

Overcoming social
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Despite his left-of-centre, Fabian society background, D. H. Lawrence's early fiction displays little advocacy of political change. This is clearly not ignorance, but an opportunity to express concerns for the spirituality of man. If a man has a body, a mind and a spirit, then he may be naturally expected to satisfy his desires. But if he lives in a society, then his actions may be prevented or his desires repressed by economic restriction and/or social conditioning. Therefore, the process of emotional and spiritual emancipation must be facilitated by some sort of struggle against social and economic circumstances.

Rather than improving these circumstances through revolution, Lawrence suggests in 'Daughters of the Vicar' that they can be overcome if individuals have the courage to rise above these conditions via internal determination. This forms a 'quiet' revolution that may bring about widespread change without the alienation or violence of political movements. Lawrence's philosophy before the Great War, and around the time he wrote 'Daughters of the Vicar', is most apparent in the metaphysical contents of his 'Foreword to Sons and Lovers', which was expanded on in 'Study of Thomas Hardy'.

In the 'Foreword' we begin to understand Lawrence's conception of mutually enriching union between man and woman, whereby a man turns to a woman for nourishment as she holds more of the inventive life force ('The Flesh') and he can then go forth and utter 'The Word' through the products of his daily labour. The 'Foreword' also sheds light on the instability of a character's actions, as they seem to be powered by forces outside of their control, especially at the points of union between Mary and Massey, and Louisa and Alfred.

Whilst ' Daughters of the Vicar' is not an illustration of a prescriptive philosophy, Lawrence's metaphysic provides the story with a unity of purpose as all the characters operate within the boundaries of an energy that is more powerful than all the facets of man's existence on which man prides himself: consciousness; will; the production of laws, useful objects, works of art, and so on. Man cannot understand or control this creative life energy, which is essentially unknowable.

He is aware of it in the spontaneous life of the body, but his tendency to believe that the human mind is powerful enough to control or enrich that life within himself is an illusion. The existence of this metaphysic does not predestine characters, as they bear out the truth of the metaphysic in individual ways. Lawrence demonstrates how characters interact with their own psyche, the other characters and the society they live in to bring about unique situations, albeit containing truths relevant to everyone.

Bare elements of life such as man and woman, law and love, dominance and servitude, reason and instinct, operate on everyone, but happiness is to be found by fusing these forces. This fusion will occur in mutually loving personal relationships, thereby encouraging the reader to examine the marriages in ' Daughters of the Vicar' with an eye for the way social and economic concerns play a role in deflecting the individual searching for balance and happiness in life.

The ' Study of Thomas Hardy' is beneficial to considering a character's position in a social and economic world through the idea of the perfect situation where the spirit triumphs over these conditions in the creative

process of love: “ ideally, the soul of a woman possesses the soul of the man, procreates it and makes it big with new idea, motion” . We can see how Lawrence managed to isolate the social and economic factors that determine how life is led by his introduction of the principal family, the Lindleys.

Lawrence’s target is not that of contemporary political activists (the aristocracy or capitalists who dominated industrial life), but rather the psychological illusion of social superiority, which is often mistaken as a class divide. In the case of the Lindleys, their perceived superiority is the dominant factor in their presence throughout the story. Little history of Mr and Mrs Lindley is given by Lawrence, as his primary interest was, as the title suggests, the nature of their children. However, the reader can be left to assume that it is the economic circumstances of the Lindley’s lives that determine their social outlook.

Lindley is trapped in a situation whereby the small size and recent creation of his parish determines his income; this sum makes him resentful of his financial relation to his parishioners who would have traditionally earned less than him. He then creates a perceived superiority by distancing himself from his flock. The clearest insight into his behaviour is his visit to the Durants to deliver the Church almanac; he fails to sympathise with Mrs Durant over Alfred’s decision to join the navy, and refuses Durant’s beer despite his thirst.

Lindley seems to forget that his role as Vicar should be of one who possesses knowledge and spirituality, to be dispensed, as required, providing wisdom and guidance. Apart from failing to lead his parishioners to the service of

God and their own salvation, Lindley earns their contempt rather than the respect that would set him apart within the community. Whilst the Lindleys may be poor, it becomes clear that if Lindley had a truly benevolent and spiritual character then he would be able to overcome the circumstances, which he may not have chosen, but is unavoidably restricted by.

Unfortunately, Lindley's character is fixed throughout the story and his happiness is sacrificed to his ego's belief in the importance of perpetuating artificially constructed social dogma. As this becomes apparent, the concerns of the reader change; " Gradually Mr and Mrs Lindley lost all hold on life, and spent their hours, weeks and years merely haggling to make ends meet, and bitterly repressing and pruning their children into gentility, urging them to ambition, weighting them with duty" .

With opportunities limited in late nineteenth century society, children not only inherited their parents' social and economic world, but their outlook on life too. The distance and contempt, which characterises the villagers' relationship with the Lindleys, continues with their children as they are paraded to Church every Sunday, evoking hate from the local children. Whilst Mary and Louisa seem to be introduced as simply a product of their parents' repression, there are indications to the origins of independent characters.

Mary is described as possessing a " pure look of submission to a high fate"; as Lawrence's narrator does not maintain a fixed position and moves from omnipresence to speaking from the viewpoint of the characters, this description contains both prophetic irony and an indication of self-regard.

Similarly ambiguous is Louisa's portrayal as "obstinate looking", which may be her attitude to her upbringing, or her surroundings. This is elaborated upon when her father tells his family of Alfred's enlistment, and Louisa takes an oppositional stance; she "looked up in protest" and talks "stubbornly [...] as if taking opposite sides to her parents".

As a result, Louisa reveals her character through her own, undramatic, actions. In this conversation Lawrence also introduces a trope, which will be repeated throughout the story to reveal and reiterate Louisa as an instinctive, primal creature who is open to sensations and eager to feel rather than deliberate on preconceptions: "[Alfred] had made her feel warm. It seemed the days would be colder since he had gone" (added emphasis). If Louisa has managed to develop a character independent of her parents with desires tuned more to the real world than to concepts, then the origin of this individuality remains obscure, if not completely hidden.

In their first appearance, the reader is informed that Mary "received as governess a few little daughters of tradesmen", whereas Louisa "went among her father's church-goers". This may have been a product of fate, but Louisa's decision to go forth into the community (albeit for money) rather than 'receive' shows a willingness to mix with what should naturally be her peers, thus affording her the opportunity to broaden her mind through experience rather than reason.

This is confirmed when we learn that Louisa feels regret at the absence of Alfred, who must have been an acquaintance and later, when she attends to Mrs Durant we see that "Louisa knew the ways of the working people".

Having shown a willingness to venture, on her own, into other social environments we not only recognise the potential for children to break free from their parents' dogma, but can affirm the belief that the source of this ability is something integral to character.

Lawrence does not make this blatant, which allows the reader to track Louisa's progress as a character from Vicar's daughter to emancipated wife. Into this world of social snobbery, Lawrence introduces a new element in the form of Mr Massey. In Brian Finney's words, Massey is a "grotesque embodiment of the rational mind and the moral will" who, as a fixed character, provides the emotionally and spiritually impotent, but socially and economically acceptable, match for Mary. Massey's proposal to Mary is a culmination of all that promises unhappiness in a marriage.

The episode forms a tragic instance of denying the soul and submitting wholly to an "inhuman being". Lawrence's metaphysic is most evident here, with Mary's submission and Louisa's response; here the sisters part spiritually as their destinies become clearer. Mary's resignation to her fate seems to come from an almost suicidal desire to serve Massey who represents intellectual and legalised tyranny: "She knew that Mr Massey was stronger than she, and that she must submit to what he was. [...] she was in the grip of his mental, moral being".

Massey's proposal shows the totality of his being, as 'cold' is used on six occasions to describe their relations. His existence is displayed as an unforgiving and unstoppable force arising from the unbalanced elements of nature within his character. He displays "the male in him, something cold

and triumphant, asserting itself” , Mary submits to being “ good and purely just”, which reflects the “ inexorable, cold death, a taste of pure justice” that Louisa senses in Massey when they visit the Durants.

His powerful, rational mind having been rigorously trained for Roman Law at Cambridge, Massey has an overwhelmingly legal soul, lacking the combination of love necessary for happiness and progress. The language Lawrence uses to describe a disastrous marriage would not be misplaced in describing human disasters on a wider scale and draws a parallel between the potential destruction of the individual with the destruction of war or industry. Whilst this annihilation of Mary’s soul occurs through Massey’s intellectual and moral force, her desire to cooperate is a product of her parents’ social and economic circumstances.

When Massey asserts his will over the Lindleys by denying Mary a meal with her family, they feel the natural injustice, but suppress their anger: “ But no one said anything, because of the money that came to the vicarage from Mr Massey”. Mr and Mrs Lindley have enslaved themselves; their unfortunate circumstances are ultimately a consequence of their spiritual bankruptcy. When Mary feels “ the days allotted out to her. And her family watched”, this sadistic voyeurism from her parents suggests that they understand exactly what is happening and fully anticipate Mary’s sacrifice for social acceptability.

The Lindleys are prepared for their daughter to lose her physical vitality; “ She had paid with her body [...] She had bought her position in the world” , this position leads her to live in “ shame [...] isolated in the rectory”, yet Mr

Lindley “ thinks it would not be a bad match”. Only Louisa stands free now, having questioned “ What right has that to be called goodness! ” and she now becomes the central concern of the story, as if Mary’s marriage caused – if not a fatality – a finality. Mary’s marriage seems to be just as important an event for Louisa as it does for Mary: So Miss Louisa stood isolated from everybody.

She and Mary parted over Mr Massey. In Louisa’s eyes, Mary was degraded, married to Mr Massey. She could not bear to think of her lofty, spiritual sister degraded in the body like this. Mary was wrong, wrong, wrong: she was not superior, she was flawed, incomplete [...] A new solitariness came over the obstinate Louisa, and her heavy jaw set stubbornly. She was going on her own way. But which way? Louisa becomes determined that she will not suffer the same fate as her sister; when she leaves the house during the Masseys’ visit she repeats the question “ Where am I going? ” in a literal sense, but in both cases, the answer for her is ‘ Alfred’.

Alfred has been introduced into the narrative in generally servile terms: “[he] drew himself up to salute [...] bowed his head with dignity”. This servitude arises from believing the social chimera that Louisa and the Lindley’s are superior, rather than the psychologically deeper ‘ will-to-serve’ that the previous conception of his character in Lawrence’s early version of the story ‘ Two Marriages’ suffered from. This ensures hope that Alfred can cast off his sense of inferiority to reveal his true self; “ Now he was not himself.

He was the will which obeys set over against the will which commands [... He had ranked himself inferior, subordinate to her. ” This significantly differs

from the extended background Lawrence details in 'Two Marriages', where "he had never turned his thoughts to a girl, being never in a position to marry whilst his mother needed and monopolised him". From the moment Louisa leaves the vicarage the narrative moves towards its climax by Louisa and Alfred working against their social circumstances and offering a view of mutually rewarding personal union. Alfred emerges as a spiritually balanced individual only lacking in physical instinct because of his upbringing.

The comparison with Massey's overpowering 'maleness' is striking, for Alfred goes down the pit "because that was the only way speedily to become a man", yet his mother's view is that "he did not seem manly enough". Moreover, despite his "perfect physical condition [...], he was uneasy and felt despicable among all his confidence and superiority of ideas", it is only his inability to respond to the urges of his body that prevents him from fulfilling Lawrence's metaphysical ideal; "Anything he would have given for this spontaneity and this blind stupidity which went to its own satisfaction direct".

Unfortunately, Alfred is utterly committed to remaining with his mother, as it is the only truly satisfying relationship he has. Lawrence comments on mother-son relationships in the 'Foreword', stating that "if that Woman be his mother, then is he her lover in part only: he carries for her, but is never received unto her for his confirmation and renewal, and so wastes himself away in the flesh". This repressive situation is overcome primarily through Mrs Durant's death, but also through Louisa's penetration of their seemingly sealed family unit.

She inverts their social relationship by serving them both (rescuing and nursing Mrs Durant; washing and cooking for Alfred), which gives her great satisfaction; “ Miss Louisa felt glad she was admitted, even in an official capacity. She wanted to share their lives”. Mrs Durant’s death brings Alfred to the crucial moment in his life, as he struggles to come to terms with his own life now he has no-one to serve: “ He could not escape from her, she carried him with her into an unformed, unknown chaos”. When Louisa comes to call on him, Alfred’s destiny lies in the balance, as his “ long trial” begins.

It seems as though he may submit to the social norm of visiting the pub and descending into the alcoholic stupor which will enslave him to his own social impotence. Louisa provides the dynamic force he lacks, she interrupts his excursion to the ‘ New Inn’ and offers herself to him as the decisive option that will bring him true happiness. Within the privacy of his home, Alfred and Louisa battle with their psyches until Louisa – tellingly – expresses her desire to stay with him. The exchange between them is filled with intense fear, as they are about to embark on a huge personal change.

The imagery used by Lawrence is that of heat, fire and lightning, which not only contrasts with Massey’s proposal to Mary, but also indicates the primal, fundamental and instinctive nature of their union. There are wild forces at work as they accept each other and this genuinely tremendous moment leads to a rebirth of Alfred’s character and a solid confirmation of their future together: his brain reeled round, and felt himself falling, falling from himself, and whilst she, yielded up, swooned to a kind of death of herself, a moment of utter darkness came over him, and they began to wake up as if from a long sleep.

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He was himself... The ending of the story should be viewed as the culmination of Lawrence's belief in the ability of characters to overcome their social and economic circumstances and achieve progressive metaphysical union through sexual relationship. Lawrence completely revised the ending in 'Two Marriages', which results in Alfred and Louisa settling down and having children, but this not only suggests that their revolutionary acceptance of each other leads to a perpetuation of their social and economic lives, but also that their children will complete their spiritual evolution by possessing the education that Alfred lacks.

By terminating the narrative after the Lindleys have been informed of the marriage, Lawrence confirms that the act of marriage is the important, climatic aspect of the story. More importantly, Alfred's decision to go to Canada and Mr Lindley's verdict that "it really would be better", completes the break from social and economic ties, as the colonies provided opportunities for enterprising young men to make money, as well as having partially evolved societies where class was much less important than endeavour.

In going to the vicarage to ask for Louisa's hand, and also in deciding to emigrate, Alfred displays the courage that he significantly lacked throughout the story. Courage emerges as perhaps the facet of character which is the most necessary to break social and economic ties and probably the most difficult to obtain.