

Use of Symbolism in *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract: Symbolism destabilizes time frame of a narrative, reverses its sequential flow and opens up the world unknown, unlimited in front of the reader. D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* is a dense network of symbols that suggests the novel's world as infinitely incomprehensible, which renews itself in each reading. The present study undertakes to investigate symbolism's destabilizing the linearity of the novel.

Keywords: Lawrentian male-female relationship, social constructs, visual symbols.

The novel opens with the picture of mines and mine workers, who are “burrowing down like ants into the earth, making queer mounds and little black places among the corn-fields and meadows” (3). In his first meeting with Gertrude Coppard, Walter Morel states the miner's life: “You live like th' mice, an' you pop out at night to see what's going on” (11). The parallel brings the contrast of light and darkness with recurring images of underworld, darkness, mole, culture, civilization, and lady. The reader looks at Morel with a sense of lowliness and detachment, and at Coppard with nobility, intellectual/spiritual qualities. Then he learns that Walter Morel marries Gertrude Coppard, a girl of higher class, of education and social prestige, and takes her to his mine world. The way he comes across this girl, and “melts” in front of her reminds the reader of the marriage of light and darkness, the Pluto/Persephone myth. When the two characters are observed with the subsequent development of the story the mine image configures with significance of symbol- that the pits are not just the habitation of colliers, but are replaced by the under world of Pluto, from which dark hole Walter Morel suddenly emerges out to the world of light to see the wonderful, uncommon “lady-like” Persephone in play with her mates. Now the world of *Sons and Lovers* is embedded with another world, and as the new world of the myth is unfolded in front of the reader, the linearity of the narrative is lost sight of, and significance holds new ground; so also its spatio-temporal dimensions. Gertrude is happy for six months at the wonder and unfamiliarity, then her knowledge becomes elusive, she desperately pines for escape into the world of light. “I should be only too glad. I should laugh, laugh, my lord, if I could get away from you”, she replied” (22). If it is not possible in her own life to return physically, then she injects her spirit into her children to give up the “commonness” of the miner in order to reach the middle class status, to be respected citizens- educated and cultured. This strife on the part of Mrs. Morel depicts the whole story of the novel. If the reader is not aware of the parallel of Pluto/Persephone, he is still struck by the drama of attraction-repulsion of Lawrentian male-female relationship, how they are united as if by the magnetic force of instinct in

a moment and fall out in fierce fighting in another. Replacement of one idea by another, or association of ideas on the basis of similarity is the function of a metaphor or symbol. A cross may symbolize Christianity in one context, and a road intersection in another, but these uses are limited and easily decodable, whereas literary symbols are not easily decoded that tend towards a rich plurality, even ambiguity of meaning. Similarity of a metaphor/simile consists of likening – A to B, while a literary symbol is a B that suggests A, or a number of correlatives of A (David Lodge 139). If a symbol is different from a metaphor by its recurrence, it also varies from an allegory so far as it suggests one idea by another without being particular or definite. Lawrence, however, doesn't define the object or incident before he uses it as symbol, which adventurous step generally provides a sensuous and realistic detail of the scene that helps the reader to easily perceive the symbolic significance. In relation to myth, symbol too is very indefinite and general, for myth traces the original prototype of the genesis and can't be invented; it stands for characters, events, initiated in the sacred time and are imitated down the generations, like celebration of festivals, rituals. In this sense, symbol is both myth and history; it stands for mental concepts as well as historical events. Thus, figures like metaphor, allegory, myth, and symbol are all images that evoke different pictures, physical or conceptual. The delicate difference between these figures is often overlapping, which can't be reduced to mathematical formula. They depend more on perceptive faculty of the reader than on objectively definable categories. The point that this discussion underlines is how the image takes the reader beyond the presented world of narrative to the imaginative world, the leap that obliterates the temporal frame work of the narrative for multi-texts. The image of flooded Trent corresponds the meeting of Paul and Clara, its symbolic significance comes to one's notice in recurrence. The narrative presents:

The Trent was very full. It swept silent and insidious under the bridge, travelling in a soft body. There had been a great deal of rain. On the river levels were flat gleams of flood water. The sky was grey, with glisten of silver here and there....The river slide by in a body, utterly silent and swift intertwining among itself like some subtle, complex creature....Sometimes there below they caught glimpses of the full, soft sliding Trent, and of water meadows dotted with small cattle....The far-below water-meadows were very green. He and she stood leaning against one another, silent, afraid, their bodies touching all along. There came a quick gurgle from the river below. (267-68)

The description presents more than the fertility symbol and consummation of Paul and Clara. The words/phrases- “full, soft body,” rain, green meadows, “slide by in a body”, swift, gurgle, insidious – are suggestive of a blind force and natural cycles that connect cosmic movement with human behaviour. The images of sexual consummation and fertility are different forms of the universal expressive spirit:

As a rule, when he started love making, the emotion was strong enough to carry with it every thing-reason, soul, blood-in a great sweep, like the Trent carries bodily its black swirls and inter-twinings

noiselessly. Gradually the little criticisms, the little sensations, were lost; thought also went, everything borne along in one flood. He became not a man with a mind, but a great instinct. (316)

The river by which bank they meet is not only a complement of adverb in the text, but an identification and content of something else. This relationship replaces one figure for another and shows us what has not been said in verbal signs. This metonymic digression and metaphoric association seem to be the very root of symbolism. "If a woman were to grab up a bottle of Grade A and say to her husband 'Get away from me or I'll hit you with the milk' that would be a thing contained for the container" (Campbell 116). This is a metonymical inversion of Miss Groby's student Thurber, and the whole class laughs. The figure recalls Antonio's funeral speech – "Lend me your ears". Lawrence shifts the narrative frame of the novel from social container to the things contained. The realistic tradition has focused on the container to which individuals must accommodate themselves. Campbell draws our notice to the point that for Lawrence the social institutions, constructs, provide inadequate tools to measure the source of characters' impulses and instincts (116-17). Roman Jakobson recognizes the metaphoric process of literary schools of romanticism and symbolism as the real source of metonymy. He states that the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the settings in time and space ("Two Aspects of..." 124). If Thurber parodies Miss Groby, it is not just a joke, but it states something deeper beyond our notice. The narrative with the use of Flooded Trent digresses from the verbal signs to the revelation of new world. The metonymic digression further comes to our knowledge in the episode of Paul-Miriam that covers second half of the novel. From the very beginning of their relationship the reader understands that the girl is romantic, otherworldly, and abnormal and in her reflection, "the queen in swine girl". Regarding her love she articulates in prayer: "But, Lord, if it is Thy will that I should love him, make me love him-as Christ would, who died for the souls of men...because he is Thy son'...then she fell into that rapture of self sacrifice, identifying herself with a God who was sacrificed" (*SL* 150-51). Her intention and end are well defined with the images of sacrifice, guardian angel, hope, suffering, nun, nunnery, paradisaal entry. The irony of the situation compels the reader to perceive the symbolic significance. During the visit to Hemlock Stone the narrative presents: "A feeling of stillness, almost of ecstasy, came over her. It felt almost as if she were alone with him in this garden" (145). May it be Willy Farm, or Hemlock Stone, or the sea beach, the garden metaphor is configured to the Paradise. In the next development, seeing Paul interested in things of lesser value she is hurt: "She believed that there were in him desires for higher things and desires for lower and that the desire for the higher would conquer" (199). Then she puts Paul to test with another woman Clara Dawes. As his intimacy with Clara develops the narrative presents Paul and Clara:

He took her by the arm, held her facing him, holding her eyes with him. Something fretted him, 'Not sinners, are we?' he, said with an uneasy little frown. 'No', she replied. He kissed her, laughing. 'You like your little bit of guiltiness, I believe', he said. 'I believe Eve enjoyed it, when she went cowering out of Paradise'. (272- 73)

Paradisaal entry and Paradise lost are two poles of Miriam and Clara between which is put Paul. His steep swing towards Clara suggests Paul's choice and use of free will. The choice to remain human compels Paul to reject Paradise and otherworldly interest of Miriam. He is to quit Paradise and desire human follies, guilt that Clara offers. The narrative of the novel describes the relationship between Paul, Miriam, and Clara, but symbolism used reveals another world, the narrative of the *Bible*, God's creation, the guardian angels set to protect Adam and Eve. The complexity of the temporal presentation and opening onto the atemporal draws attention to the real human world where Miriam desperately tries to be united with Paul ; the biblical world where Adam and Eve had their immortality, and also the fall that states exercise of choice and free will. This complexity and multi-level association of the narrative figures are the result of symbolism and imagery. Towards the closing part "Derelict" the speech of Miriam echoes the voice of the withdrawing guardian angel, the last effort to save Paul being defeated: "Suddenly she saw again his lack of religion, his restless instability. He would destroy himself like a perverse child" (364).

Lawrence's use of symbolism with myth transforms the narrative into a field where not only meaning within the meaning but also meaning against meaning clash and collide. The text becomes a textile. Within the given text infinite sub-texts are embedded, the intertexts of the text. While the Bloomsbury group aims at achieving the purpose of Lawrence with innovative structural techniques, the latter tends to turn down intentional meaning and stable author God more articulatively, being a forerunner of the post-modern, who subverts the linearity of the text and highlights that meaning is a construct, involving spatio-temporal dimensions. Symbols, by nature, are anti-narrative and drive the reader to instantaneous perception of their multi-texts. General significance of the work corresponds to the sum of particular details, but when the significance is caught, the particular incidents seem to be ignored. Symbol does that in order to foreground the significance, which release arrests the passage of time. Joseph Frank observes from his study of Troy, Wilson Knight, Clive Bell, Herbert Read, Worringer, T. E. Hulme, and Edwin Muir that symbol, like image, performs the function of picture to spread time in space ("Foreword to *SFN*" 8-9).

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