

# The use of allegory in d.h. lawrence's 'the man who loved islands'



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In D. H. Lawrence's 'The Man who Loved Islands', the plot is used as a vehicle for an allegory about different ideals in life - 'community, marriage and independence' (Franks 121), as represented by the three islands.

Through the use of an allegory, Lawrence delivers a cautionary tale that goes beyond the plot of simply a man who lives on three different islands, warning against the 'idealization of solitude' (Son 156) and emphasizing that socialization is a necessary part of our humanity.

The first island, which represents a creation of the ideal community revolving around oneself, is a resounding failure. The problem with such a community is that Mr Cathcart sees the island community as 'a world of his own' (210), 'the perfect place, all filled with his own gracious, blossom-like spirit' (212-213), 'Paradise' (213). In essence, he sees the island as an idealization of a heaven on earth, and him playing God at the center of his utopia. He assumes a fantasized role as 'the Master' (214), 'Our Saviour' (215), and 'the fount of this happiness and perfection' (214) on this 'Happy Isle' (212). Thus, although there is a community around him, Mr Cathcart is not properly socialized into it, rather he focuses on minimizing or negating the other islanders, exerting his egotistic and self-centered vision and ideal, which is contrary to the spirit of community in the first place. Hence, it logically fails as his ideal conception of a community precludes the interests of the islanders, in fact, it is the lack of self-awareness in relation to other people that leads to the failure of his own perceived vision of this community. Thus, Lawrence underscores the need to respect the social order and equality of a community, and illustrates the physical alienation and ostracization that is the consequence of not doing so.

The second island represents the married life, which can be seen in the settling down of ambitions, when the man no longer attempts to pursue an ideal vision of his world. He sees the second island as a sort of refuge, 'as if he and his few dependents were a small flock of sea birds [that] alighted on this rock' (221). The rock is an image that speaks of settling down and stability in life, while the sea birds, which are migratory by nature, have found a resting place on this rock away from harsher climates. Here, it seems like he has attained some sort of happiness, when he thinks to himself 'I feel nothing or I don't know what I feel. Yet it seems to me I am happy.' (222) The island characterizes for him a slow transition from the 'material island' (212) to that of simple pleasures, 'without desire, without ennui' (222). Even as he attempts to publish his book, he realizes that the book for him is of no importance, as it represents 'the race of progress' (222), and he is more than happy to drop such a worldly pursuit and need for recognition. However, the love between him and Flora is characterized as 'mechanical, automatic' (223), and 'driven from the will' (224), it 'shattered him, filled him with a sort of death' (223-224). While the stability of the married life appeals to him, the passion that is lacking between both of them proves to negate all the happiness that he had found in this 'new stillness of desirelessness' (224). As a result, the island is now 'smirched and spoiled' (224), and he can no longer stay on the island. In illustrating the island as a metaphor for married life, Lawrence seems to equate this stability and peace as true happiness in life, while warning against marriage in the absence of love, which proves to adequately negate the peace of the married life.

The third island represents a total renunciation of human civilization, in search for happiness. On this island, he indulges in his own idealized asceticism, 'wanted so little' (226), and his complete dissociation from people or even a reminder of them - 'didn't want trees or bushes, they stood up like people, too assertive' (226-227). He finds happiness in the 'great silence' (227), which is not even to be broken by his own voice. As a 'deathly cold' (230) comes to inhabit the island, this meteorological coldness is an outward manifestation of his emotional coldness, even as he slowly loses all form of desire, and ceases 'to register his own feelings' (230). His predicament ironically parallels the journey of Jesus in the wilderness. He describes the satisfaction of being alone as 'the bread of his soul' (229), while Jesus renounces bread, which symbolizes worldly needs, in order to subsist on the word of God. The parallel starkly reveals his self-exile for what is - a misguided quest for solitude in pursuit of happiness, in contrast with Jesus' denial of worldly desires and selfish needs.

However, at the end of the winter, it is suggested that he changes his desire for solitude when 'Something brought him to' (232). He inadvertently casts his gaze to the sea, searching for the 'wink of a sail' (232), although 'he knew too well there would never again be a sail on that stark sea' (232). The island has become 'unrecognizable', 'foreign' and 'inaccessible' (232). The diction that is used to describe the island is that of harshness, barrenness, lifelessness. While the frozen island is the manifestation of his deadened humanity, the 'stark', 'lifeless' (232) sea surrounding the island symbolizes the loss of society's connection. Truly, the man has discovered the meaning of what really 'feels like an island' (210), one that is '[filled] with [his]

personality' (210), which is now cold, emotionless and lonely. The regret of his isolation and resulting hopelessness is encapsulated in ' He turned' (232), indicating that he has given up hope of returning to society. In such a poignant conclusion to the man's journey, Lawrence reminds us of the dangers of the prolonged isolation, which is often motivated by an idealization of solitude, and that such a complete isolation is sometimes an irreversible process.

In the use of the allegory that utilizes the three islands to represent different ideals in life, Lawrence delivers an important didactic message emphasizing the necessity of social interaction and relationship in life. By calling attention to such themes, his narrative transcends the most literal aspects of its plot.

## **Works Cited**

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