



Research Paper

Ecology, Space and Time in the works of D H Lawrence

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ABSTRACT: It is innate human nature to rely on works of art that contain aspects that one can effortlessly relate to, particularly when the reader or viewer is in an unexpected battle with the inner self. With the world currently witnessing a pandemic, the aftermath of which are expected to last throughout the initial years of the next decade, people across the globe are turning either to self-help books or to absurdist literature, seeking a stronger foundation for their individual beliefs. Yet, it can be safely stated that there is no better time than the present to read or re-visit the works of D H Lawrence, whose ideologies, though quite controversial, can offer deeper insights into human relationships, ways of nature and the beauty of life itself, thus providing some solace during the global pandemic. The attempt here is to analyze the major works of Lawrence and examine his views on some of the issues and debates that are key to current discussions in humanities such as Ecocriticism and Spatial Studies

KEYWORDS: D H Lawrence, Ecocriticism, Spatial Studies

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I. INTRODUCTION

A writer of extremities, a writer whose works, according to critics bordered on sexism, racism and misogyny, a writer whose novels were banned from being published in several countries; it is quite natural for one to wonder the relevance and necessity of reading the works of Lawrence, one of the most divisive and provocative figures of the modernist era. Often referred to by his contemporaries as a ‘pornographer’ who wasted his talents, Lawrence believed in writing works that were stark, immediate and answered the extremities of the inner force. The highly rebellious, profoundly polemic writer with strong radical views alienated nearly everyone in his life and survived under a cloud of suspicion, having embraced revolutionary anti-war politics during the First World War and an obsessive focus on writing about sex in his novel. However, what Lawrence left behind was not just a mere collection of novels and poems with explicit content, rather, they were products of his appalling yet intriguing ideologies and philosophies, which he believed sprung from blood knowledge instead of mental knowledge. Perhaps, there was no other writer who wrote as instinctively and impulsively as Lawrence, for he gave little or no attention to editing his works as he wrote it, and instead penned down the spontaneous overflow of his thoughts and emotions, which makes it less of a surprise that the writer’s first major novel *Sons and Lovers* had to be rewritten and revised three times. Having travelled the world widely to shake off his stupor, the places that he went to, the people he got acquainted with and the experiences he gained shaped the profound ideas and notions of the writer, which formed the foundation for his major works. In spite of the censure he has been subjected to, the writer remains an influential figure in literary studies, for as F R Leavis sums it up: “Lawrence's genius is that of a supremely great novelist- which is to say that his art is thought and his thought art” (64).

II. ECOCRITICISM

A surge in discussions surrounding environmental conservation over the past couple of years has given rise to the interdisciplinary field of Ecocriticism; the term ‘Anthropocene’ is now a buzzword in humanities and Geosciences circle, with ecologists calling for a wider debate on the scope and impact of human interference on the biophysical world. It might not come off as a surprise that Lawrence, who vehemently opposed industrialisation and spent a major part of his life in close connection with the environment, depicted the dichotomy between nature and civilization in almost all his major novels, poems and other writings. Lawrencian

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philosophy endorsed a world in which humans lived in harmony with environment and its components, a world in which humans fell back on nature and its healing powers both in times of glory and distress. Many of Lawrence's non-Christian perspectives regarding Man and his relationship with nature bear strong affinities to Oriental traditions and philosophies, particularly ancient Taoism. His proposition of unconscious creativity carries the spirit of Wu Wei, which in Taoist philosophy is an effortless surrender to the natural cycles of the world that can be achieved by learning to work with our inner nature, the natural order of thing and the natural laws operating around us. Taoist sages achieve intuitional enlightenment from mental stillness and non-action of mind. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious* Lawrence describes his way of writing, which has a striking resemblance to the way of traditional Chinese artists. He says, "It's no good looking at a tree to know it. The only thing is to sit among the roots and nestle against its strong trunk, and not bother. That's how I write all about these planes and plexuses – between the toes of a tree, forgetting myself against the great ankle of the trunk. And then as a rule, as a squirrel is stroked into its wickedness by the faceless magic of a tree, so am I usually stroked into forgetfulness, and into scribbling this book. My tree-book, really" (45).

Keeping in view of Lawrence's faith in Eastern philosophy, his characters can infact be broadly divided into two categories: the ones that lead a life mingling with nature and its mysterious creations, and the ones that long for a material life amidst the buzz of industrial towns and mechanical cities. Consider the portrayal of the Brangwen men and women in *The Rainbow*; Lawrence says that it is enough for the men "that the earth heaved and opened its furrows to them", that they "helped the cow in labour" or ferreted the rats from under the barn; they thrive in an environment where their faces always turn to the heat of the blood "staring into the sun, dazed with looking towards the source of generation" (8). The Brangwen men are unable to turn around and gaze in the direction of an industrialised world where man plunders nature rather than nurturing it. Conversely, the writer intermingles the Fall of Man and destruction of nature through Brangwen women who look out from the heated, "blind intercourse of farm life, to the spoken world beyond" (9), into a world in which they are destined to shatter. Lawrence's memories of the bracken town where he spent his childhood provide a backdrop for most of his major novels including *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. The first generation Brangwen men in *The Rainbow* live in harmony with nature; there is a union between man, woman and beast which is a part of the cosmic unity between the sky and earth that has not yet been ruined by mechanisation. However, pastoral peace rapidly paves way for catastrophic destruction and every element of the rural idyll gets torn apart by some agent of change. For Lawrence, industrialized towns and collieries resemble abodes of demons where men are enslaved to work round-the-clock with little contact with the charms of the natural world. For instance, when Ursula visits her Uncle Tom the sight of the "hideous abstraction of town" (Lawrence, 359) shocks and repels her:

Ursula looked out of the window and saw the proud demon-like colliery with her wheels twinkling in the heaven, the formless, squalid mass of the town lying aside... how terrible it was. There was a horrible fascination in it-human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to the symmetric monster of the colliery (Lawrence, 360).

In *Sons and Lovers* the opening paragraph describing the pits "which had been worked in the time of Charles II" (Lawrence 9) acts as a literary Necker-Cube wherein the reader is aware that when Lawrence talks about the "sudden changes" in the place, the growth of industrial towns and coal mines, he also highlights the counter effect, which is destruction of nature and erosion of the nucleus of rural life. The deliberate and repeated usage of 'Hell Row' and 'Bottom' evoke a sense of deterioration and symbolises the degradation of farm lands. According to Frank Glover Smith "Lawrence felt only antipathy for Freudian concepts, and psychoanalysis, fashioned as they were by repressive forms of modern civilization" (22). Lawrence has been influenced by the ecocritical philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Nietzsche, whose ideas have affected the school of Transcendentalism, which opposes the Materialism of the modern society. Transcendentalism has been founded on the belief that the society and its institutions particularly organized religion and political parties should be held liable for contamination of man who is pure by nature. Lawrence tries to show that a man is 'a god in ruins' by delineating the process in which most of his characters first follow their romantic ideals, and then, become more degenerate as they grow up, as a consequence of which they separate from nature and become corrupted by culture. *The Rainbow* stands as a prototype for this philosophy, for Lawrence depicts how man, pure by nature becomes contaminated once he is uprooted from his land and replanted in an urban industrialised circle, thus instilling a longing for primitivism among his readers.

However, towards the conclusion of the novel, the writer illustrates the nature's wonder as a balm, a new doorway of possibilities for Ursula, for as she looks at the Rainbow, "the earth's new architecture"(Lawrence 512) she has a hope for future, a self realization, while in *Lady Chatterly's Lover* he urges his protagonist to rediscover herself and her sexuality by watching a little chick in a sort of ecstasy, "Life,

life! pure, sparky, fearless new life! New life! So tiny and so utterly without fear!” (127), thus offering her a renewed energy through nature’s beings.

The innumerable letters that Lawrence has written during his years of frenzied travelling stand as a testimonial for his love and worship for nature. In his letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan written during his stay in Florence in 1927, he says, “It is lovely spring here- the red tulips in the corn, and the last of the purple anemones. I have said we will keep this house another year- it doesn’t cost so much, so is no matter if one abandon it halfway” (qtd.in Boulton et al.37). In a similar letter to Juliette Huxley, written on 27 March 1928, Lawrence points out "It's been a beastly weather since we're back-cold and rain rain rain. The flowers are all out- red tulips in the wheat, purple and red anemones, grape hyacinths and primrose and violet in great abundance. But what's the good of flowers unless the sun shines! (qtd.in Boulton et al.344).

By employing Anthropomorphism, Lawrence celebrates and venerates nature’s beings through his poems wherein animals, plants and even insects are placed on a pedestal above human beings. The inner voice in the poet advises him to “stand and wait” until his reptilian guest has finished drinking water (in the poem *Snake*), while his “accursed human education” directs him to throw a clumsy log at the snake. Ecocritics believe that before the appearance of religion, every natural object was deemed to have a guardian spirit and man had to respect them; nobody was allowed to kill an animal, cut a tree, or dry a spring without taking permission of its guardian spirit. Lawrence’s argument that modern education has compelled humans to forgo the worship our ancestors once offered to nature, gets exacerbated in *Snake* when he proclaims that he too might be doomed to spend the rest of life carrying an albatross around his neck. However, being the man of extremities that Lawrence is, he offers a drastically opposing view of human-animal relation in *Man and Bat*, where unlike in *Snake* he does not revere the intruder in his room, but rather feels disgusted at the sight of the Bat. He refrains himself from killing the bat for he believes that only God has the power to do so, but he exerts his power as a higher form of life on the so called ‘lower form’ by forcefully removing the bat from his room. Through the lines

And now, at evening, as he flickers over the river
Dipping with petty triumphant light, and tittering over there
....But I am greater than he....
I escaped him

he shows that since he is a ‘man’, he is greater than nocturnal mammal. Lawrence’s belief in the hierarchy in nature can be found expounded in the essay *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, where he talks about one form of life ruling over the other to sustain the circle of life

Every lower order seeks in some measure to serve a higher order: and rebels against being conquered. It is always conquest, and it always will be conquest. If the conquered be an old, declining race, they will have handed on their torch to the conqueror: who will burn his fingers badly, if he is too flippant. And if the conquered be a barbaric race, they will consume the fire of the conqueror, and leave him flameless, unless he watch it. But it is always conquest, conquered and conqueror, forever.

While Lawrence reasserts his belief in Darwinian Theory, critics have also pointed out the essay as a classic example of Lawrence’s racist views, on the grounds that it propagates oppression and conquest. Nevertheless, the author attempts to show through his works that for humans to have a peaceful and content life, they should survive in close association with nature, its elements and beings.

III. SPACE AND TIME

Along with discussions surrounding man-nature relationship, Lawrence’s body of work often encompasses implicit or explicit references to space and time, thus becoming the perfect references for studies relating to the emerging field of Spatial Humanities. The term and spatial relationship that are artistically represented in literature, is essential in the context of learning space-time relationship. Influenced by the Thomas Hardy’s vivid narration on natural settings in his novels, Lawrence did not limit himself while describing the landscape and places surrounding the lives of his protagonists. Through the adventures of the young American ‘girl’ in *The Woman who Rode Away*, who, stifled by the constraints of a colonised nation, submits herself to the calling of an indigenous world, Lawrence explores the freedom of space and time. Oppressed by the claustrophobic environment of her house, the woman longs for an otherness, a foreignness of experiences that are “not safe, lawless and rude” (Lawrence, “The Woman who Rode Away). Though she finds her journey gratifying, it affects her progressively, stripping her of her will and reducing her to a state of extreme tiredness that she tends to lose the sense of her own identity. “If she had had any will of her own left, she would have turned back... to be protected and sent home...But she had no will of her own” ” (Lawrence,

“The Woman who Rode Away”). The usage of the word “protected” is significant here as Lawrence shows the clash between two spaces: inside and outside world which depict safety and wilderness respectively

The character is not restricted to a particular space; instead Lawrence carries her through the rough country, the mountains and water bodies, in a quest for self-identity, oblivious of the changes in minutes, hours and days. By creating a whole new cosmos of boundless space and time, Lawrence succeeds in shifting the attention of the readers from the chaos of the colonised world to the primitive way of life. The plot of *The Woman who Rode Away* in several ways foreshadows that of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, wherein Connie, browbeaten by the cramped atmosphere of Wragby Hall, where her spouse keeps her in a state of semi-isolation, and by the desolation of the surrounding environment (the coal mines and the squalid, crowded tenements), conceives a desire to escape, to find a “beyond” which she does not identify with any particular place.

As opposed to vast expanse of space and time in *The Woman who Rode Away*, the Chronotope gets reduced to the home in which Anna and Will Brangwen moves to after the wedding, in *The Rainbow*, which infact is an illustration key to the study of Spatial Humanities. “As the days went by, it was as if the heavens had fallen, and he were sitting with her among the ruins, in a new world, everybody else buried, themselves two blissful survivors, with everything to squander as they would”(Lawrence 148). The couple, Will in particular, find comfort in the closed space of the house, as a child seeks reassurance inside a mother’s arms; resembling Adam and Eve, the duo spend their days unaware of the outside world or other human interactions.

In terms of Space and Times *Sons and Lovers* can be broadly divided into two sections: the first part deals with the house that Paul is confined to and his internal struggles, while the second part discusses Paul’s venturing out into the open, the external crises and his growth as an individual as well as an artist. The Morel house stands as the nucleus, the locus centre, a place of power hierarchy, a uniting factor for the entire family, which keeps drawing them towards it even if they attempt to shed their ties with the home. When her husband ask her to leave the house, Mrs. Morel finds it impossible to move away from her home and the individuals it contain, just as how Mr. Morel is unable to bid adieu to the place even though he attempts to do so. Carrying forward the Darwinian theory of Survival of the Fittest, the author places his character in various spaces to see how well they learn to adjust to their new surroundings. Hailing from an educated, strictly Puritan middle class family, Gertrude finds herself suffocating in *The Burrows*, after she gets pulled down to the life of colliers. However, though for a long time she despises her home and the atmosphere she has been pushed into, Gertrude learns to adapt to the different life, especially after her neighbours come to her aid when her husband falls sick. Throughout the novel, there is a constant battle between two kinds of major realms: the inside and the outside world, the home and the city, nature and culture, garden and jungle. For Paul Morel, Wiley Farm becomes a space that he is constantly drawn to, a place that offers him solace and artistic inspiration just as how Miriam provides him spiritual connection and urges him to create better art work. Almost all his meetings with Miriam are connected with an encounter with Wiley Farm. Once Paul leaves his domestic realm, in accordance with the demands of his maturation process, he ventures upon Wiley Farm and other places connected with Miriam, until having exhausted the relationship’s potential, even the farm loses it lure for him.

In accordance with the repetitive structure of the novel, Paul’s advances towards Clara are made during reiterative situations such as the walk, which occurs not just in the country, but in the natural islands of the city such as Castle’s park, the canal and banks of the river. The Castle becomes the centre of their romantic activities; developing their relationship from a friendship to one that gets moulded on intense physical connection. Lawrence also uses the Castle to give expression to their respective relationships with urban reality: while for Clara, it is an alienating agglomerate, a labyrinth which reflects her social and existential situation, for Paul, it represents a challenge, a world to conquer, which he, in this phase, is determined to meet.

As Stefania Michelucci notes in *Space and Place in the Works of D. H. Lawrence* “In *Sons and Lovers*, the protagonist’s formation occurs through frequently-repeated movements between places. Each place reveals its own function: as a test of the degree of maturity he has achieved, as a stage of life, as an occasion for ideological, existential and artistic choices, or encounters with different microcosm and models of life, represented by characters who reside (and consequently preside) at certain places” (33). Lawrence thus creates new dimensions, new realms for his protagonists, which are conducive not just for the progress of the plot, but also for the development of the characters.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though he belonged to the Modern Era, the works of D H Lawrence do not precisely fit into the definition of modernism for he experimented less with literary form and expression and instead focused on the radical yet significant ideas that he wanted the world to listen to. It is true that like W B Yeats and T S Elliot, Lawrence outrightly protested against industrialization, mechanization and other key societal changes that Modernist writers attacked. Yet, unlike James Joyce and Franz Kafka who pondered over existentialism and meaninglessness of life, Lawrence’s reverberated a sense of hope, and his writings urged readers to view life from a new perspective.

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