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Research Paper

D.H. Lawrence : The Influence of Frieda

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Abstract: ***Frieda was the single largest influence on Lawrence after the death of his mother. She was five years his senior, the mother of three children and the wife of his former French professor. After his mother's death, Lawrence had little confidence left in him and was ill with pneumonia. Frieda helped him come out of that hopeless phase of his life. After meeting her he realized that 'slowly the world came back'. He rewrote Sons and Lovers with her. Henceforth all his major works and the poems of Look ! We have come Through ! bear the influence of this new liberated life with Frieda. Single handedly she got Lawrence out of the shackles of the claustrophobic mother love and helped him achieve his full potential as one of the finest writers of modern times. This paper tries to trace the transition and growth of Lawrence under the influence of Frieda.***

Keywords: French Professor, Frieda, Sons And Lovers, Look! We have come Through!, Edward Garnett, Harry T. Moore, neurotic transference, emotional commitment.

After the death of his mother, Frieda becomes the greatest single influence on Lawrence's life and art. In a letter to Edward Garnett in 1912, Lawrence writes about Freida, the wife of his former French professor:

'She is rippling- she's the finest woman I've ever met – You must above all things meet her….. She's splendid, she is really….perfectly unconventional, but really good in the best sense. I'll bet you have never met anybody like her,……oh, but she is the woman of a lifetime.'

Lawrence was twenty seven when he finished writing *Sons and Lovers.*He was living in a lakeside village in northern Italy where he had recently come with Frieda –five years his senior and the mother of three children; the lovers had eloped from Nottingham after six weeks' acquaintance.

The first piece of fiction that Lawrence completed in the new circumstances of his life with Frieda is the largely autobiographical *Sons & Lovers*, and their relationship was the largest single aid in Lawrence's astonishing development from the level of apprenticeship in his earlier two novels to the artfulness of his third book. Harry T. Moore, after examining the *Paul Morel* manuscript that comprises 'parts of two earlier versions,' concludes that 'The *Paul Morel* fragments are too sketchy to warrant much critical comment, except it may be said that the scenes-often the seeds for later development in the final version of the novel-rarely come to life. They are not organically arranged, and the people lack the vitality of those in *Sons and Lovers.* Apparently it was not until after Lawrence had met Frieda Weekley- Richthofen, and went away to live with her in Germany and Italy, that he could see his past experience in perspective and at last make *Sons and Lovers* the coherent and great novel which Duckworth published in 1913.'

Lawrence's mother had died in 1911 and he had emerged from youth with little confidence or stamina remaining for further life. For months he was ill with pneumonia, and his inner 'demon', as he sometimes called his creative self nearly died of attrition, unable to grow beyond a youthful, winsomely sad awareness of delicate beauty- an effete response to life that is characteristic of Lawrence's early works. The liaison with Frieda was a total revitalization, and he later regarded the period of his romance as a rebirth of creative and moral energy after an experience of despair:'In that year (1911), for me everything collapsed, save the mystery of death, and the haunting of death in life. I was twenty five, and from the death of my mother, the world began to dissolve around me, beautiful, iridescent, but passing away substanceless. Till I almost dissolved away myself, and was very ill. When I was twenty six. Then slowly the world came back: or I myself returned: but to another world. And in 1912, when I was still twenty-six, the other phase commenced, the phase of *Look! We have come Through* !- When I left teaching and left England, and left many other things, and the demon had a new run for his money.'

Lawrence's return 'to another world,' the phase that is celebrated in the cycle of love poems that he mentions, coincided with his new love for Frieda, who was an example to him and perhaps even an apostle of faith in the spontaneous, passionate self. At their first meetings he was dazzled by her emotional freedom, describing her as "perfectly unconventional, but really good'; and when he soon met her sisters he was amazed to find similar qualities in

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them: they were proudly sensual and morally emancipated women. 'Lord, what a family. I've never seen anything like it,'he wrote from Germany. What he saw so strikingly in Frieda's life-style was a degree of autonomy that he urgently needed in his own life, and with her companionship he began to achieve it. In their illicit love and their elopement and eventual marriage they largely transcended conventional morality and disregarded the standards of their social classes. Their more or less necessary exile averted Lawrence's return to the dreaded task of provincial schoolteaching. He spoke of having freed himself from 'England' as a sign that with Frieda he could also overcome the psychological barriers to a fuller life and a unified identity. From Germany he wrote that 'I loathe the idea of England, and its enervation and misty miserable modernness. I don't want to go back to town and civilization. I want to rough it and scramble through free, free. I don't want to be tied down. And I can live on a tiny bit. I shan't let F. leave me, if I can help it. I feel I've got a mate and I'll fight tooth and claw to keep her. She says I'm reverting, but I'm not- I'm only coming out wholesome and myself.…I loathe Paul Morel.'

Some biographers allege that by marrying Frieda, Lawrence shifted the burden of his emotional dependency from his mother to his wife. It is nevertheless most clear that even the limited triumph directly served his genius for art and for living. He gained a sense of freedom that may have been in excess of his actual circumstances, but it still helped him for the remaining eighteen years of his life to gain ground against fatalism. Direct comparison of the two women, however, suggests the more likely possibility that Frieda was the surprising embodiment of everything that Lawrence had wished his mother to be, so that he might love her without being trapped by her neurotic demands on his emotions. Frieda was a buoyantly independent, sensual, proud, intellectual, and expansive woman. That Lydia Lawrence was nothing of the sort had always roused her loving son's anxieties and guilt. His sense of complicity in her failure as a person was a cause of continuing distress, as *Sons and Lovers* reveals by his attempts to disguise her actual shortcomings beyond what the fiction requires or his own artistic honesty can permit. His conscious characterization of Gertrude Morel represents his ideal for his mother more closely than it portrays Lydia Lawrence, and it was impossible for Lawrence until years later to acknowledge any considerable unattractiveness in his mother's character. Frieda, however, was the ideal woman who proved to be real, and his response to her was not a simple neurotic transference but a fairly free emotional commitment to a person whose love offered him partial liberation from both psychic and circumstantial bondage.

His imagination had a joyful sense of escape from the limitations of his former life. From the actual changes in his life Lawrence acquired a broader perspective of experience and a more analytical intelligence to consider that side of his nature which was Paul Morel. Frieda actively participated in his work as he went about revising the earlier manuscript. He read parts of his fresh writing to her and questioned her about the soundness of the characterizations. Frieda's own letters to Edward Garnett, Lawrence's editor, defend the novel's (*Sons And Lovers*) "honesty" and "vividness" against Garnett's insistence upon matters of "form".'I also feel as if I ought to say something about L.'s formlessness. I don't think he has no form. I used to. But now I think anybody must see in Paul Morel the hang of it. The mother is really the thread, the domineering note. I think the honesty, the vividness of a book suffers if you subject it to form. I have heard so much about 'form' with Ernest; why are you English so keen on it ? Their own form wants smashing in almost any direction, but they can't come out of their snail house. I know it is so much safer. That's what I love Lawrence for, that he is so plucky and honest in his work, he dares to come out in the open and plants his stuff down bald and naked; really he is the only revolutionary worthy of the name, that I know; any new thing must find a new shape, then afterwards one can call it 'art'. I hate art, it seems like grammar, wants to make a language all grammar; language was first and then they abstracted a grammar. I quite firmly believe that L. is quite great in spite of his 'gaps'. Look at the vividness of his stuff, it knocks you down , I think. It is perhaps too 'intimate', comes too close, but I believe that is youth, and he has not done, not by long chalks !'

'Any new thing must find a new shape,' she says, echoing Lawrence's own attitude. It is unlikely, though, that she merely echoed Lawrence when together they examined particular details of the fiction. 'He is writing P.M. again,' she reported to Garnett, 'read bits to me and we fight like blazes over it, he is so often beside the point, 'but 'I'll learn him to be a toad' as the boy said as he stamped on the toad.' Frieda says that she 'wrote little female bits and lived it over in my own heart.'

In *Not I, But the Wind* she reminisces:'He was then rewriting his *Sons and Lovers,* the first book he wrote with me, and I lived and suffered that book, and wrote bits of it when he would ask me: 'What do you think my mother felt

like then?' I had to go deeply into the character of Miriam and all the others; when he wrote his mother's death he was ill and his grief made me ill too, and he said: 'If my mother had lived I could never have loved you, she wouldn't have let me go.' But I think he got over it; only, this fierce and overpowerful love had harmed the boy who was not strong enough to bear it. In after years he said: 'I would write a different *Sons and Lovers* now; my mother was wrong, and I thought she was absolutely right.'I think a man is born twice: first his mother bears him, then he has to be reborn from the woman he loves. Once, sitting on the little steamer on the lake, he said : 'Look, that little woman is like my mother.' His mother, though dead, seemed so alive and there still to him.Towards the end of *Sons and Lovers* I got fed up and turned against all this 'house of Atreus' feeling, and I wrote a skit called: 'Paul Morel, or His Mother's Darling.' He read it and said, coldly: 'This kind of thing isn't called a 'skit.'While we were at Villa Igea Lawrence wrote also *Twilight in Italy*, and most of the poems from Look ! *We Have Come Through !*His courage in facing the dark recesses of his own soul impressed me always, scared me sometimes.In his heart of hearts I think he always dreaded women, felt that they were in the end more powerful than men.'

Frieda remembers that 'when he wrote his mother's death he was ill and his grief made me ill too.' As Lawrence re-created the stresses of his family relations and again suffered through some of the worst episodes of his past, her empathy gave him another avenue to the truth of experience. With generous egotism he began advising other young writers and artists to rely more on the sensitivity and power of women. He felt that the works of his contemporaries were flawed by ignoring or falsifying the feminine reality. Garnett was writing a play about Joan of Arc: 'You've got a fair amount of 'priest' in you,' Lawrence stated after reading the manuscript. 'It's the positivity of women you seem to deny- make them sort of instrumental. There is in women such a big sufficiency unto themselves, more than in men." He cautioned an illustrator who wrote him after submitting dust-jacket designs for *Sons and Lovers:*'You are more or less a Galahad- which is not, I believe, good for your art. It is hopeless for me to do anything without I have a woman at the back of me. And you seem a bit like that- not hopeless- but too uncertain. Bocklin- or somebody like him- daren't sit in a café except with his back to the wall. I daren't sit in the world without a woman behind me. And you give me that feeling a bit: as if you were uneasy of what is behind you. Excuse me if I am wrong. But a woman that I love sort of keeps me in direct communication with the unknown, in which otherwise I am a bit lost.'

Their relationship was essential not only to sustain Lawrence's ability to work, but also because woman was his major contact with unforeknown experience, his 'communication with the unknown.' He implies in his letter that he can discern the unconscious and mysterious operations of life more clearly in woman's sensibility than in man's, and this affinity for the private feminine response is characteristic of many of Lawrence's best works. Frieda could not have had such an extraordinary, salutary effect on Lawrence's creativity had not his genius needed to identify and empathize with woman kind. The first letters which Lawrence wrote from Europe, after his elopement with Freida indicate his feelings of exuberance and new energy- 'Here, in this tiny savage little place, F. and I have got awfully wild. I loathe the idea of England, and its enervation and misty miserable modernness. I don't want to go back to town and civilization. I want to rough it and scramble through free, free. I don't want to be tied down. And I can live on a tiny bit. I shan't let F. leave me, if , I can help it. I feel I've got a male and I'll fight tooth and claw to keep her. She says I'm reverting, but I'm not……' I'm only coming out wholesome and myself.'

Frieda instills in Lawrence a profound sense of release from the limitations of his former life. Now he rebels against the crucifixion of the procreative body for the spirit, and presents a passionate plea for the flesh against the spirit: Lawrence believed that the key to greater self-realization in the body's natural wisdom of its immediate desires and aversions.'My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our mind. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle. What do I care about knowledge. All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fibbing intervention of mind, or moral, or what not. I conceive a man's body as a kind of flame…..'

At times Lawrence despaired of humanity, because he saw modern man as mortally afraid of spontaneous feelings. The state of contemporary civilization was evidence to him that man now repudiates his bodily life. Society's ideals, which are the rationalizations of our self-denial and self-hate, substitute controlled, conceptual experience – 'Subdue the flesh,''Love your neighbour' – for the concreteness and variety of a person's sensual responses. Man becomes increasingly a product of his unbalanced civilization – a social rather than a natural creature, perpetuating the

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maladies of his society – and his natural manhood withers along with his diminishing capacity and freedom to be himself, openly.

Whatever Lawrence wrote was guided always by his desire to break down the barriers to spontaneity and to reintegrate our submerged, fundamental selves with our overt lives. The integration and destiny of essential human identity, across centuries or generations or within single life-spans or in brief moments of vitalization, interested him more than the circumstantial and conscious developments in the lives of his characters. His art, however fully it represents objective details of historical and personal life, focuses chiefly upon the recesses of individual consciousness, where his characters encounter their generic, natural self and must make a crucial adjustment to it. In writing to remind people of their fundamental identity:'We never know that we ourselves are anything" – Lawrence's stance is sometimes prophetic and visionary with apocalyptic utterances, but he is almost always hortatory to some degree, as even his letters illustrate. He felt that art could serve man's urgent need to reclaim his essential being. The integration of character which Lawrence understood as necessary could come about through freeing our emotions from the tangle and oppression of our rational thought. Apart from the possibly restorative powers of passional experience, as in sexual intercourse or deeply felt encounters with death, only the strong feelings of an aesthetic response can renew man's awareness of his sensual identity and direct him toward acceptance of his whole self. Literature and painting, the arts which Lawrence practiced and wrote about, have a corrective moral effect; by reviving the individual's capacity for direct, pre-mental responses, great art works can tear a hole in the curtain of mental consciousness and alter the way men recognize their lives thereafter. No protagonist in Lawrence's fiction has his sensuality revivified by reading a good book or attending an exhibition, but Lawrence assumed that his readers might profit from opportunities that his characters go without. The novel particularly, Lawrence came to feel, 'can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead.'

Lawrence believed that the artist himself must constantly struggle against his tendencies to blur his awareness of subjective reality or to distort his account of it, and he must learn not to interfere with his intuition of experience. 'I think one has as it were to fuse one's physical and mental self right down, to produce good art.'

The rediscovery of passion and the new sexual relation fed directly into his work; what he had discovered was what the world needed: 'I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about: and that, at present, is the relation between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women.' And again he declares that 'I think the only re-sourcing of art, revivifying it, is to make it more the joint work of man and woman, I think the one thing to do, is for men to have courage to draw nearer to women, expose themselves to them, and be altered by them…'

Lawrence's sense of life is being conditioned by the interaction of opposed forces- woman and man, conscious and unconscious, civilized and savage.In another letter he writes, 'I believe there is no getting of a vision, as you call it, before we get our sex right: before we get our souls fertilized by the female.. Then the vision we're after, I don't know what it is- but it is something that contains awe and dread and submission, not pride or sensuous egotism and assertion…… We want to realize the tremendous non-human quality of life.. driving us, forcing us, destroying us if we do not submit to be swept away.'

Life must submit to the still source of nonhuman power within and beneath individual life, to be wholly changed, or destroyed. The nature of Lawrence's insight, which is fundamental to *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* and the process by which it was attained, are indicated in the sequence of poems entitled *Look ! We Have Come through !* beginning with 'Ballad of a Wilful Woman' , to 'Craving for Spring' , it traces the progress of Lawrence's relationship with Frieda , from summer 1912 to early 1916, and his progress from uncertainty and insecurity to an unusual self-confidence. These poems were not successful as individual poems. Lawrence himself said, 'These poems should not be considered separately as so many single pieces. They are intended as an essential story, or history, or confession, unfolding one from the other in organic development'.

In his introduction to the *Collected Poems*, Lawrence states that some of his early poems were 'struggling to say something which it takes a man twenty years to be able to say.' Though he was referring specifically to the early poems of childhood and adolescent love, the words apply equally well to the sequence of poems in *Look ! We have come through !* He felt that 'many of the poems are so personal that, in their fragmentary fashion, they make up a biography of an emotional and inner life'.

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The sequence is, indeed, highly personal and one might think that one is eavesdropping. We may even accept Bertrand Russell's waspish comment, 'They may have come through, but I don't see why I should look', yet there is no denying the fact that Frieda's was perhaps the most important influence in Lawrence's growth as an artist and in her, he had found, to borrow his own words- 'the woman of a lifetime.'

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