure.

The simile of the tomb-influences suggests that Hermione is suddenly overwhelmed by the buried life within her. She is simultaneously 'like a ghost' and 'like a corpse'. Confronted by the inadequacy of what she lives by, she has no living centre from which to act; she is 'decentralized'. The words 'dissolution' and 'corruption' (in the passage quoted above) have the same force as in the context of Birkin's reflections on the African statue. Forced by Birkin, Hermione experiences a mystical sense of her own 'disintegration'. And just as the African carvings represent the highest pitch of a mindless civilization, the culture of an 'ultimate physical consciousness', Hermione's breakdown is anticipatory of the end of a culture of ultimate mental consciousness which is represented by Breadalby.

Hermione represents the last stage of social development, the human being becomes mechanical. She exemplifies a stage which is putrescent. This is confirmed by a passage which endorses her own dictum that 'mind is death'.

One question that arises is whether the tree referred to in this passage is likely to be violently uprooted or it is to die by natural process. A conversation at the Crich wedding suggests the answer. Hermione's readiness to kill for a hat is paralled by her actual attempt to murder Birkin. Birkin, so to speak, is continually snatching her hat off her head. Her murderous attack on Birkin is a logical

extension of her deep desire to kill, of which the conversation at the wedding first gives as intimation. Her attack also suggests the inherent destructiveness of the world in which she lives. The attack is a physical expression of the urge which animates the talk at Breadalby, the talk that is 'like a rattle of small artillery'. It is also, as her voluptuous ecstasy indicates, the satisfaction of a perverse lust, which is the counterpart of her lust 'to know'. The blow is an evidence of her ultimate disbelief in the inner life (a 'trick') and in the spiritual world (an 'affectation'). And, indeed, it is through a curious combination of the flesh and the devil, if not also of Mammon, that Hermione makes contact with reality.

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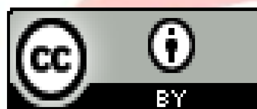

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